



Published by the [COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Logout](#)

[My Account](#)

[Printer-friendly](#)

Economic, Social, and Environmental

By Richard N. Cooper

From *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2008

Greening Aid? Understanding the Environmental Impact of Development Assistance. Robert L. Hicks, Bradley C. Parks, J. Timmons Roberts, and Michael J. Tierney. Oxford University Press, 2008, 368 \$35.00

The authors address whether foreign assistance has over time become more friendly to environmental concerns as such concerns have become politically more salient within the donor nations. To this end, they have assembled a massive database of development projects funded by both bilateral and multilateral donors during the 1980s and 1990s and classified each project, necessarily crudely, into one of five categories according to how friendly or unfriendly it was to the environment. Their major finding is that environmentally friendly aid projects did indeed grow significantly both in relative terms and in dollar amounts between 1980 and 1999 (although the value of environmentally unfriendly projects still outweighed the value of friendly ones by threefold in 1999). The authors explore several explanations for the difference in trends, with sometimes surprising conclusions. Strong domestic environmental organizations in donor countries are more effective at blocking environmentally unfriendly projects than at promoting friendly ones; friendly projects tend to favor global issues, such as biodiversity and climate change, over local ones, such as the provision of clean water and the development of adequate sewage disposal. Throughout the book, as the authors acknowledge, runs a strong tension between development (which everywhere depends on electricity, the generation and distribution of which are labeled unfriendly) and environmentalism.

[Home](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Current Issue](#)

Copyright 2002--2008 by the Council on Foreign Relations. All rights reserved.