

Barefoot Global Health Diplomacy: Field Experiences in International Relations, Security, and Epidemics. Sebastian Kevany. Academic Press, an imprint of Elsevier, 125 London Wall, London EC2Y 5AS, UK. 2021. xxiv + 226 pages. Price: US\$ 99.95.

The publication of *Barefoot Global Health Diplomacy* by Sebastian Kevany is timely and relevant given how the world is in the throes of a global pandemic and understanding how the global health system works has become increasingly important for a layperson. This book builds a narrative around the interwoven nature of public health with a plethora of issues from local customs to military conflicts through a range of essays based on personal experiences by frontline health workers and health administrators. These essays are embedded in the chapters that discuss the themes that affect public health and, in turn, are affected by it. This book, however, is silent on the current pandemic except in the last two essays that seem to be disconnected from the overall theme and flow of the rest of the book.

Chapter 1 elaborates on the concept of the ‘barefoot health diplomacy’. Here, this term refers to informality practiced by international health professionals working beyond their job descriptions and engaging with a diverse set of players. The chapter also presents the different practices that barefoot health diplomacy entails through the tales of some practising health diplomats. These practices and qualities include embracing local cultures and humour, understanding local socio-economic situations, acting as bridges in politically divided regions if needed, negotiation skills, attention to details, making connections, and perhaps the most essential quality which is honesty that ultimately gives credibility and respect to their work.

The second chapter illustrates that ‘adaptability’ is a core value of health diplomacy. The author argues that being adaptable is essential for managing public health to customize the approach based on the local environment, culture, norms and beliefs instead of the ‘one-size-fits all’ approach. Through various examples, the author illustrates that it is essential to do away with rigid programme design and focus on flexible approaches that provide space for barefoot health diplomats to act in accordance with different local values and needs, still keeping the big picture of global health in mind. This flexibility is in contrast with the norms of epidemic controls, based on protocols and standard operating procedures, and finding a balance between these contrasting cultures is often a difficult act. Therefore, it is emphasized that the global health programmes should be jointly designed and implemented by locals and internationals.

Chapter 3 underlines the importance and methods of local ownership of the infectious disease control programmes. This chapter further explores how locals and internationals interact, and the importance of cross-talk and cross-learning in all stages of the design and implementation of global health programmes. Local ownership and control help build local capacities, provide a sense of local responsibility and ensure long-term sustainability. Engaging with the locals from the beginning can help prevent feelings of inappropriateness and imposition, while helping fill the North-South divide and avoiding the ‘dependency culture’. It ensures that the programmes are culturally, socially, religiously, and politically appropriate and help customize them to maximize effectiveness at local and global levels. The author concludes by emphasizing that transparency is an essential part of barefoot diplomacy to convince the locals that there is no hidden agenda or possible exploitation of local resources.

Chapter 4 focuses on the holistic governance approach involving expertise in different areas from both local and international levels to handle public health. As global health is interwoven into the bigger picture that includes trade, environment, security, economics, these synergies should be explored to find solutions that address the underlying challenges of these interconnected issues. Such holistic approaches for public health involve designing and delivering programmes that are coherent across various policies and have a positive impact on other interconnected areas. A

case is made for ‘enlightened altruism’ where national interest and global health objectives can be served together. The author calls for ‘smart’ holistic approaches to be systematically integrated and formalized in global health programmes to reap the benefits across different cross-cutting areas interconnected with public health. He highlights that the epidemic control programmes can provide alternatives to hard power and help nations build the reputation of good-doers while advancing world peace.

Chapter 5 discusses the monitoring and evaluation aspects of the global health programmes. These are indispensable to ensure that the money is utilized according to planned allocations and that there is no corruption or wastage of resources. However, the evaluation is seldom done optimally, with too much focus on numbers and it often misses out on the downstream effects. Further, the performance pressure creates its own set of problems as the small clinics, and local health workers, as they need to get the additional paperwork done on top of their core health care responsibilities. The author calls for new monitoring benchmarks that are more comprehensive, sensitive and respectful towards local conditions to be developed and deployed. These should go beyond numbers in capturing the impact, while abstaining from putting too much pressure on local health workers. It is emphasized that perspective on performance needs to be holistic, inclusive and all-encompassing to judge the overall effectiveness of the health care programmes. The author, however, has not elaborated much on the methodology for developing such innovative ways of monitoring and evaluation.

Chapter 6 explores the relationship between war and public health in different dimensions, including how defence and public health priorities often get co-opted to serve each other. It is argued that improving public health also reduces global inequalities and resentment, which are both causes and effects of the military conflicts. Military personnel can be used as agents of humanitarianism and are often deployed in times of health emergencies. The author makes a case for partially re-orienting the vast military capacity towards healthcare in conflict-torn areas. However, there is a bit of overselling global health as an important factor in avoiding dictatorships, terrorism, genocides and environmental degradation while improving international relations. Further, there are obvious dangers of mismanaging the

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relationship between global health and military power, as global health can easily become secondary in the pursuit of national interests through military means. The author highlights that the mixing of health and strategic realms can put the health personnel under increased danger in the conflict zones. Overall, collaborations between health and strategic realms should be explored based on convergence in goals and priorities while being cautious to minimize the pitfalls.

Chapter 7 focuses on the various aspects of ethics and economics of epidemic control, how they are often at odds with each other, and how barefoot diplomacy can bridge the gap between the two. This chapter presents barefoot diplomacy as a challenge to utilitarianism which the author presents as being disconnected from local social and cultural settings, too theoretical and depends mainly on numbers. This is, however, a narrow understanding of utilitarianism based on its practice in global health, which projects the success or failure of the programmes, depending on some numeric parameters that often fail to capture the overall impact. In fact, the vision of barefoot diplomacy connecting people, cultures at the local and global level with health and other benefits, is much closer to the broader utilitarian concept of maximizing the well-being of the maximum number of people. The author discusses how too much focus on cost-effectiveness and short-term measurements lose sight of the long-term positive impacts of the health programmes. He emphasizes that new structures or smart programmes need to evolve so as not to abandon the sick in the interest of greater efficiency.

Chapter 8 summarizes and streamlines key ideas proposed in other chapters. The author explains some of the non-academic terms frequently used in the book: 'smart', 'cool', and 'magic' and finally defines the term 'Global health'. This last chapter seems like an attempt to tie the loose ends. The author paints the overall concept of barefoot diplomacy to be more transparent, accessible and 'cool' in contrast to the traditional elitist and secretive nature of diplomacy. However, the barefoot diplomacy approach should be taken cautiously as it might not be practical to use this approach in most diplomatic settings, except maybe in public diplomacy.

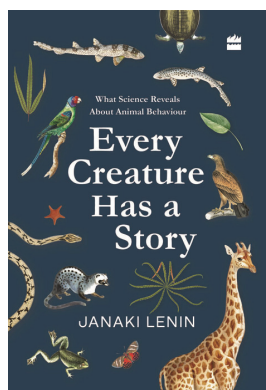
Throughout the book, one finds the interchangeable use of global health, public health, epidemic control, infectious disease control, and liberal and often unwarranted

use of the term diplomacy. Further, some technical terms are used without explanation, like: *sine qua non* and *quid pro quo*. This book primarily covers the perspective of North-South cooperation in global health; South-South and North-North perspectives are missing. Across various chapters, one finds some informative and touching anecdotes and lessons from barefoot health diplomats around the world. However, some of the essays seem out of place with the overall context of the chapters.

Overall, this book demonstrates the connections of global health with a vast range of issues affecting all walks of life. Even with its vast global scope, this book builds a narrative around the stories of individuals with diverse backgrounds working at the forefront of global health diplomacy. It is a good read and can be recommended to all aspirants and practitioners of public health and diplomacy.

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Every Creature Has a Story: What Science Reveals About Animal Behaviour. Janaki Lenin. Harper Collins Publishers India, A-75, Sector 57, Noida 201 301, UP. 2020. xiii + 282 pages. Price: Rs 599.

Charles Darwin, besotted by the variation and the ingenuity of life on earth, mused in the final sentences of *On the Origin of Species*. 'There is grandeur in this view of life,' he wrote.

This line kept ringing in my head while reading Janaki Lenin's latest book. *Every Creature Has a Story* is a compendium of fifty essays about the behaviours and the peculiar lives of the myriad creatures on this planet. The essays, first published in

The Wire, are short, varied and highly lucid, most running only two or three pages long.

In the essays, Lenin describes – in astonishing detail – how chimpanzees grieve, how amorous Pacific striped octopus mate, and how southern African python moms guard its clutch of eggs, among other such stories. Each essay uncovers the peculiarities and the secret lives of the animal, effortlessly weaving current scientific understanding with the narrative. The essays feature a diverse cast of characters – birds, animals, insects, reptiles and parasites – arranged in no particular order, rejecting any facile notion of a neat classification in nature. As Lenin writes, '[Nature] leaks, overflows, overlaps and intrudes across man-made boundaries.'

Lenin's prose is witty and casual and is sympathetic to a broader readership. Her writing has the traditional contours of science or nature writing in that she is able to wring observations and scientific studies into neat edible stories, but the essays also leave enough doors open for an overcurious reader. Lenin, in the introduction, makes the case that, 'There is a certain pleasure in delving into the disease immunity of bees and then leaping on to a fur seal beach in Antarctica,' and I agree with her. Leafing through the essays felt like watching a parade of eccentric characters, each with their unique way of navigating, surviving and revelling in this world. Even the most reluctant reader would find several essays in the book to be surprising and entertaining.

While each essay stands in and of itself, the book, in toto, is more than just a sum of its parts. Ted Chiang, the American science fiction writer, pondered why humans are so interested in finding intelligent life in the stars and yet so deaf to the many creatures who manifest it here on this planet. Reading Lenin's work puts the question in stark light. Learning about the ingenuity of the Australian firehawks, rodents that comfort their companions and feel empathy, and humpback whales who rush to the rescue of other sea creatures, makes us question our hubris. *Every Creature Has a Story*, in that sense, is an antidote to our indifference towards other creatures and a celebration of the diversity of life on this planet.

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