
Published shortly before her death, in the succinct and unpretentious prose that characterised all her published works, this short treatise will provide her many admirers with a ready summary of her remarkable achievements, enlivened with three photographs taken at different points in her life.

Ester Boserup’s genius reposed in her ability to bring the theoretical rigour of a critical economist to bear on the case study literature and thereby to challenge conventional wisdom on (in the first instance) the relations between agrarian systems and population, and (later), women in development and technological change, and other causes she espoused during her career on international bodies. She not only domesticated the fragmented knowledge which agricultural economists, anthropologists, geographers and others had accumulated, but set the ground rules for a truly interdisciplinary debate which, beginning with The Conditions of Agricultural Growth in 1965, has continued with undiminished vigour ever since. Her models have stood the test of time, for while disputed by many, they have not lacked validation in later studies, and they have suggested common ground between South Asia (which was her first stamping ground) and Africa. All this was managed without the benefit of a university post.

This little history is as objective as her economic arguments. There are no personalia to titivate, except for a few brief references to moving around the world with her husband, Mogens Boserup, and to illness later in life. But it deserves a place on the shelves of those for whom these debates forever carry the stamp of her intellect and who are occasionally curious about how we arrived where we are on the knowledge map of Asian and African societies.

22 May 2000

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