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BOOK REVIEW

A. Baer

Harold Brookfield, Lesley Potter, and Yvonne Byron: *In Place of the Forest: Environmental and Socio-economic Transformation in Borneo and the Eastern Malay Peninsula*, United Nations University Press, Tokyo, New York, 1995. 310 pages.

This book results from a project of the United Nations University on critical zones in global environmental change, part of a program on human and policy dimensions of global change. The authors explore the question of sustainability of the ongoing environmental changes in Borneo and nearby areas, but not for the first time. They have written extensively on deforestation, land use, and development, from Malaysia to Melanesia. They find the principal constraints on environmental health in Borneo to be population growth and economic growth, with the latter heavily dependent on natural resources.

The early chapters discuss population densities, geology, soils, forest types, climatic history, political history, traditional lifestyles, mining, oil and coal extraction, cash crops, urbanization, and the timber industry. In Chapter 4 the authors begin a closer look at "issues of endangerment and criticality," starting with forest clearance and loss of biodiversity. In particular, they voice support for enlarging and adequately protecting conservation areas, such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.

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Chapter 5 considers the aftermath of deforestation on the regional economies, especially in terms of soil quality, erosion, flooding, drought, and fire. Transmigration into Kalimantan for food-crop agriculture is evaluated and found to be largely unsuccessful, but tree cropping may be more sustainable. In Malaysia, particularly in the peninsula and Sabah, the Federal Land Development Authority has been the major transformer of rural lands, mainly for tree crops. The authors contend that in the 1980's this land development drive in Malaysia was "clearly confronting growing difficulties" (p. 91), for reasons such as a lack of willing workers and global price fluctuations on exports. In Sabah, and also in West Malaysia, some land schemes resorted to using illegal immigrant labor, for lack of settlers. In Kalimantan, land settlement in tidal swamps was a particular problem. For example, failure at one scheme in Central Kalimantan was associated with highly acidic (pH 3.8) "soil", actually thick peat. Untrained and unprepared transmigrants are a more general problem.