Question 6: What are the factors that led you to go into environment and development economics? If you were starting your career today, would you do anything differently?

EDE: Job well done, but job not yet done

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I wandered into environment and development economics through an initially disconnected series of interests in the environment, development and, finally, economics. Family camping trips instilled in me a love of nature from an early age, but growing up in the US industrial heartland in the 1960s also exposed me (literally) to serious pollution problems. My home state of Ohio is famous for having a river that caught on fire. It is also on the shores of Lake Erie, which was the source of my family's Friday fish dinners until mercury contamination closed the fishery. About the only business in my rural hometown was a waste dump, which contaminated all the wells in the town and forced the town to develop a more costly water source.

In hindsight, the roots of my environmental interests are in plain view. When I went to college, however, I had no intention of pursuing the environment as a field of study. I opted instead for social anthropology, which had very flexible course requirements, a top priority for my younger directionless self. The hodge-podge of courses I took included several on 'the Third World', which planted a seed that would sprout after college. I didn't entirely ignore my interest in the environment, however, and this turned out to be a good thing. I took a few botany courses, and when I graduated jobless with my anthropology degree, one of my botany professors, Barry Tomlinson (an expert on mangroves), took pity and hired me as his research assistant. This was a turning point. I gained my first serious research experience and, of particular importance, made my first trip to the tropics. I was hooked. Tropical forests became my focus, drawing out my latent interests in environment and development.

But still, I wasn't sure how to draw these interests together. That changed when Barry took me to a seminar by an economist, Malcolm Gillis, who spoke about economics as a source of ideas for promoting more sustainable

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use of tropical forests. This wasn't what I understood economics to be. I hadn't taken a single economics course in college, and I thought economics was about playing the stock market. To my surprise, an economic way of thinking appealed to me, and for the first time I had a sense of a professional direction. The path ahead wasn't without more twists and turns (e.g., a one-year detour when I thought I wanted to be a forester), but I eventually earned a PhD, and I have spent the past quarter-century working on the economics of forestry and other environmental issues in developing countries.

I recently stepped down as the founding director of my university's environmental economics PhD program. Writing this essay prompts me to wonder if I would have admitted my younger self into this program. Probably not. Competition for entry into environmental economics PhD programs has intensified. Successful applicants typically have more advanced training in math, statistics and economics than I did when I applied.

I also wonder, less selfishly, about young people in developing countries who aspire to be environmental economists but have non-economic backgrounds similar to mine. I encounter many such people through my participation in environmental economics capacity-building programs. Due to increased competition, they face longer odds of being admitted to environmental economics PhD programs than I did in the 1980s. This concerns me, because progress in EDE depends on researchers from developing countries continuing to enter the field. Local institutions – the rules that mediate human interactions with nature – are at the core of environmental economics research in developing countries. Local researchers have the twin advantages of proximity and time: they can study these institutions up close and at length, and thus develop the knowledge that is essential for moving the field forward. The first article Barry Tomlinson gave me to read when I became his research assistant was a one-pager, 'The Good Eye', that he had published in *Carolina Tips* in 1964. He argued that botanists often learn the most important things from the simple act of careful observation. This advice applies equally well to research in EDE, especially in an era when abundant online data sets tempt the user to run regressions now and think later.

This eponymous journal deserves an Oscar for its supporting role in promoting environmental economics in developing countries. *EDE* has made it easier for developing country researchers to get their work into print and to gain the confidence that sustains them as researchers. When it receives manuscripts, instead of seeking quick desk rejections by finding fatal flaws, it looks for promising features and works with authors to craft their papers around them. In the end, quality matters to *EDE*'s decisions on manuscripts – as it must – but more than most journals, *EDE* tries to find the gold in the ore.

As the field has grown, so has the number and quality of submissions to *EDE* and other journals. This is good, but it does mean that all authors, including those from developing countries, face a higher risk of rejection. In the past few years I've heard many tales of disappointment from developing country authors who received rejection decisions from journals. Their

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disappointment is understandable, but so too are the journals' decisions in most cases. Papers by less experienced environmental economists from developing countries often contain high-quality analysis but are submitted to journals in a form that reduces their chance of acceptance. Their papers don't tell the basic 'story' of the research in a clear and convincing way. Some of these individuals appear to have had little prior training in expository writing. *EDE*'s glass-half-full review process is admirable, but it is not sufficient to address this problem. As *EDE* deservedly celebrates its remarkable rise, I hope it will remain committed to working with environmental economics capacity-building programs to reduce the impediments that put developing country researchers at a disadvantage in competing for space in its pages.

Looking back to leap forward: does environment and development economics matter to South Asia's future?

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I was 23 when I first ventured into rural India as a research assistant to examine how women harvested, traded and earned income from a fruit from the Uppage (*Garcinia Cambogia*) tree. The seeds were collected for their oil by local women, until markets opened up for the fruit, which had value as a condiment in a neighboring region. This led to changes in demand, and harvest rights began to be auctioned by the government. The Uppage case presents a classic story of access to new markets leading to partial privatization of common property, with consequences for both conservation and income distribution. Of course, I knew little about environmental economics then. But this foray into rural India exposed me to many elements of environment and development problems – the challenges of managing the commons, the possibility of markets leading to overexploitation of resources and growth in employment, the idea of institutional change contributing to multiple winners and losers with poor women being left behind on the bottom rung, and so on. This had a life-changing influence, leading me eventually to branch out and specialize in this area.

The commons have gained much attention, both on theoretical and empirical fronts, in the last 20-odd years (Ostrom, 1990; Baland and Platteau, 1996; Dasgupta, 2008). Growth in this field of enquiry has contributed

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