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Book Review Buckley, R. (2011) Debt-for-Development Exchanges: History and New Applications

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Abstract

Books and articles highlighting intractable debt, poverty and development abound in both the academic and popular literature. This addition to the debate is both timely and interesting as it subsumes the economic debate to the broader social, political, environmental and institutional context of debt in developing countries. *Debt-for-Development Exchanges: History and New Applications* is intended for a wide audience including: academics from a range of disciplines (including accounting and finance); non-Government organisations (NGOs); civil society groups; and, both debtor and creditor governments and public sector organisations.

Keywords

debt-for-development, Third World Debt; illegitimate debt, Jubilee, book review



Book Review

Buckley, R. (2011) *Debt-for-Development Exchanges: History and New Applications*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

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Keywords: debt-for-development, Third World Debt; illegitimate debt, Jubilee

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Books and articles highlighting intractable debt, poverty and development abound in both the academic and popular literature. This addition to the debate is both timely and interesting as it subsumes the economic debate to the broader social, political, environmental and institutional context of debt in developing countries. *Debt-for-Development Exchanges: History and New Applications* is intended for a wide audience including: academics from a range of disciplines (including accounting and finance); non-Government organisations (NGOs); civil society groups; and, both debtor and creditor governments and public sector organisations.

Professor Ross Buckley, author and editor, has developed an international profile in the area of debt relief and this book is the outcome of an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery grant to explore debt-for-development mechanisms that relieve debt, improve development outcomes from aid, are practically and politically attractive to creditors and contribute to regional security. This edited book combines contributions from the author, international academics in the field of debt development, NGO advocates and civil society activists on the innovative use of debt-for-development exchanges. The purpose of the book is to facilitate dialogue and develop partnerships between academics and civil society with the aim of creating opportunity to influence government policy.

Debt-for-development exchanges are hybrid alternate financing tools for development are based on the tenets of debt-equity swaps canvassed in the finance literature. These exchanges range from basic commercial debt-for-nature exchanges (e.g. in Ecuador and Costa Rica) to more complex bilateral and multilateral debt financing arrangements (e.g. recent Debt2Health exchange between Australia and Indonesia). These debt-for-development swaps are modelled on a range of factors including: the type of development e.g. health; the role of NGOs as mediators; and, the number and type of creditors. The book traces the historical development of debt-for-development exchanges, creditor involvement, critiques and future directions. While the author provides a balanced view from a variety of stakeholders, the specific public sector perspective from both debtor and creditor governments is absent. As with most books emanating from developed economies, the perspectives and narratives of the poor are represented by civil society advocates.

Debt-for-Development Exchanges: History and New Applications combines a range of literary styles and genres incorporating arguments from the more mainstream academic literature to analyses of contested meanings in both the development and debt literature. While the initial chapters require an understanding of financial economics and the historical underpinnings of the debt and poverty landscape, the following chapters employ a more accessible, narrative style. In addition, these later chapters provide a series of diagrams and figures to explicate the complexities of debt-for-development exchanges. The discrete nature of the chapters also allows the reader to select articles and topics suited to their particular purpose.

The book is useful for an accounting and finance audience as it provides an excellent background for debt-for-development exchanges. There are numerous examples of these innovative financial instruments in practice, balanced with a healthy critique. For example, the groundbreaking work of Jurgen Kaiser on illegitimate debt is used to provoke a discussion about defining the problem of odious debt and the nature of proposed solutions. Debt-for-development exchanges expose the complex relationship between debtor and creditor and address issues of upward and downward accountability in the not-for-profit sector and civil society organisations. For an accounting audience the nuances of accountability, audit and accounting practice will provoke interest in this field of inquiry.

Overall, the book is inspirational, demonstrating the tenacity of debt and poverty alleviation campaigners to move beyond instrumental and economic solutions to more innovative and holistic techniques. Debt-for-development exchanges are the result of an

iterative learning process and provide the forum for a productive and meaningful partnership between academics and civil society, which in this text is demonstrated through well articulated and thoroughly researched contributions.