

Measuring Vulnerability in Developing Countries: New Analytical Approaches, 2012, by Wim Naudé, Amelia U. Santos-Paulino, and Mark McGillivray, London: Routledge.

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“Vulnerability” has long been a buzzword in disasters and development research, policy, and practice. Many papers and books have been published about the definition, interpretation, and application of vulnerability. Quantitative definitions and interpretations soon segue into discussions of indices, metrics, and measuring techniques.

Measuring Vulnerability in Developing Countries: New Analytical Approaches contributes to this literature. The book republishes a special issue of *Oxford Development Studies* (2009, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 183-309) entitled “Vulnerability in Development: Advances in Concept and Measurement” which, in turn, was based on papers presented at the United Nations University’s *WIDER Conference on Fragile States - Fragile Groups; Tackling Economic and Social Vulnerability*, held from 15-16 June 2007 in Helsinki, Finland (http://www.wider.unu.edu/events/past-conferences/fragile-states/en_GB/fragile-states-fragile-groups).

The introductory chapter from the editors solidly frames the book, placing it firmly within economics and defining that field’s criteria for methods of measuring vulnerability. The book’s aims are stated as “to consolidate the current state of the art as far as the concept and measurement of vulnerability on different levels and outcomes are concerned, and to note directions for future research” (p. 2). The overview of the other chapters nicely constructs the book as a comparison of three scales of vulnerability: macro, meso, and micro. As with some of the other chapters, the discussion is rather ahistorical, with most of the references being from 2000 or after.

Patrick Guillaumont provides the first full chapter by taking a macro view for developing an economic vulnerability index and applying it to international development policy. There is some useful discussion on the political and policy generation of vulnerability as well as how to weight different components of a vulnerability index. The detailed tables at the end, presenting countries’ and country groups’ economic vulnerability index values, are excellent for understanding the advantages and limitations of the index and for comparing changes in the values since 1970.

The second macro chapter is Chapter 3 by Lino Briguglio and three co-authors, who also present detailed tables of country-level results for economic vulnerability and economic resilience indices. Their interpretation for development policy is useful within four development scenarios defined in the chapter, especially given the clear definitions

and lucid framing at the beginning regarding what the authors suggest represent economic vulnerability and resilience.

Two of the three editors (Naudé and McGillivray) join with Stephanié Rossouw to move Chapter 4 into the meso level. They use the important “vulnerability of place” concept to examine subnational vulnerability of 354 districts in South Africa leading to a Local (economic) Vulnerability Index. The method is explained well and the variables considered for the index are justified convincingly, from an economics lens. The paper is as important for its method as it is for the results from the case study of South Africa.

The final two chapters represent the micro level. The penultimate chapter by Yuan Zhang and Guanghua Wan focuses on vulnerability to poverty in rural China. Two poverty lines are compared of US\$1/per day and US\$2/per day for Purchasing Power Parity, along with two definitions of vulnerability, yielding an insightful sensitivity analysis. The policy implications and limitations of the study are helpfully delineated, demonstrating what the study does and does not achieve.

Finally, Tilman Brück and Kati Schindler close the book with a qualitative analysis of the economic vulnerability of households with war widows, using post-genocide Rwanda as the main case study. Research gaps and methodological critiques are impressively articulated, providing a useful baseline for intersecting conflict studies and economic vulnerability studies.

No conclusion is provided to the book. For a special journal issue, that is the norm. For a book, it can be useful to have a short concluding chapter consolidating the chapters’ lessons and signposting future directions.

The audience for the book is clearly economists or those who wish to know how economists think about and approach vulnerability. From that perspective, it is helpful for readers to be aware of the disciplinary viewpoints and to ensure that economists are able to contribute to vulnerability literature and practice on their own terms. Some authors extend their analysis beyond strict economics to some degree, especially the final chapter, but most are up-front about their definitions and research bounds being economics-related.

The limited contextualisation and comparatively narrow scope of the chapters overall means that the authors’ results and conclusions might have limited applicability beyond their own discipline. That does not mean that the chapters should have been expanded nor that they necessarily should have adopted other vulnerability perspectives. Instead, a concluding chapter from a non-economist, proposing and interpreting uses of the methods and results beyond a specific discipline, would have been a valuable addition to help in bridging the gap between economics and non-economics perspectives.

For instance, the continual emphasis by several authors on exogenous or external shocks as helping to define vulnerability covers one component that forms a thread throughout many definitions of “vulnerability”. Equally important components are given less attention in the book.

One example is the endogenous nature of vulnerability, such as internal power structures denying some segments of the population resources and choices to be able to deal with normal environmental extremes, so these extremes become natural hazards. Another example is to explicitly note that the entirety of vulnerability cannot be captured through a calculation representing a snapshot in space and time. Instead, vulnerability can be viewed as a long-term process representing the underlying development conditions of a society, sometimes exposed only when a normal environmental event such as a flood or earthquake ends up being a disaster. These concepts emerge from fields other than economics and might not always fit comfortably within quantitative economics analyses.

Yet the book's disciplinarity could be accepted as an advantage, to draw economists into the multi-scalar discussions. A strength which comes across throughout the manuscript is the macro-meso-micro blend highlighted in the editors' introduction. Anyone reading through the entire volume cannot escape the balance of the scales, the different perspectives emerging from that balance, and the potential cross-overs amongst the scales. A macro-economist, a meso-economist, and a micro-economist would each learn about vulnerability challenges in developing countries from each other's perspective—a significant outcome from this publication.

As part of a wider suite of publications on understanding vulnerability in developing countries, Naudé et al. contribute important elements regarding metrics and measurements. The methods should not be neglected, are significant in informing multi-scalar quantitative analysis, and provide useful components for fully analysing each of the specific case studies. No single perspective, of course, can untangle the knot of vulnerability and poverty, but *Measuring Vulnerability in Developing Countries* provides one piece for solving the large puzzle.