

Public Abstract

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Title:THREE ESSAYS ON ECONOMIC GROWTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

This dissertation extends our understanding of the relationships among economic growth, the environment and well-being. It is motivated by the facts that (i) global environmental change and environmental degradation are major policy concerns among world leaders, policymakers and scholars due to their deleterious consequences for human well-being, and (ii) because everyone ultimately wants to be happy, world leaders are increasingly embracing happiness reports as an alternative measure of national well-being. The first essay examines whether, and to what extent, individual perceptions about the seriousness or otherwise of poor local and global environmental quality influence their happiness. As measures of local environmental quality, poor water, poor air, and poor sewage and sanitation in the respondent's own community are considered. The global environmental quality measures include global warming or greenhouse effect, loss of animal or plant species and biodiversity, and the pollution of rivers, lakes and oceans in the world as a whole. The empirical results indicate that while both local and global environmental quality measures diminish happiness for residents of developed countries, only local environmental quality measures have a negative effect on the well-being of people in developing countries. The second essay explores the role of perceived socioeconomic status as a predictor of environmental concern. The results suggest conclusively that in addition to being more likely to choose environmental protection over economic growth and job creation, people who perceive themselves as belonging to the working class, lower middle, upper middle and upper class are significantly more willing to make income sacrifices (i.e., give part of their income and/or agree to pay higher taxes) to prevent environmental pollution than those who believe they are in the lower class in both developed and developing countries. Finally, the third essay studies the relationship between economic growth and air pollution within the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) framework. Aside from testing for EKCs for carbon dioxide (CO₂) and particulate matter (PM₁₀), it compares turning point incomes for these air pollutants for developed and developing countries. Because institutional quality is likely to influence the design, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations, the study empirically tests whether a country's extent of democracy influences its level of air pollution. However, results from fixed and random effects models do not support this claim. Each essay compares developed and developing countries with respect to its outcomes. While the developed countries are a sample of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the developing countries are mainly countries in Africa. This focus on African countries is partially anchored on the following reasons. First, the region is the least happy region in the world. Second, it is argued that developing countries are more vulnerable to climate change than developed countries. Climate change and environmental pollution have destructive implications for agricultural productivity, health and human well-being generally. Because agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of Africans, focusing on the region is seemly.