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Rio+20 and the challenge of sustainable development

Rio + 20: addressing the crisis of sustainable development

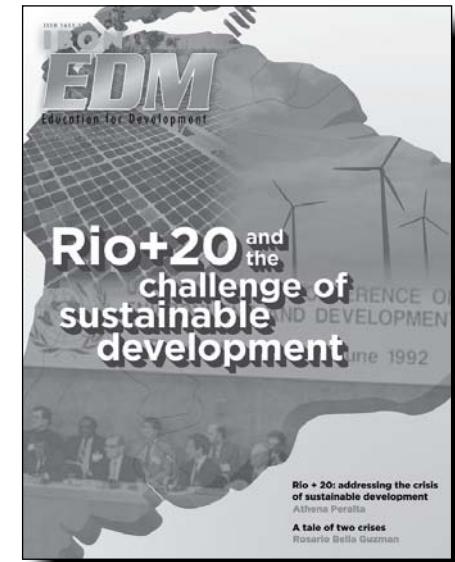
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**IBON International
IBON Foundation, Inc.**

IBON Center
114 Timog Avenue, Quezon City
1103 Philippines
Website: www.iboninternational.org
E-mail Address: ibon.international@ibon.org
Tel. Nos. +632 927 7060 to 62
Local 202
Fax +632 927 6981

Antonio Tujan, Jr.

International Director
Editor-in-Chief
International Department

Paul Quintos

Maria Theresa Nera-Lauron
Editorial Board

Cover and Layout Design
Ron Villegas

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Rio+20: Addressing the Crisis in Sustainable Development

By Athena Peralta



<http://www.worldwatch.org>

In 1992, at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, governments made powerful commitments to sustainable development, producing the landmark United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biodiversity and the Agenda 21. Yet almost twenty years after Rio, our planet is confronted with unprecedented ecological and socio-economic crises. A dangerously warming climate from the continuous build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is resulting in rising sea levels and massive weather disturbances – aggravating livelihood, food and water insecurity for the world's poor; and a recent global financial and economic meltdown has thrown hundreds of millions of people below the poverty threshold.

The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The concept views the objectives of ecological protection and poverty eradication as equally critical, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The upcoming Conference on Sustainable Development, which will take place again in Rio in 2012, must now come to the realization that the attainment of both objectives is increasingly imperilled in the current period of heightened economic globalization. More importantly, the summit must generate wide consensus and clear proposals for sweeping and deep-seated changes in our global economic structures if, indeed, we are to build a just and sustainable future for our children.



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Unsustainable globalization

Since the last decade, it has become more and more evident that the on-going process of economic globalization is unsustainable. Despite having generated much prosperity, the gains from globalization have been unevenly distributed between and within nations – with the benefits accruing largely to the already economically powerful. And often these gains have been achieved at huge ecological cost.

More specifically, “free trade” policies pushed by the World Trade Organization and powerful governments have fostered a competitive tendency by multinational corporations and local businesses to minimize production expenses not least by systematically ignoring environmental damages and cutting labor costs (especially the wages of “low-skilled” workers that make up the bulk of the poor), while at the same time promoting consumerist lifestyles that necessarily entail accelerated resource depletion. The global financial and economic crash of 2008 – unparalleled in scale and intensity – also revealed the inherent instability and destructiveness of liberalized financial

markets: economy after economy was battered, swelling the ranks of the jobless, homeless and hungry in both developing and developed regions. Thus some economists and sociologists have persuasively argued that intensified trade and financial integration is leading to a “globalization of environmental problems” (Borghesi and Vercelli 2003) as much as a “globalization of poverty” (Chossudovsky 2003).

The “green economy”: win-win solution?

Responding to the deepening crisis in sustainable development, governments will be gathering in Rio a second time from 14 to 16 May 2012 for the 3rd United Nations World Conference on Sustainable Development. At the top of the agenda is the development of the so-called “green economy” as a solution to the problems of escalating environmental destruction and poverty.

Ostensibly, the “green economy” is geared towards safeguarding scarce ecological resources, reducing pollution and emissions from production processes, and encouraging sustainable consumption patterns. While it is exceedingly difficult to find fault with these worthwhile goals, many issues and uncertainties remain with the “green economy” that are reflective of the old tensions and perceived trade-offs between ecological sustainability and development. For instance, would such an economy place limitations on economic expansion, job creation, consumption and poverty eradication in poor countries? What are the risks and costs? What institutions and regulatory frameworks are needed to ensure a smooth and equitable transition?

While a detailed blueprint towards building the “green economy” is far from emerging at this point, a key feature would have to be the establishment of rules and regulations at various levels to safeguard the environment such as the imposition of pollution fines and taxes. By putting a price on the use of natural resources and ecological damages, the latter would address what is perceived by many mainstream economists as a “market failure” manifesting in the current environmental predicament. Yet another likely feature would be the promotion of trade and investments in green goods, technologies and services. This could encourage the development of a wide range

of green industries that additionally could be a source of much-needed employment in an era of recession.

However, aside from technical and ethical concerns, pricing nature might lead to an acceleration of commodification of such basic resources as air and water especially as there is already a tendency in the current policy framework to depend on market-based approaches to environmental protection. A prime example would be the buying and selling of emission rights whereby companies and countries can pollute the atmosphere beyond their assigned quotas by purchasing emissions certificates from other companies or countries. Needless to say, studies indicate that emissions trading did not bring about significant cuts in emissions. If markets are envisioned to play an important role in the “green economy”, then there is a huge risk of reverting back to business-as-usual where profit, not human or ecological well-being, is the main yardstick.

From the perspective of poor country governments, there are apprehensions that the “green economy” might prioritize environmental protection over people’s socio-economic needs and right to development as well as result in unilateral restrictions on trade and conditions on aid, loans and debt relief (Khor 2010). If so, the “green economy” would further constrict poor countries’ already-diminished policy space for determining their development paths according to their needs and aspirations.

Overall, it is clear is that the urgency of tackling the growing ecological and economic crises entails a radically different approach to production, consumption and distribution or the way we run and manage our economies. No doubt sacrifices will have to be made and there will be “losers” along the way. But the potential success of the “green economy” in blazing new and much more just and ecologically-friendly development tracks will hinge heavily on at least two things: first, how its vision and outcomes are eventually defined – whether in terms of ecological health, social-economic well-being for all peoples and democratic participation in decision-making processes – and, perhaps more importantly, on how the benefits, costs and responsibilities are shared.

Towards a sustainable future: an agenda for Rio+20

In line with the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” established at the first Earth Summit, rich countries – being accountable for the bulk of global environmental damage and possessing more capacity relative to poor countries – have the foremost obligation for revamping the dominant, growth-oriented economic paradigm that has failed to advance ecological and human well-being. At the same time, rich countries have the obligation to provide poor countries with the required finance and technology to transit to more sustainable systems.

For a growing movement that brings together economists, ecologists and activists, the way forward is to be found in “de-growth” – a planned downsizing of economic production and consumption – in the rich, industrialized countries. The Declaration of the 2nd International Conference on De-growth held in Barcelona last March 2010 states:

“... An international elite and a “global middle class” are causing havoc to the environment through conspicuous consumption and the excessive appropriation of human and natural resources. Their consumption patterns lead to further environmental and social damage when imitated by the rest of society in a vicious circle of status-seeking through the accumulation of material possessions...”

“... So-called anti-crisis measures that seek to boost economic growth will worsen inequalities and environmental conditions in the long-run. The illusion of a “debt-fuelled growth”, i.e. forcing the economy to grow in order to pay debt, will end in social disaster, passing on economic and ecological debts to future generations and to the poor. A process of de-growth of the world economy is inevitable and will ultimately benefit the environment, but the challenge is how to manage the process so that it is socially equitable at national and global scales...”

“... A wealth of new proposals evolved, including: facilitation of local currencies; gradual elimination of fiat money and reforms of interest; promotion of small scale, self-managed not-for-profit companies; defense and expansion of local commons and establishment of new jurisdictions for global

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Talking about an energy and jobs revolution

Revolutionising the way we produce and distribute energy could curb greenhouse gas emissions, create jobs and help fight poverty. It is time to replace the fossil fuel monopoly with decentralised energy production using renewable sources

By Kumi Naidoo

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Creating decent new jobs, fighting poverty and curbing catastrophic climate change have historically been seen as three distinctive challenges, pursued by a trio of different movements: trade unions, development organizations and environmentalists. This should no longer be the case. In the past few years, as climate change has become ever more of a pressing issue and the international financial institutions have once again proved incapable of creating employment or fighting poverty, people and organizations have realized that it is in our collective interest as citizens of the world to pursue a green industrial policy. This should start with a re-evaluation of the way we produce and distribute energy.

Greenpeace's Energy [R]evolution, developed in conjunction with over 30 scientists and engineers worldwide, proposes a radical shift in the way the world produces, distributes, and ultimately consumes energy. It is a roadmap for moving energy production closer to the point of use. Under the current system, we produce large amounts of energy at a few centralised locations and send that energy over very long distances to where it is consumed. This system is inflexible, often wasteful, and leaves large swathes of the world's population unserved and without access to any energy.

In addition to being centralized geographically, energy production is also centralised in terms of influence with control lying in the hands of a few very powerful energy

companies. All too often, these companies operate as monopolies, dictating availability, prices and access. Because energy corporations do not cater to the poor, about a third of the world's population (over 2 billion people) lives with little or no access to reliable energy services. For cooking and heating, many people must depend almost exclusively on burning biomass, a labour-intensive process often detrimental to health and a scourge for the environment.

Bringing energy to these parts of the developing world would not only help us address the ongoing issue of poverty but, if done in the right way, we would also be a big step closer to a fairer and more sustainable future.

Such a move would also help curb global warming and create millions of new jobs along the way.

The good news is that an Energy [R]evolution is well within our grasp. If we make the right changes over the next ten years or so, we will be able to redesign the outmoded energy system we rely on in most parts of the world – and move to a future powered in most part by the sun, the wind and the natural forces of the Earth. This would create benefits not just for the environment, but for workers as well.

The Energy (R)evolution calls for decentralized energy, which comes wherever possible from renewable sources such as wind or solar energy and is connected to a local distribution network system. This local “micro-grid” supplies homes and offices, rather than the high voltage transmission system. The scenario would see a huge proportion of global energy produced by such decentralized energy sources – supplemented, as needed, by large offshore wind farms, concentrating solar power (CSP) plants in the sunbelt regions of the world, and other renewable sources of energy by 2050. Creating a closer proximity of electricity-generating plants to consumers will allow any waste heat from combustion processes to be piped to nearby buildings, a system known as cogeneration or combined heat and power. This means that nearly all the input energy is finally put to use.

The Energy [R]evolution is a win not just for the environment, but also for local people. Towns, villages and local communities will be empowered to produce, monitor and profit from their own energy thus bypassing major monopolies.

Properly implemented, the Energy (R)evolution would also create millions of new jobs starting with the global power supply sector which could create up to 12.5 million jobs by 2015 (4.5 million more than the current projection). A significantly increased uptake of renewable energy would create over 8 million jobs by 2020 in that sector alone, four times more than today.

The potential boost in employment can only occur with aggressive renewable energy policy and targets. Greenpeace calls for a range of measures from

governments to safeguard against detrimental changes to the employment balance by providing jobs and retraining in communities affected by this transition. Doing nothing means we will see significant losses in employment in the fossil fuel sector, and there will not be an expansion in clean energy production to compensate. With renewable energy investment it is possible to provide more replacement jobs to counteract the losses, in areas like wind turbine and solar PV manufacturing, geothermal drilling, solar thermal plant constructions, wave energy installations, energy efficiency, and many other cleaner employment alternatives.

If we look at the power sector as a whole, the picture is equally encouraging: if we radically redesign our energy systems as outlined above there will be 3.2 million (or over 33 percent) more jobs by 2030 in the global power supply sector. In Asia, we would see 650,000 power sector jobs by 2015, compared to 610,000 under a business-as-usual scenario. In India, we would see around 1 million power sector jobs – compared to 710,000 under a business-as-usual scenario.

In addition to quantity, the quality of many of these new jobs is impressive. Employment in the sectors that would come to exist, or would considerably expand, through an Energy [R]evolution will often be of a much higher standard than those created by the oil industry for example. They will be a world away from the risks and dangers emanating from the 19th century technology so much of the world still relies on for its energy production. By shifting away from dirty, deadly energy sources such as fossil fuels and nuclear energy, we will create many new jobs that are clean, safe and healthy.

For developing countries this presents a great opportunity to catch up both financially and technologically with the more developed world. By implementing new forms of energy, these countries could leapfrog the era of dirty energy that the world's developed countries are just emerging from – and move straight to clean and sustainable energy thereby avoiding rising oil prices, dwindling fossil fuel reserves and the ongoing dangers that come with these types of energy. By embracing the technologies of the 21st century, they would not only be able to reduce their CO₂ emissions

drastically and play an important part in the global fight against climate change; they could also set themselves on a pathway of economic growth, decoupled from a dependence on fossil fuels and respecting the natural limits of the planet we all share.

The timing couldn't be better: many power plants in industrialized countries, such as the USA, Japan and the European Union, are nearing the end of their proposed life-span, with more than half of all operating power plants already over 20 years old. At the same time countries such as China, India and Brazil are looking to satisfy the growing energy demand created by their expanding economies.

But the Energy [R]evolution won't happen by itself. We need governments and industry around the world to implement the right policies to make substantial structural changes in the energy and power sector. Unfortunately, few of our current leaders - political or

business - have seen any advantages for themselves in promoting a revolution in the way we treat the planet.

Given that change is in the interest of the people and the planet and not necessarily of Big Business, it is going to take the will of millions of us around the globe to force those in power to create the political infrastructure for change. We are going to need an international movement of honest men and women that encompasses environmental organizations, trade unions, development organizations and many others who haven't actively thought about how the environment touches all of our lives.

Kumi Naidoo is the Executive Director of Greenpeace International. This article was published in Stwr.org (<http://www.stwr.org/land-energy-water/talking-about-an-energy-and-jobs-revolution.html>).

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commons; establishment of integrated policies of reduced working hours (work-sharing) and introduction of a basic income;... discouragement of overconsumption of non-durable goods and under-use of durables by regulation, taxation or bottom-up approaches; abandonment of large-scale infrastructure such as nuclear plants, dams, incinerators, high-speed transportation; conversion of car-based infrastructure to walking, biking and open common spaces;... support for environmental justice movements of the South that struggle against resource extraction; introduction of global extractive moratoria in areas with high biodiversity and cultural value, and compensation for leaving resources in the ground...

... As the economy of wealthy parts of the world quietly contracts and our damage to the environment... is constrained, well-being will increase through public investments in low-cost social and relational goods..."

Poor nations, too, have a significant role to play in determining the future. They, too, must find ecologically-nurturing ways to meeting peoples' economic, social

and cultural rights. The immediate hurdles – heavy debt burdens, unjust trade, investment and intellectual property rules and agreements – that are inhibiting them from developing differently must first of all be removed. In building societies that "live well collectively" ("buen vivir"), poor countries will perhaps have to break away from their economic, intellectual and cultural reliance on the rich, industrialized North. This could imply emphasizing domestic-led development that addresses peoples' material needs and provides gainful employment; and also rediscovering in their cultural histories and identities, values, practices and systems of caring, solidarity, and community that run counter to the profit-motive, the logic of rational self-interest and the philosophy of "more is better" that have caused immeasurable harm to our planet.

Athena Peralta is Consultant in Poverty, Wealth and Ecology at the World Council of Churches.

Havana harvest: Organic agriculture in Cuba's capital

By Mickey Ellinger and Scott Braley



Scott Braley

We are looking at the end of (relatively) cheap oil, food and transportation, crises that have already had a devastating impact on Third World nations and communities of color. These issues hit Cuba a stunning blow in the early 1990s, which they overcame by using what they have – scientific intelligence, organization and human energy instead of money and machines.

On a recent visit we learned that Cuba has been raising its fruits and vegetables organically for more than 15 years, using worm and vegetable compost and integrated and natural pest management to raise crops for its people. In the process they have decentralized agricultural production, tripled farmers' average income, built stronger communities and shown the way to living well after the end of cheap oil.

When Cuba overthrew the dictator Batista in 1959, wealthy Europeans, Americans and Cubans fled the revolutionary society and the U.S. cut off economic and political relations. Cuba turned to the Soviet Union, and for about 30 years exported its sugar, nickel, coffee and tobacco to the socialist world at better than market prices. Russian oil powered agriculture and Russian cars and trucks filled the roads.

The plantations owned by foreigners became state farms. Cubans were paid better and had more say in their working conditions, but the structure of the economy – what was produced and how – did not change that much. People worked on big farms drenched in fertilizer and pesticides, and almost 60 percent of Cuba's food was imported, paid for with income from the socialist bloc.

By the 1980s, Cuban biologists and ecologists were already challenging these methods and urging attention to integrated pest management and methods of cultivation better suited to Cuba's relatively infertile tropical soil. Their studies, demonstration projects and policy papers laid the basis for rapid change in agriculture once the crisis forced changes upon Cuba.

For Cuba, the end of cheap oil came in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed and its trade agreements with Cuba collapsed with it. Overnight, Cuba lost 80 percent of its oil imports. Cuba was thrown back into the world market, and the price of its exports fell dramatically. The U.S. tightened its trade embargo and Cuba had to come up with hard currency for all its imports.

This crisis, which Cuba calls the "special period," hit the people hard. The food ration shrank; and although no one starved, people were hungry. People lost weight. Cubans began to suffer from diseases of malnutrition for the first time since the revolution.

Cuban society not only survived this crisis but actually used it as an opportunity to make major changes in how it raises food. Today tens of thousands of small gardens, ranging from patios and back yards to medium sized truck farms, produce more vegetables and tubers than before the crisis, using organic methods and manual labor.

One immediate way people confronted the food crisis was by starting to grow food in their own back yards, in vacant lots, even on their balconies. State institutions did the same. Catherine Murphy, researcher for Food First, writes: "The Ministry of Agriculture (MINAG) tore up the front lawn at their modern headquarters in Havana, and planted lettuce, bananas and beans. Many employees that regularly worked behind desks began watering and weeding to ensure a steady food supply for the ministry's lunchroom."

Alamar – people's farm in Havana's suburbs

One of those Ministry of Agriculture bureaucrats was Miguel Salcines Lopez, who came out from behind his desk to learn to be a real farmer. Today he is president of the Alamar Food co-op in Havana's eastern suburbs,

which he helped establish in 1998 on land that had been used to dump building materials.

After the density of central Havana, turning into Alamar is a relief: long straight rows of greens, ranging from the nearly yellow green of lettuce through the gray green of the cabbage family to the deep red greens of beet tops, like a striped afghan against the red soil.

The central part of the co-op is built out of recycled materials: wood, tin roofing, one building with windows that clearly came from a bus, hand painted signs.

Alamar has 160 members, 42 of them women, 63 seniors over the age of 60, two Ph.Ds. They farm on 10 hectares (a hectare is 2.6 acres) and produce 80 tons of food per acre with as many as five rotations a year of some crops. The co-op receives credits and services from the government, contracts to deliver crops for schools, hospitals and the food ration that every Cuban gets – people tell us it's about half a month's worth of food – and sells the surplus.

Profit is divided among the members according to a formula that allocates shares based on seniority as well as hours worked. Their average wage is 950 pesos per month (about \$40 US), about three times the average Cuban wage. The seniors also have a pension, and the co-op provides not only breakfast and lunch but interest-free loans, work clothes, detergent, hair cuts and beauty parlor services.

Cuba's soil is not naturally high in nutrition for plants, so Alamar, like most of Cuba's gardens and farms, nourishes the soil with worm castings. The worms eat garden scraps as well as manure from Alamar's animals, supplemented by manure from neighboring farms. In turn, they provide worm compost for smaller gardens and the storefronts that serve individual gardeners.

Unlike the smaller co-ops in the city itself, Alamar has domestic animals, even a pair of oxen that they use to bring new areas under cultivation. Most but not all of its crops are grown in the raised beds that are standard for Cuban organic agriculture and, except for the oxen, all the labor is done by hand.

Farming in the city

"Del cantero a la mesa: from the garden bed to the table," says the banner outside the urban garden at 44th Street and Fifth Avenue in Havana's Playa district. People are lined up at the counter to buy today's harvest: lettuce, spinach, bok choy, garlic chives.

Havana has almost 10,000 gardens, ranging from back yards to truck farms like Alamar. The 44th Street organoponico (the official term for the organic gardens in raised beds), founded in 1992, takes up half a city block on what used to be a dumping place. Its 48 raised concrete beds are filled with a planting mixture made of soil brought in from farther out in the country, mixed with worm compost from a bigger garden near them. They start the plants in three shade houses, harvest a bed all at once and set out new plants the same day.

They grow sorghum around the edges of the whole garden as a trap plant; the bugs like sorghum and munch on it instead of the leaf vegetables. Garden director Roberto Perez Sanchez says that the sorghum "keeps the insects entertained." Basil and marigold bloom at the foot of every bed to ward off more insects; and onions or garlic planted close together as a border inside each bed is a third line of defense.

This planting method gets results: They harvest half a dozen crops a year on average. Some plants like spinach go from garden to table in as little as 15 days. And the leaf crops are organically grown – beautiful, succulent, unblemished.

They also raise medicinal herbs – aloe vera, chamomile, lime, marjoram, two kinds of mint, and chicory. A sign at the counter from the macrobiotic researchers at Havana's world-famous Finlay Institute explains the health benefits of chicory: "a friend of the liver."

The garden co-operative has eight members: three in production, three in sales, a biological specialist that makes trichoderma (a biological control for nematodes) and director Perez, who is the agronomist and administrator. They contract part of the crop to the government to redistribute to schools, hospitals and workplaces to supplement what these institutions grow on site. They sell the rest directly: 80 percent of the

profit goes to the workers, 15 percent to the state and 5 percent is saved as a capital reserve.

Cuban society not only survived this crisis but actually used it as an opportunity to make major changes in how it raises food. Today tens of thousands of small gardens, ranging from patios and back yards to medium sized truck farms, produce more vegetables and tubers than before the crisis, using organic methods and manual labor.

Odalys Bello Barrera and Magaly Vines Diaz. These state stores support Havana's backyard gardeners. A leaflet series called "ABC of the Producer" explains planting, soil, worm culture, the use of biological controls for pests.

The consultorio conducts workshops for institutions planning an autoconsumo (garden at an institution to feed its members) and consults with individual backyard gardeners, helping them plan their plots. They diagnose pest damage and recommend remedies. Although a state agency, they are self-financed and share half the net proceeds, often as much as five times the average Cuban wage.

What makes it work?

Of course there are challenges: convincing more people to see farming as an honored and well-paid job, training new farmers, allotting and preparing more farm land, encouraging more people to grow food in their back yards or on their patios.

But farming in Havana works. It fills an important social need and has government and social support. By Cuban standards it is well paid. It's a place where workers

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Transition towns: The art of resilience

Before corporate globalization crashed, the transition towns movement had already started making waves on a more human, local scale.

Rowenna Davis reports on the ‘engaged optimism’ that looks for positive solutions.



Duncan Law is a dedicated transitioner. Standing in the middle of a dark, densely built housing estate in South London, his eyes flash like flint as he points to the winter herbs, vegetables and raspberry plants growing amongst the concrete. As a member of Transition Town Brixton, Law has helped this garden grow in one of the most deprived urban areas of Britain. Local residents dug up the concrete slab in the middle of the estate, filled it with compost, planted and harvested. Now residents come and help themselves to free, healthy, carbon-neutral winter vegetables.

‘One of the local residents created a vision of the estate fully transitioned,’ adds Law, eyeing up the surrounding rooftops for solar panels. ‘We had goats, bicycle trailers, roof gardens, a community centre, right here in the inner city. Once you start looking, the possibilities are endless. That’s the beauty of the movement. It’s not against something: it’s a move towards something positive.’

Transition Town Brixton emerged like most towns in the movement. A small number of individuals forms a steering group and begins talking about climate change and the threats of ‘peak’ – the impending end of – oil with their local community. Brixton now has 200 active members and 1,500 on their mailing list. As their priorities and interests become apparent, autonomous groups set up under the Transition Town umbrella. Brixton has groups on building and energy, food and waste, business and the economy. The only limit to their activity is their imagination. ‘You just put an idea out

there and let it run through the bloodstream,’ says Law. ‘The outcomes are beyond our control.’

Network grows

The Transition Network, set up to provide guidance and support, claims that there are now more than 130 formal transition towns in Britain, and another 250 worldwide. Many more are in the ‘mulling’ stages, and others are likely to be functioning below the radar. A giant series of ‘community experiments’, they are hotbeds of potential solutions to some of the most dangerous and impenetrable problems of our time, conducted and run at a local level.

The financial crisis has triggered a new wave of interest, particularly in local currencies. The Brixton Pound is now accepted in over 120 local shops – it can only be used in Brixton. According to Law, 90 per cent of the money taken by chain stores leaks out of the area. Local currencies also offer security – if the Pound Sterling crashed, the Brixton Pound could be pegged to another

currency. Law says the initiative is almost too popular: 'Brixton Pound tourists are coming from all over the world to buy the currency and get it framed. We're starting to worry about the carbon miles it takes all the visitors to get here!'

The transition towns movement was founded by Rob Hopkins, a permaculture teacher who was living in Kinsale, Ireland, in 2005. He was interested in how communities could build 'resilience' and reduce their carbon emissions. When Hopkins and his students published a draft document on how it might work, it was downloaded thousands of times. Clearly, there was hunger for local change.

'No-one had done anything quite like it before,' says Hopkins. 'It was about moving away from the shocking leaflet or DVD and engaging people with something much better – an experiment in engaged optimism.'

It's hard not to be impressed. Take Totnes in Devon, the first transition town in Britain. With a population of just 7,500 living in a largely rural setting, it was a perfect test bed for the movement, and its long list of achievements still inspires other groups.

The food group set up a garden-share project, described by one member as 'a kind of dating agency that matches people who don't have a garden with people who are too old or busy to look after theirs'. The economics and livelihood group co-ordinates a car-sharing scheme. The environment group has formed a community-owned energy company, TRESCO, which is looking into buying a site for sustainable hydropower from the

local river. The education group encourages local kids to reconnect with their natural environments. The Totnes Pound is going strong.

'There's so much going on, it's hard to keep up,' says Ben Brangwyn, co-founder of the Transition Network. 'People are no longer waiting for the politicians or their permission. They're starting to work together in ways they never knew how.'

Sceptics

Others are more sceptical. They say the movement doesn't connect with people beyond its narrow social base, or create change on a scale and at a pace that's desperately needed. One of the most common charges is that it is a step 'backwards' towards a more parochial way of doing things, sticking two fingers up at technology.

Hopkins profoundly disagrees: 'Obviously, if we were proposing to put a big fence around every community, cut imports, switch off the web and stop sharing ideas, that would be a cause for concern – but that's not what we're doing. One way of moving backwards is to find ourselves in the middle of an economic depression, suffering from climate change and highly volatile oil prices, with no preparation. Starting to prepare now and build on our opportunities and strengths is far more likely to avoid protectionism and parochial approaches further down the road.'

Certainly, the transition movement was inspired as much by concrete example as by heady idealism. Hopkins was moved by the 'special period' in Cuba. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, Cuba suddenly found itself cut off from supplies of oil, diesel and pesticide – exactly what would happen if we reached peak oil without preparation. But, rather than unravelling, the community came together to put local food and other production systems into place, while still maintaining high standards in health and education.

'No-one had done anything quite like it before,' says Hopkins. 'It was about moving away from the shocking leaflet or DVD and engaging people with something much better – an experiment in engaged optimism.'



'We're not saying we're exactly like Cuba,' adds Hopkins. 'But it's a recent historical example of a community adapting quickly to build resilience in a short time frame – and that's encouraging.'

Cuban inspiration

Marsden and Slaithwaite Transition Town (MASTT) in the Colne Valley, Yorkshire, was also inspired by the Cuban experience. Going strong for over three years now, the group boosted numbers by screening the famous Power of Community film documenting Cuba's achievements. To date, MASTT's most popular project has been the community-owned Green Valley Grocer. Bought as a co-operative, it's now turning over more than \$5,000 a week selling locally produced vegetables. There has even been enough profit left over for development work, allowing the shop to employ a member of the community to teach gardening to residents.

'It's much more successful than we dared hope possible – it continues to take double what we thought,' says Jon Walker, a dedicated transitioner who has been involved in the project from the start. 'People bring down their surpluses from their gardens, the community loves it, and reducing food miles is a huge part of the carbon descent plan.'

According to Walker, such initiatives have helped to rekindle a neighbourhood spirit. 'Our monolithic global society is rediscovering community. I used to go to the supermarket and speak to no-one. Now shopping takes most of the day – I keep bumping into people on the way to the grocer!'

The biggest challenge now, says Walker, is reaching out to a wider community. 'More and more people are involved, but we're all the same – the Guardian-reading middle class. We've held huge dances in the valley, inviting local rock bands and Balkan groups to attract

a younger, more diverse crowd, but there is still a long way to go.'

Another challenge follows the initial bubble of enthusiasm. According to Hopkins, the best way to meet this is through the state. 'Things get interesting when the Government gets behind the movement and supports it, rather than drives it. Scotland is leading the way on this. The Low Carbon Communities Fund has helped employ four permanent transition town employees, and Transition Forres got £184,000 (\$300,000) to set up an organization to promote allotments.'

Signs of interest

Authorities in other parts of Britain are showing signs of interest too. Back in Brixton, Lambeth Council allows people to pay their local taxes with Brixton Pounds, boosting the currency's legitimacy. In Totnes, all the local government candidates have committed to an Energy Descent Plan designed by the transition town's members. Transition Stroud has worked with their council to produce a local food strategy.

Without these commitments – and even sometimes with them – many towns still fail. Transition Oxford started with a bang and then fizzled out, as did Biggar. But, as the Transition Network says, there are no guarantees about these 'experiments', and there's often as much to learn from those that collapse as from those that survive.

However, the overall direction of the movement is up and has even crossed international borders. The Network in Britain has links with similar hubs in New Zealand/Aotearoa, Japan, Brazil, America, the Netherlands, Sweden and elsewhere. And this is just the beginning. The most exciting thing about this movement is its infancy. Just how deep it goes or how far it spreads will be up to local communities themselves.

Rowenna Davis is a freelance journalist and regular contributor to *New Internationalist*. This article was published in **New Internationalist** (<http://www.newint.org/features/2010/03/01/post-carbon-world/>). [Editor's note: For a critical take on the Transition movement, see "Transition Towns or Bright Green Cities?" by Alex Steffen.]



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A Different Kind of Ownership Society

Innovative strategies for cooperative local ownership make it possible for prosperity to be shared as well as sustainable.

By Marjorie Kelly and Shanna Ratner

Drive across southern Minnesota near the city of Luverne, and you'll see clusters of wind turbines poking up through the cornfields. Climb into one of these sleek, gleaming, white towers, and you'll find sophisticated computer controls monitoring dozens of factors every moment (wind speed, pressure on the blades, and so on). Yet the way the turbines are funded and owned is just as innovative as the technology that runs them.

These wind developments were created by Minwind Energy, a limited liability company that is structured as a cooperative. Back when only corn was harvested in these fields, Minwind invited hundreds of local residents to make investments of \$5,000 apiece, eventually raising \$4 million to fund the turbines. In return, the residents became owners of the project—alongside the farmers on whose land the turbines stand.

With a policy that no individual can own more than 15 percent, the ownership design is aimed at spreading wealth widely and keeping it rooted locally. According to the Government Accountability Office, keeping a project like Minwind locally owned means that local communities get three times more economic benefit than if the project had absentee owners. Rather than flowing to Wall Street investors or major companies, the dollars generated by these wind farms will flow first through local communities, going to pay local workers,

local investors, and local suppliers of all kinds. Wealth stays local.

Minwind Energy is also an example of shared ownership, an emerging, broad category of ownership design in which ownership is shared among individuals (as in cooperatives or employee-owned firms) or between individuals and a community organization (as in a community land trust, where families own their homes while a nonprofit owns the land they stand on).

Shared ownership, like local ownership, is a valuable tool for enhancing community wealth over the long term. Both represent the innovations in social technologies that must evolve alongside innovations in physical technologies—like wind turbines, organic agriculture, or sustainably managed forests—if we're to create an economy in which prosperity is both sustainable and shared. If sustainable technologies are about the what

of the living economy, local and shared ownership designs are about the who: who will own the productive capacity of the nation, who will control it, and who will benefit from the wealth created.

Shared ownership takes many forms. For example:

- In Arizona and New Mexico, a ranchers' organization called the Malpai Borderlands Group is preserving nearly one million acres as unfragmented open space for wildlife using conservation easements, another tool for sharing ownership. These legal covenants combine private ownership of the land with a binding commitment that further development will cease.

- In Maine, communities are using agreements called working waterfront covenants to preserve waterfronts for commercial fishing. The covenants are shared ownership agreements that attach to property deeds in perpetuity. These covenants allow the state of Maine to purchase and hold development rights so that local fishermen can continue fishing even as they receive payment for the sale of development rights.

- In Denmark, cooperatively owned wind guilds—similar to Minwind—have helped the Danish transition to wind power more quickly than any other nation, with the help of policy frameworks that encourage cooperative wind ownership. If we had such policies in the U.S., offshore wind projects, rather than being seen as outside developments to be resisted, could be seen as a chance to join neighbors in a shared investment opportunity. Local ownership could lead to pride rather than resistance.

- In a model now spreading throughout the U.S., residents of manufactured homes are joining together to create resident-owned communities. By cooperatively owning the land beneath these communities, residents transform the legal status of their homes from personal property into real estate. The result is increased property values, more stable families, and greater participation in the life of the community.

For rural areas, which so often see little lasting benefit from the exportation of their natural wealth, shared ownership is an important tool in creating rural-urban partnerships that help rural regions keep wealth local. Rural areas are home to more than one in five Americans, but are disproportionately impoverished and too often on the fringe of societal concern. Yet they're rich in natural capital and other forms of wealth that today are more vital than ever. As the new economy creates rising demand for sustainable practices in fisheries, organic agriculture, wind generation, and forest stewardship, new opportunities are opening for solidarity between cities and the rural areas that support them. To sustainably share both our resources and their benefits, we must recognize that true wealth is about more than financial capital—it's about reconnecting to land, forests, and water (which we can think of as natural capital) and to community (social capital, or the stock of trust, relationships, and networks). It's also about individual capital, the stock of skills and mental capabilities of people in a region; built capital, such as wind towers; intellectual capital, including inventions or published writings; and political capital, the ability to influence the distribution of resources.

Ownership is something most of us think little about, yet its allocation is basic to our daily lives. Ownership defines the shape of our days: where we work for 40 hours (or more) each week, whether we're empowered or belittled by our work, how much anxiety we suffer over our debts, whether we're able to own a home or be secure in retirement. Questions about who owns the wealth-producing infrastructure of an economy, who controls it, and whose interests it serves are among the largest issues any society can face, and critical to creating shared prosperity.

Local and shared ownership, key tools for keeping wealth local, help to form the girders of a framework that can unite a community wealth movement as a social counterpart to the sustainability revolution.

Marjorie Kelly and Shanna Ratner wrote this article for YES! Magazine, a national, nonprofit media organization that fuses powerful ideas with practical actions. Marjorie is an ownership design specialist with Tellus Institute in Boston; Shanna is the principal of Yellow Wood Associates, a rural community economic development consulting firm in St. Albans, VT. This article was published in <http://www.yesmagazine.org/new-economy/a-different-kind-of-ownership-society>.

Food and Climate: A Tale of Two Crises

by Rosario Bella Guzman



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Corporate agriculture is failing to feed the world. This short statement should be enough to summarize the global food crisis – that it is not entirely about supply-demand equations but the very model of development that poor, underdeveloped countries, whether or not food self-sufficient, are dictated to follow. Yet despite the explosion of what most analysts have described as the 21st century's worst crisis (the global food crisis), the world is seeing more of the same – more agribusiness, more globalization.

Now, the planet is moving rapidly into another unprecedented crisis (the climate crisis), which is driven partly by the same model of agriculture and development. Yet the architects of globalization are prescribing more of the same, and worse, presenting the two crises as merely consequences of each other, and by doing so, are evading responsibility. Agribusiness transnational corporations (TNCs) and even financial oligarchs who have joined the food and land bandwagon are saying through their commissioned researchers that increasing food demand is bringing about a hotter climate while climate change would triple food shortages in no time. Certainly, there is validity in how the two crises complicate each other, but that the situation calls for more globalization has no scientific basis. In fact, there is more evidence against it.

The food crisis

The number of hungry people around the world is conservatively placed at 925 million. Three-fourths of them are the food producers themselves – the farmers and farm workers, specifically in underdeveloped countries. Most of the world's hungry are in the underdeveloped countries where they account for 16% of the population. The region with most undernourished people (63% of total hungry) continues to be Asia and the Pacific. The region with the highest proportion of hungry people (30% of population) is Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates current production of oilseeds, sugar, meat, dairy and fish to be increasing slightly while the production of major cereals, particularly wheat

and rice, continues to decline. Although it forecasts in the short-term tight supplies or even shortages for the utilization of wheat and coarse grains, the FAO expects supplies of major food crops (special mention to rice) to be more adequate than two years ago, mainly because of larger stocks. Still, the FAO warns that with the recent downward revisions of crop forecasts in several major producing countries, global prices have increased at a much faster rate and more alarming level than in 2007-08.

The problem with the FAO outlook is that it is trade-centric. Too much focus on the world market is given when in fact only a diminutive percentage of food production is traded globally. Almost 90% of the world's food is grown and consumed within national borders. Peasants breed community seeds, 40 livestock species and 8,000 breeds, 5,000 domesticated crops, and 1.9 million plant varieties. Fisherfolk harvest and protect more than 15,000 freshwater species. According to the ETC Group, the work of peasants and pastoralists maintaining soil fertility is 18 times more valuable than the synthetic fertilizers provided by the seven largest agro-chemical corporations. Peasants feed at least 70% of the world's population – 50% with the food they cultivate, 12.5% from hunting and gathering, and 7.5% with the food they produce in the urban areas.

Yet the irony is that corporate agriculture, which feeds only 30% of the world's population, is taking over in a rather comprehensive way. From seed and genetic resources to food retailing, food and agriculture TNCs dominate and are focusing on a narrowing commodity list that has left half of humanity either malnourished or obese. The industrial food chain focuses on only about five livestock species of 150 breeds, barely a dozen crops, and only 80,000 commercial plant varieties. According to the ETC Group, apart from loss of biodiversity, nutritional content of many grains and vegetables has dropped from 5-40%, such that we have to eat more to get the same nutrition. Still, corporate agriculture peddles more expensive and dangerous technology such as genetic engineering, and is aggressively imposing the patent regime.

More importantly, food and agriculture TNCs, traders and financial oligarchs control global trade and

investments in food and agriculture. They can create tight market situations, fake shortages, and practically dictate prices, which can send the production and livelihood of peasants around the world in a tailspin. This is what the food crisis is all about. It is about corporate and imperialist control of what could otherwise be local, small-scale and self-sufficient peasant production. The food crisis has been largely aggravated by the policy of trade liberalization where even food producing and sufficient countries have been dictated to import. This has ruined self-sufficiency, aggravated backward production, and intensified monopoly pricing.

Food crops have also become so-called soft commodities that are placed in the futures markets and subjected to price speculation by market traders. In fact, the steep increases in food prices beginning in 2008 are largely due to speculation. The volatility of corn and soybean in April 2008 for instance was only 30% and 40%, respectively, of what market fundamentals could back up. The amount of speculative capital poured into food and agriculture can take over markets and real agricultural production just by speculation-driven price increases. This is also one of the reasons for the FAO outlook being problematic, as it is price-centric – any talk of a looming global shortage activates private equity speculators and increases prices in reality.

The major traders of food commodity index funds are the big financial speculators and holders of complex financial instruments such as those that were exposed in 2008 when the global capitalist crisis began. These include Goldman Sachs and AIG, which are headquartered in the US but trade globally. Banks such as Bank of America, Citibank, Deutsche Bank and HSBC as well as diverse group of financial companies such as Rabobank and many other commercial financial firms are involved in offering investment and speculation instruments that are based on commodity indices.

The same TNCs, financial speculators, and cash-rich but resource-poor states have used the food crisis to justify the massive land grabs that are happening globally. Land markets have become attractive destinations of private investments especially by financial oligarchs. Morgan Stanley purchased 40,000 hectares of farmland in Ukraine; Goldman Sachs took over farmland rights

in China's poultry and meat industries; and the New York-based BlackRock, Inc. has set up a \$200-million agricultural hedge fund, \$30 million of which is specifically for land acquisition.

Obviously, the speed at which private investments in lands have increased is only partly explained by food demand. The bull run in soft commodities such as land and food was more about commodity profitability rather than structural changes in food and agriculture. Throughout 2008, investors were increasingly aiming to gain direct exposure into soft commodities markets by investing in land and farming, and a lot of speculation was involved.

The World Bank has recently endorsed these developments by coming up with principles on 'responsible agricultural investments'. The World Bank is actually saying that large-scale foreign investments in farmlands and the direct participation of TNCs and financial institutions in agricultural production are acceptable as long as they are done under the pretence of social responsibility.

The climate crisis

The basic facts on climate change tell us that the increase in human-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions responsible for global warming is directly linked to over two centuries of unrestrained fossil fuel combustion by industries in industrialized countries. The planet is currently 0.8°C warmer than in 1850. An increase of 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures is the threshold to catastrophic climate change. If global GHG emissions continue to rise at the current rate, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects that by year 2100, increases in global mean temperature would be around 1.4–5.8°C and sea level would rise by about 9–88 square centimetres. The facts tell us that if GHG emissions continue 'business-as-usual', the likelihood of remaining below 2°C threshold is rather small.

To keep the future growth of GHG emissions and future warming below this threshold, CO₂ concentrations should be stabilized to 350ppm as soon as possible. This requires global emissions to peak by 2011 and drop to zero by 2050. The burden

of advanced capitalist countries in curbing emissions will have to be significantly higher relative to poorer countries, and action has to start now.

But like the responsibility for the food crisis, the responsibility for the climate crisis is being dodged by the imperialist states, TNCs and financial institutions. They are watering down accountability, proposing market-based solutions, passing on the burden of mitigation and adaptation to poor countries, and basically delaying action. In the 2009 climate summit in Copenhagen, there has been a weakening of a multilateral instrument that would tackle climate change. The previous approach especially under the Kyoto Protocol has been replaced with a looser emissions regime based on a collection of unilaterally-determined, non-binding, and non-comparable individual pledges not subject to international negotiation or compliance. Similarly, funding and other support commitments have remained voluntary with no mechanism to ensure compliance. Copenhagen has even failed to set targets for CO₂ concentrations and emissions.

From seed and genetic resources to food retailing, food and agriculture TNCs dominate and are focusing on a narrowing commodity list that has left half of humanity either malnourished or obese.



The correlation

A study of the impact of global warming on agriculture by William Cline of the Center for Global Development shows that by 2080, climate change will reduce the potential output of global agriculture by 3.2%. In various studies cited by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), on the other hand, the reduction can reach 15% on the average to as much as 20% for underdeveloped countries. The number of hungry people in Sub-Saharan Africa may increase from 138 million in 1990 to 359 million in 2050.

This does not yet factor in the looming water crisis. Hotter temperatures will bring about drier conditions and increase the amount of water needed for agriculture. On the other hand, extreme climate events such as droughts and floods are increasing, which wreak havoc to agriculture. The intensification of storms will make an additional three million hectares of farmland in coastal areas vulnerable to inundation. Likewise, wild fires that already affect about 350 million hectares will increase dramatically.

Research institutions commissioned by TNCs, multilateral organizations including international financial institutions use these data to justify their move in pushing further for corporate and globalization agenda. The proposal of the research sponsored by the Global Environmental Change done by the Hadley Centre for Climate Change in London as well as NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, for instance, while recognizing that forecasts should not be completely pessimistic, is to increase corporatization of global agriculture. To quote, “Even during this period, though, some regions will benefit and others will lose ground. Food production is projected to increase in temperate regions, such as North America and Europe. It may fall, however, in sub-Saharan Africa or India. As a result, the world will become increasingly dependent on a handful of major food exporters, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, Brazil and Argentina.” The research proposes adaptation techniques for farmers, which include increased irrigation development, changes in crop variety to varieties more adapted to the altered climate, increased fertilizer application, and genetic development of new varieties.

The FAO is even more explicit. It has a new website that offers examples of how farming can prepare for a warmer world and reduce emissions. Examples are dominantly about developing new varieties that are climate-resistant and employing techniques that are climate-smart. Increasing temperatures, particularly night temperatures, new research shows, have already caused rice yield declines of 10–20% in some locations in Asia over the last 25 years. The FAO solution is to produce and make farmers use new drought and submergence tolerant varieties of rice. In short, the global capitalists have continued to turn the correlation of the two crises upside down and use it to their advantage.

The other side of the correlation as pointed out by the globalists that dominate the debate is that agriculture is also a major contributor to climate change. The scientific consensus is that agriculture is currently responsible for around one-third of human-made GHG emissions, the FAO estimates 30%, although the IPCC places CO₂ emissions from agriculture at 10-12% of total GHGs. Agriculture emits methane, which has 20 times more global warming potential than CO₂; nitrous oxide, which has 300 times greater global warming potential than CO₂; and CO₂.

According to Greenpeace, the main forms of emissions are nitrous oxide emissions from high nitrogen levels in the soils from synthetic fertilizers, followed by enteric fermentation of cattle. The production of fertilizers by itself is already energy-intensive and adds 300-600 million tons of CO₂ equivalent per year, or 0.6 to 1.2% of total GHG emissions. This alone shows that when agriculture is being blamed for increased CO₂ emissions, it is actually referring to corporate agriculture. For example, Canadian agriculture is believed to account for 6% of the country's total GHGs, equivalent to 1.6 tons of GHGs per Canadian. In India, where agriculture is much more important to the national economy, per capita GHG emission from agriculture is only 0.4 ton.

Industrial food system is also consuming fossil fuel at a high rate, such that the US Environmental Protection Agency, for instance, reported that US farmers emitted in 2005 as much CO₂ as 141 million cars. According to GRAIN, this hopelessly inefficient food system uses 10 non-renewable fossil-fuel calories to produce on single

food calorie. The FAO calculates that on the average farmers in industrialized countries spend five times as much commercial energy (fossil fuels for the production of agrochemicals and for use in the operation of farm machines) to produce one kilo of cereal as do farmers in Africa. The American farmer uses 33 times as much commercial energy as his or her Mexican counterpart to produce one kilo of maize and 80 times as much commercial energy as the traditional Filipino farmer to produce one kilo of rice. This is only one-fourth of the picture, however. The real waste of energy happens in the processing, packaging, freezing, cooking, and transporting of food. In the end, the industrial food system wastes half of the food it produces in its chain from the farm to the traders to food processors, stores and supermarkets.

The way out

Several objects of research may be pursued to strengthen the development agenda, with the basic research problem of how to best bring about the following:

1. the pursuit of biodiversity and ecological agriculture as a viable form of resistance not only to climate change but more importantly to corporate control, which includes farmers' seed-saving, re-integration of crops and livestock, rehabilitation of the soil, etc;
2. reject reliance of synthetic agrochemicals;
3. self-sufficiency through local food production;
4. promotion and protection of small-scale, subsistence and community-based farming;
5. state planning of human food consumption with the objective of prioritizing food and eliminating wastage;
6. state planning to ensure nutritious, adequate, appropriate and accessible food;
7. the continued pursuit of genuine agrarian reform;
8. demand for accountability in mitigation and prioritization of free funding for adaptation;
9. indigenous techniques and measures for adaptation to climate change.



<http://www.theweatherclub.co.uk>

Like the responsibility for the food crisis, the responsibility for the climate crisis is being dodged by the imperialist states, TNCs and financial institutions.

First of all, any counter-proposal to get out of the crises of this century, which pursues the direction of genuine development, must expose the TNC monopoly of the global food chains being at the root of the food and climate crises. This immediately rejects the notion that the crises may still be solved within the same bankrupt system. Secondly, therefore, any offer of techno-fixes must be rejected as it only delays the overhaul of the system and our assertion of our right to development. Thirdly, the corporate schemes and human rights rhetoric of multilateral and financial institutions must be exposed so that from now on only real solutions are placed at any negotiating table.

Rosario Bella Guzman is the executive editor of IBON Foundation .

Biodiversity Convention adopts landmark decisions

Governments that are Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) concluded a two-week meeting in Nagoya, Japan on 29 October by adopting more than 40 decisions, of which a new legally binding agreement to combat biopiracy, a revised Strategic Plan to implement the CBD and a financial mobilisation plan were the centrepieces. **Chee Yoke Ling** reports.

The tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Nagoya ended at about 3 am on 30 October. The 'Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilisation' was adopted in the early hours of the morning after almost six years of negotiations that culminated in an intense two and a half weeks of marathon sessions. This is the second treaty developed under the CBD, the first being the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety that entered into force in September 2003.

The Nagoya meeting had three major inter-linked components: the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS); the revised and updated Strategic Plan to guide international and national efforts to meet the CBD objectives including a revised biodiversity target for the period 2011-2020; and the implementation plan for the Strategy for Resource Mobilisation in support of the achievement of the three CBD objectives adopted by COP 9 in 2008.



(The three CBD objectives are: conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of the components of biodiversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of such components.)

The President of COP 10, the Minister of the Environment of Japan, Ryu Matsumoto, said in a press release dated 29 October, 'The outcome of this meeting is the result of hard work, the willingness to compromise, and a concern for the future of our planet. With this strong outcome, we can begin the process of building a relationship of

harmony with our world, into the future.'

Until the final hours there was still no clear signal that the package of three main decisions would be adopted unanimously as one financial resource mobilisation draft decision was sent to plenary with many brackets (signifying lack of consensus).

Delegates at COP 10 were shadowed by a possible 'Copenhagen' collapse - the 2009 COP of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in the Danish capital had ended in disarray and

disillusionment. There was also growing concern that if Nagoya failed to deliver a positive outcome, the multilateral system as a whole would suffer another blow.

Matsumoto was visibly relieved when his gavel came down to adopt the three decisions after more than two hours of post-midnight plenary discussion.

In an unprecedented move in the CBD's history, the COP did not adopt a draft decision that was tabled before it at the final plenary. The controversial draft decision on 'Policy Options Concerning Innovative Financial Mechanisms' sought to introduce, at the behest of developed countries, a range of new and untested market-based mechanisms. The developing-country Group of 77 (G77) and China expressed serious reservations, with Bolivia on behalf of the member countries of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) taking on the strongest objections.

COP 10 adopted the Nagoya Protocol on ABS and established an Open-ended Intergovernmental Committee to prepare for the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol. The Committee will meet on 6-10 June 2011 and 23-27 April 2012. The Protocol will be open for signature by governments at the UN headquarters in New York from 2 February 2011 to 1 February 2012. Fifty ratifications are needed for the Protocol to enter into force.

Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela expressed their deep

disappointment over the ABS Protocol and put on record their rejection of the document even though they decided not to block its adoption. (See the following article in this issue for a detailed report on the Nagoya Protocol.)

The COP also adopted the updated and revised Strategic Plan that had as its original goal 'to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth.'

The 2010 goal has failed to be realised and the third edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook report presented to COP 10 was a bleak one.

There was thus a heightened sense of urgency in adopting a revised plan with new goals and targets. Developed countries, especially the European Union, wanted ambitious numerical targets for biodiversity conservation areas.

On the other hand, developing countries were extremely concerned that since its entry into force in 1993 the means of implementation of the CBD, especially financial resources, have been highly inadequate. They therefore wanted COP 10 to adopt numerical targets for financial flows and provide clear terms of reference for a thorough fourth review of the CBD's financial mechanism, as well as provide additional guidance to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) that is the institutional structure operating the mechanism.

One of the points of dissatisfaction of developing countries is that even though the GEF is guided by the CBD COP through regular COP decisions, it has its own governance and accordingly the CBD still does not have an effective financial mechanism.

Bernarditas Muller of the Philippines, who represented the G77 and China at the Nagoya finance negotiations, pointed out that the average cycle for a project to be prepared, approved and funds disbursed by the GEF is about six years. 'It is no wonder that that 2010 goal was missed,' she said.

Another reason for the failure to meet the 2010 goal, according to developing countries, is the failure of the third CBD objective and hence the conclusion of a meaningful ABS Protocol was essential. In retaining a fair and equitable share of the benefits (monetary and non-monetary) from the utilisation of their genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, developing countries would be better placed to meet the other two CBD objectives of conservation and sustainable use within the framework of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Meanwhile, the 131 members of the G77 and China adopted a Multi-Year Plan of Action on South-South Cooperation on Biodiversity for Development on 17 October on the margins of COP 10. The COP welcomed this in a formal decision, as an important contribution to the CBD Strategic Plan for 2011-2020.

Strategic Plan and targets (2011-2020)

COP 10 adopted the updated and revised Strategic Plan that includes a shared vision, a mission and 20 targets, organised under five strategic goals that address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, reduce the pressures on biodiversity, safeguard biodiversity at all levels, enhance the benefits provided by biodiversity, and provide for capacity-building.

The vision is a world of 'Living in harmony with nature' where 'By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.'

The mission was agreed upon only in the final hours of the last day:

'Take effective and urgent action to halt the loss of biodiversity in order to ensure that by 2020 ecosystems are resilient and continue to provide essential services, thereby securing the planet's variety of life, and contributing to human well-being, and poverty eradication.'

'To ensure this, pressures on biodiversity are reduced, ecosystems are restored, biological resources are sustainably used and benefits arising out of utilisation of genetic resources are shared in a fair and equitable manner; adequate financial resources are provided, capacities are enhanced, biodiversity issues and values mainstreamed, appropriate policies are effectively implemented, and decision-making

is based on sound science and the precautionary approach.'

The contentious point was whether to include the phrase 'tipping points are avoided' in the second paragraph above, with most developed countries wanting to include it and developing countries concerned as to how 'tipping points' could be determined and doubtful that the means to do so are available.

Parties debated the necessity to take into account the diversity of national circumstances, and accordingly the Strategic Plan is a 'flexible framework' that will apply to the entire UN system.

Under the section on 'Strategic Goals and the 2020 Headline Targets', Parties are invited 'to set their own targets within this flexible framework, taking into account national needs and priorities, while also bearing in mind national contributions to the achievement of the global targets. Not all countries necessarily need to develop a national target for each and every global target. For some countries, the global threshold set through certain targets may already have been achieved. Other targets may not be relevant in the country context.'

Parties agreed to translate this overarching international framework into national biodiversity strategy and action plans within two years.

Among the 20 targets, Parties agreed to, by 2020:

- Eliminate, phase out or reform incentives, including subsidies, harmful to biodiversity, and develop and apply positive incentives consistent with the CBD and other international obligations, taking into account national socio-economic conditions;
- (With business and stakeholders) take steps to achieve or implement plans for sustainable production and consumption and keep the impacts of use of natural resources well within safe ecological limits;
- At least halve and where feasible bring close to zero the rate of loss of natural habitats including forests, and to significantly reduce degradation and fragmentation of those habitats;
- Identify and prioritise invasive alien species and pathways, control or eradicate these, and to put measures to prevent their introduction and establishment;
- Establish a conservation target of at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10% of marine and coastal areas;
- Enhance ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks through conservation and restoration, and restore at least 15% of degraded areas, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification;
- Respect the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and their customary use of biological resources, and fully integrate and reflect this in the

implementation of the CBD with the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities.

An earlier target year of 2015 was agreed for special efforts on coral reefs so as ‘to minimise multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs, and other vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change or ocean acidification, so as to maintain their integrity and functioning’.

Target 16 aims at the Nagoya Protocol on ABS to be ‘in force and operational’ by 2015. The original year was 2020 and Brazil requested that this be changed at the final plenary.

Parties also agreed in the last, Target 20 that ‘the mobilisation of financial resources for effectively implementing the [Strategic Plan] from all sources and in accordance with the consolidated and agreed process in the Strategy for Resource Mobilisation should increase substantially from the current levels. This target shall be subject to changes contingent to resources needs assessments to be developed and reported by Parties.’

Battle over finance mobilisation

One of the most heated and longest negotiations at COP 10 centred on the mobilisation of financial



kyodo news

Delegates to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UN CBD)

resources to support achievement of the CBD objectives.

The G77 and China led by the Philippines, Brazil, Bolivia and Kenya strongly represented the interests of developing countries. They insisted in particular on specific targets for financial flows on the basis of the legal obligation of developed countries to provide new and additional finance for agreed full incremental costs under Article 20 of the CBD.

Considerable time was spent on the COP decision related to ‘Concrete activities and initiatives including measurable targets and/or indicators to achieve the strategic goals contained in the strategy for resource mobilisation and on indicators to monitor the implementation of the Strategy’. The Strategy was adopted by COP 9 in 2008. The preamble of the adopted decision states that ‘any new and innovative funding mechanisms are supplementary and do not replace the financial mechanisms

established under the provisions of Article 21 of the Convention’.

Parties adopted 15 indicators for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy for Resource Mobilisation, based on its mission and eight goals. These included:

- Aggregated financial flows, in the amount and where relevant percentage, of biodiversity-related funding, per annum, for achieving the Convention’s

three objectives, in a manner that avoids double counting, both in total and in categories including official development assistance (ODA), domestic budgets, private sector, NGOs and foundations, UN system, non-ODA public funding, South-South initiatives etc.;

- Number of countries;
- Amount of funding provided through the Global Environment Facility and allocated to biodiversity focal area;

• Level of CBD and Parties’ support to other financial institutions that promote replication and scaling-up of relevant successful financial mechanisms and instruments;

- Number of international financing institutions, UN organisations, funds and programmes, and the development agencies that report to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC), with biodiversity and associated

ecosystem services as a cross-cutting policy;

- Number of South-South cooperation initiatives conducted by developing-country Parties and those that may be supported by other Parties and relevant partners, as a complement to necessary North-South cooperation;

- Amount of financial resources from all sources from developed countries to developing countries to contribute to achieving the Convention's objectives;

- Amount of financial resources from all sources from developed countries to developing countries towards the implementation of the 2011-2020 Strategic Plan of the Convention;

- Resources mobilised from the removal, reform or phase-out of incentives, including subsidies, harmful to biodiversity, which could be used for the promotion of positive incentives, including but not limited to innovative financial mechanisms, that are consistent and in harmony with the Convention and other international obligations, taking into account national social and economic conditions.

There was no agreement to establish specific targets for resource mobilisation even though the G77 and China had proposed specific figures with timelines. The European Union proposed instead to develop a methodology for assessing needs. Parties finally agreed to apply the methodology during 2011-2012 to measure gaps and needs as well as progress in the increase in, and mobilisation of, resources against the adopted indicators, most of

which were proposed by developing countries.

When asked by the G77 and China spokesperson whether COP 11 in 2012 will see developed countries agree to numerical financial targets, the EU responded that this would depend on the outcome of the methodological study.

'Innovative financial mechanisms' rejected

Bolivia on behalf of the ALBA countries (including also Ecuador, Venezuela and Cuba) was particularly focused on the policy options concerning innovative financial mechanisms that are mostly private-sector-oriented and market-based. This was originally section B of the first draft of the COP decision on the Strategy for Resource Mobilisation.

The proposals put forth by developed countries essentially emerged from the International Workshop on Innovative Financial Mechanisms organised by the CBD secretariat in collaboration with the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity secretariat (UNEP-TEEB) and financed by the German government, which observers said was 'dominated by OECD participants'. These were so contentious that they were separated into another draft decision.

At the COP 10 negotiations Bolivia inserted safeguards stating that the innovative financial mechanisms:

- Must not provoke financial speculation;
- Must not provoke commodification of nature;

- Must not result from actions that could undermine the achieving of the CBD's three objectives;

- Must incorporate the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including their full and effective participation;

- Must not provoke any additional burden for developing-country Parties.

There was no time to discuss this draft decision that was ridden with brackets and delegates were taken by surprise when Damaso Luna of Mexico, the chair of Working Group II that was responsible for this issue, recommended to the COP to withdraw the document. With no one objecting, the contentious document was withdrawn.

Finance in support of implementation of the Convention was announced. The Prime Minister of Japan, Naoto Kan, announced \$2 billion in financing, while the Japanese Environment Minister announced the establishment of a Japan Biodiversity Fund.

Additional financial resources were announced by France, the EU and Norway. About \$110 million were pledged in support of projects under the CBD LifeWeb Initiative aimed at enhancing the protected-area agenda (this was launched at COP 9 in Bonn, Germany).

Several developing-country delegates remarked that the pledged funds were aimed at conservation projects and that there continues to be a bias by developed countries

towards the first CBD objective. There was a large number of conservation organisations lobbying at the COP 10 meeting.

The high-level segment of the Nagoya COP was held with the participation of 122 ministers and five heads of state and government, including the President of Gabon, the President of Guinea-Bissau, the Prime Minister of Yemen representing the G77 and China, as well as Prince Albert of Monaco.

The next COP in 2012 will be held in India.

Chee Yoke Ling is Director of Programmes at the Third World Network. The above is an edited version of an article which was first published in the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS, No. 7031, 2 November 2010) and republished in Third World Resurgence No. 242/243, October-November 2010.

WikiLeaks cables reveal how US manipulated climate accord

Embassy dispatches show America used spying, threats and promises of aid to get support for Copenhagen accord.

By Damian Carrington, Guardian.co.uk

Hidden behind the save-the-world rhetoric of the global climate change negotiations lies the mucky realpolitik: money and threats buy political support; spying and cyberwarfare are used to seek out leverage.

The US diplomatic cables reveal how the US seeks dirt on nations opposed to its approach to tackling global warming; how financial and other aid is used by countries to gain political backing; how distrust, broken promises and creative accounting dog negotiations; and how the US mounted a secret global diplomatic offensive to overwhelm opposition to the controversial “Copenhagen accord”, the unofficial document that emerged from the ruins of the Copenhagen climate change summit in 2009.

Negotiating a climate treaty is a high-stakes game, not just because of the danger warming poses to civilisation but also because re-engineering the global economy to a low-carbon model will see the flow of billions of dollars redirected.

Seeking negotiating chips, the US state department sent a secret cable on 31 July 2009 seeking human intelligence from UN diplomats across a range of issues, including climate change. The request originated with the CIA. As well as countries’ negotiating positions for Copenhagen, diplomats were asked to provide evidence of UN environmental “treaty circumvention” and deals between nations.

But intelligence gathering was not just one way. On 19 June 2009, the state department sent a cable detailing a “spear phishing” attack on the office of the US climate change envoy, Todd Stern, while talks with China on emissions took place in Beijing. Five people received emails, personalised to look as though they came from the National Journal. An attached file contained malicious code that would give complete control of the recipient’s computer to a hacker. While the attack was unsuccessful, the department’s cyber threat analysis division noted: “It is probable intrusion attempts such as this will persist.”

The Beijing talks failed to lead to a global deal at Copenhagen. But the US, the world’s biggest historical polluter and long isolated as a

climate pariah, had something to cling to. The Copenhagen accord, hammered out in the dying hours but not adopted into the UN process, offered to solve many of the US's problems.

The accord turns the UN's top-down, unanimous approach upside down, with each nation choosing palatable targets for greenhouse gas cuts. It presents a far easier way to bind in China and other rapidly growing countries than the UN process. But the accord cannot guarantee the global greenhouse gas cuts needed to avoid dangerous warming. Furthermore, it threatens to circumvent the UN's negotiations on extending the Kyoto protocol, in which rich nations have binding obligations. Those objections have led many countries – particularly the poorest and most vulnerable – to vehemently oppose the accord.

Getting as many countries as possible to associate themselves with the accord strongly served US interests, by boosting the likelihood it would be officially adopted. A diplomatic offensive was launched. Diplomatic cables flew thick and fast between the end of Copenhagen in December 2009 and late February 2010, when the leaked cables end.

Some countries needed little persuading. The accord promised \$30bn (£19bn) in aid for the poorest nations hit by global warming they had not caused. Within two weeks of Copenhagen, the Maldives foreign minister, Ahmed Shaheed, wrote to the US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, expressing eagerness to back it.

By 23 February 2010, the Maldives' ambassador-designate to the US, Abdul Ghafoor Mohamed, told the US deputy climate change envoy, Jonathan Pershing, his country wanted "tangible assistance", saying other nations would then realise "the advantages to be gained by compliance" with the accord.

A diplomatic dance ensued. "Ghafoor referred to several projects costing approximately \$50m (£30m). Pershing encouraged him to provide concrete examples and costs in order to increase the likelihood of bilateral assistance."

The Maldives were unusual among developing countries in embracing the accord so wholeheartedly, but other small island nations were secretly seen as vulnerable to financial pressure. Any linking of the billions of dollars of aid to political support is extremely controversial – nations most threatened by climate change see the aid as a right, not a reward, and such a link as heretical. But on 11 February, Pershing met the EU climate action commissioner, Connie Hedegaard, in Brussels, where she told him, according to a cable, "the Aosis [Alliance of Small Island States] countries 'could be our best allies given their need for financing'.

The pair were concerned at how the \$30bn was to be raised and Hedegaard raised another toxic subject – whether the US aid would be all cash. She asked if the US would need to do any "creative accounting", noting some countries such as Japan and the UK wanted loan guarantees, not grants alone, included, a tactic

she opposed. Pershing said "donors have to balance the political need to provide real financing with the practical constraints of tight budgets", reported the cable.

Along with finance, another treacherous issue in the global climate negotiations, currently continuing in Cancún, Mexico, is trust that countries will keep their word. Hedegaard asks why the US did not agree with China and India on what she saw as acceptable measures to police future emissions cuts. "The question is whether they will honour that language," the cable quotes Pershing as saying.

Trust is in short supply on both sides of the developed-developing nation divide. On 2 February 2009, a cable from Addis Ababa reports a meeting between the US undersecretary of state Maria Otero and the Ethiopian prime minister, Meles Zenawi, who leads the African Union's climate change negotiations.

The confidential cable records a blunt US threat to Zenawi: sign the accord or discussion ends now. Zenawi responds that Ethiopia will support the accord, but has a concern of his own: that a personal assurance from Barack Obama on delivering the promised aid finance is not being honoured.

US determination to seek allies against its most powerful adversaries – the rising economic giants of Brazil, South Africa, India, China (Basic) – is set out in another cable from Brussels on 17 February reporting a meeting between the deputy national security adviser,

Michael Froman, Hedegaard and other EU officials.

Froman said the EU needed to learn from Basic's skill at impeding US and EU initiatives and playing them off against each in order "to better handle third country obstructionism and avoid future train wrecks on climate".

Hedegaard is keen to reassure Froman of EU support, revealing a difference between public and private statements. "She hoped the US noted the EU was muting its criticism of the US, to be constructive," the cable said. Hedegaard and Froman discuss the need to "neutralise, co-opt or marginalise unhelpful countries including Venezuela and Bolivia", before Hedegaard again links financial aid to support for the accord, noting "the irony that the EU is a big donor to these countries". Later, in April, the US cut aid to Bolivia and Ecuador, citing opposition to the accord.

Any irony is clearly lost on the Bolivian president, Evo Morales, according to a 9 February cable from La Paz. The Danish ambassador to Bolivia, Morten Elkjaer, tells a US diplomat that, at the Copenhagen summit, "Danish prime minister Rasmussen spent an unpleasant 30 minutes with Morales, during which Morales thanked him for [\$30m a year in] bilateral aid, but refused to engage on climate change issues."

After the Copenhagen summit, further linking of finance and aid

with political support appears. Dutch officials, initially rejecting US overtures to back the accord, make a startling statement on 25 January. According to a cable, the Dutch climate negotiator Sanne Kaasjager "has drafted messages for embassies in capitals receiving Dutch development assistance to solicit support [for the accord]. This is an unprecedented move for the Dutch government, which traditionally recoils at any suggestion to use aid money as political leverage." Later, however, Kaasjager rows back a little, saying: "The Netherlands would find it difficult to make association with the accord a condition to receive climate financing."

Perhaps the most audacious appeal for funds revealed in the cables is from Saudi Arabia, the world's second biggest oil producer and one of the 25 richest countries in the world. A secret cable sent on 12 February records a meeting between US embassy officials and lead climate change negotiator Mohammad al-Sabban. "The kingdom will need time to diversify its economy away from petroleum, [Sabban] said, noting a US commitment to help Saudi Arabia with its economic diversification efforts would 'take the pressure off climate change negotiations.'

The Saudis did not like the accord, but were worried they had missed a trick. The assistant petroleum minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told US officials that he had told his minister Ali al-Naimi that Saudi Arabia had "missed a real

opportunity to submit 'something clever', like India or China, that was not legally binding but indicated some goodwill towards the process without compromising key economic interests".

The cables obtained by WikiLeaks finish at the end of February 2010. Today, 116 countries have associated themselves with the accord. Another 26 say they intend to associate. That total, of 140, is at the upper end of a 100-150 country target revealed by Pershing in his meeting with Hedegaard on 11 February.

The 140 nations represent almost 75% of the 193 countries that are parties to the UN climate change convention and, accord supporters like to point out, are responsible for well over 80% of current global greenhouse gas emissions.

At the mid-point of the major UN climate change negotiations in Cancún, Mexico, there have already been flare-ups over how funding for climate adaptation is delivered. The biggest shock has been Japan's announcement that it will not support an extension of the existing Kyoto climate treaty. That gives a huge boost to the accord. US diplomatic wheeling and dealing may, it seems, be bearing fruit.

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Baby Steps Made at Climate Summit Pale in Comparison to the Change Needed

By Tina Gerhardt

Cancún, Mexico - As the sun rose over Cancún early Saturday morning, an agreement was reached at the COP 16. Nations lauded the work of the Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa, Mexican President of the COP 16, and Mexican President Felipe Calderon. They received a standing ovation at the end of the plenary.

Some touted the last minute agreement, arguing that it had reignited the UNFCCC process. Others argued that while it might have saved the UNCCC process, it had not saved the climate. And yet another group pointed out the myriad ways that the new Cancún Agreement had trammelled numerous tenets of the UNFCCC, as texts emerged through back room negotiations, and were thus not inclusive and transparent. Moreover, Bolivia's refusal to sign on to the agreement were overrun, thwarting the stipulated consensus decision-making process.

So what does the new Cancún agreement contain? How does it compare with the Kyoto Protocol? With the Copenhagen Accord? And how are various nations, nation groups and NGOs responding to it?

The UNFCCC negotiations in Cancún sought to achieve three goals: 1. to establish greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions commitments; 2. To secure funding and technology from developed

countries for developing countries, to help them adapt to climate change; and 3. To decide on a method for monitoring, reporting and verifying (MRV) the agreed upon targets. So how did nations do on these three goals.

In essence, the Cancun Agreement agreed to emissions reductions of 25 to 40 percent based on 1990 levels by 2020; it secured emissions reductions commitments from both developed and developing nations; it set up a climate fund but did not establish new funding; it worked to smooth the way for technology transfer; and it set up mechanisms to ensure transparency in reporting and monitoring.

Gordian Knot

The final days of the COP 16 were marked by a stalemate between those countries who were supportive of extending the Kyoto Protocol and the Copenhagen Accord. The Kyoto Protocol, due to expire in 2012, puts the burden on developed nations, such as the U.S., to make emissions reductions. Nation groups, such as the G77, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the European Union (EU) – in other words the majority of the countries – sought to extend the Kyoto Protocol beyond 2012.

The work of the Mexican negotiating team was thus clearly to cut through what U.S. climate negotiator Todd

Stern referred to as the “Gordian Knot” of those who wanted to extend Kyoto and those who were keen to implement the Copenhagen Accord.

The Mexican delegates decided that the best method for making progress on the matter was to invite a handful of countries to participate in negotiations. Figueriedo of Brazil and Christopher Huhne of the United Kingdom led the negotiations and, according to Stern, “about 12 countries,” which included “both major and minor countries” took part in the discussions, held during the last day of the summit and lasting about twelve hours. They were responsible for drafting the new agreement, which was then brought to the two working groups for discussion.

This meeting was not the only backroom meeting of select countries convened to address particular matters and it was these backroom deals that angered Bolivia so much because it violated the UNFCCC's guiding principles of inconclusiveness and transparency. Bolivia argued that in form, agreements put forward for discussion had to come through the UNFCCC's two working groups and not emerge through backroom discussions.

Other countries decided that making progress, any amount of progress, took precedence. They

feared that not having any results emerge from this year's summit would put the entire UNFCCC process into question. And they argued it would do even less to avert climate change.

Cancún Agreement -- Mitigation and Emissions Reductions

What does the Cancún Agreement achieve? First, it's important to know that it is not a legally binding international agreement. It does, however, pave the way for a global treaty to be agreed upon and implemented. This work will undoubtedly form the centerpiece of next year's summit.

In terms of mitigations or action needed to avert climate change, the Cancún agreement explicitly states that emissions should not allow temperature increases to rise above 2.0 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), a temperature that is commonly agreed by the worldwide scientific community as the threshold above which the consequences of climate become irreversible.

Hedegaard touted the inscription of the 2.0 maximum in the agreement, stating "for the first time, the pledges 2.0 is acknowledged in a UN document and the pledges are documented; and we acknowledge that we are not there yet."

The door has been left open for a review to bring the limit down to 1.5 degrees. Many African nations have called for a 1.5 degree limit, since temperature disproportionately affects the region: a 2.0 degree

temperature increase elsewhere equals a 3.0 temperature increase in Africa.

Additionally, the Cancún agreement seeks emissions reductions of 25-40 percent from 1990, which is in agreement with what the worldwide scientific community has called for. The agreement seeks commitments from all nations, that is, from both developed and developing nations.

In this way, it brings together the Kyoto Protocol, which sought commitments from developed nations and was signed onto by 37 nations, and the Copenhagen Accord, which sought commitments from developing nations and had 55 signatories.

Since the Copenhagen Accord commitments were entirely voluntary and neither the Copenhagen Accord nor the Cancún Agreement is legally binding, these pledges at present cannot be enforced. This remains to be worked out.

Earlier this year, countries were asked to submit commitments for the Copenhagen Accord by January 31, 2010 and appear as the Accord's Appendix I. A list of countries and their commitments can be found here. The reduction commitments made in the Copenhagen Accord are thus now anchored in the COP framework and part of the UNFCCC process. Their inclusion was of keen interest to the United States, which has been working tirelessly over the last year for their recognition and implementation.

Stern acknowledged that there were "quite different views with respect to the anchoring of pledges of the Copenhagen Accord." Many nations opposed their inclusion, since the Copenhagen Accord was a backroom deal that did not emerge from the working groups.

Countries are to develop low carbon development plans and strategies and decide how best to implement them. For developed nations, the options can include market mechanisms. For developing nations, mitigation will be matched by funding and technology.

Funding

The negotiations also sought to secure funding, in order to help developing nations adapt to the consequences of climate change, which disproportionately hit them harder. The commitments from Copenhagen were repeated: \$30 billion dollars in fast track funding for three years, 2010-2012; and \$100 billion in long-term funding to be raised by 2020.

The Cancún Agreement establishes a Green Climate Fund under the Conference of the Parties, which will be run by a board consisting of equal representation from developed and developing countries. It will not be run by the World Bank, which was of concern particularly to developing nations, who have often had negative experiences with the World Bank.

Mark Stevenson of the AP challenged U.S. climate envoy Todd Stern in a press conference to explain how the agreement was

a success in terms of funding: "You have started a Green Fund with no funding ... How can you call this a success? Could give us a small resume of what additional funding the United States pledged here in Cancún?"

Stern responded that "we do have new funding. We are part of the fast start pledge from last year, which carries for three years. The first year was 2010, then there's 2011 and 2012." Yet his answer belies the problem: funding from last year is not quite new funding.

A Technology Executive Committee and a Climate Technology Center and Network were also set up. They are intended to help transfer technology from developed nations to developing nations, in order to help the latter address and adapt to climate change. Discussions were stuck on questions of patents involved in international technology transfers.

Enforcing Pledges

Lastly, the Cancún Agreement negotiated a way to monitor, report and verify (MRV) pledges made. Having transparency in this area was particularly important to the United States. Developed nations are to report their emissions inventories annually and developing nations are to report their inventories every two years.

REDD

Additionally, the UN program to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation was going to go

ahead. The controversial program ostensibly seeks to curb emissions from deforestation by providing developing nations with financial aid, if they do not chop down their forest. Trees soak up CO₂ emissions when standing, but inversely when chopped down release them into the air.

Opponents argue that rampant abuses exist, since the program does not provide enough oversight. A key tenet of the agreement coming out of the World People's Conference on Climate Change, convened by President Evo Morales in Bolivia in April, opposed REDD. Numerous NGOs participating in this year's COP 16 took a stance against REDD through actions and panels. Forested areas are mostly inhabited by indigenous peoples, who are therefore impacted intensely.

Bolivia

Bolivian lead climate negotiator Pablo Solón refused to sign on to the agreement, saying it condemns humankind to 4.0 temperature increases and would doom millions living in the most impoverished and vulnerable nations. COP 16 President Espinosa overrode his protests, stating that she would note his concerns but that the consensus process did not allow one person to hold up the support of the other countries.

Response from NGOs

Friends of the Earth International called the agreement a slap in the face, and warned that it could still lead to a temperature rise of 5°C. "In the end, all of us will be affected by

the lack of ambition and political will of a small group of countries. The US, with Russia and Japan, are to blame for the lack of desperately needed greater ambition," said Nnimmo Bassey, Friends of the Earth's international director.

Rose Braz, from Center for Biological Diversity, said: "While the Cancun agreement moves the process forward, it doesn't move the process forward boldly or quickly enough. In Cancun, led by the U.S., countries refused to even acknowledge the gap between the cuts pledged in Copenhagen and the cuts to global warming pollution science requires, let alone establish a concrete process to close that huge gap. Today, the planet remains on a course for warming of over 3.5°C (6.3°F) -- a truly horrifying prospect."

On Friday, NASA announced that 2010 is set to be the warmest year on record. The next Conference of the Parties is scheduled to take place in Durban, South Africa, from 28 November to 9 December 2011.

Tina Gerhardt is an independent journalist and academic, who has covered international climate change negotiations, most recently in Copenhagen and Bonn. Her work has appeared in Alternet, Grist, In These Times and The Nation. This article was published in Alternet.org

Compromise Trumps Justice and Science

IBON Statement on the Cancun Climate Summit

Despite the optimism placed on them, the Cancun Agreements of the 2010 UN Climate Summit do not represent a success for multilateralism; neither do they put the world on a safe climate pathway that science demands, and far less to a just and equitable transition towards a sustainable model of development. They represent a victory for big polluters and Northern elites that wish to continue with business-as-usual.

The Agreements' two main planks – the outcomes of the Convention and Kyoto Protocol negotiation tracks – merely anchor the pledges in the Copenhagen Accord into the UN climate process, and promise to continue talks on Kyoto's second commitment period until 2011 in South Africa.

This means there is still no certainty on the future of Kyoto - the only legally-binding instrument for mitigation, whose first round lapses 2012, and which big developed countries such as the US and Japan have in word or deed abandoned – despite the fragile pledge to keep talking and ensure the first and second rounds of cuts carry on seamlessly.

This also means that the unjust Copenhagen Accord – which progressive governments and movements fought tooth and nail inside and outside the talks – is now firmly installed in the UN process, this time in official and more elaborate form.

In terms of mitigation architecture, the Agreements set up a pledge-and-review system that exempts the US – the largest historical polluter – from taking on Kyoto-style obligations, while tasking poor countries to submit their mitigation actions to reporting and international analysis. Cancun is a step closer to the dismantling of the wall of equity and historical responsibility that has heretofore set apart Southern obligations from those of the North, despite the North's failure to keep their end of the bargain.

They further water down the North's emissions commitments by installing a REDD mechanism that make forest removals of carbon count to meeting obligations, and further risk the violation of rights of forest-dependent communities.

In terms of mitigation ambition, the very low level of emissions cuts pledged from last year remain so to date and if implemented could lead to catastrophic warming of 3-4°C by 2100. The 2°C limit to warming the Agreements set is dangerously conservative, and lowering it to 1.5°C in 2013 through review would be too late. Global emissions will have to drop to zero by 2050 for the world to have any chance to return to 350ppm by 2100.

In terms of finance, the Agreements lock in the Copenhagen Accord pledges of raising \$30 billion over 2010-12 and \$100 billion by 2020, which do not only fall short of poor countries' needs, but will also come from non-mandatory public and private sources, including carbon offsetting and double-counted aid. The Agreements establish a Green Climate Fund but invite the World Bank to be its interim trustee, despite the Bank's lack of democracy and transparency, and its long record of ecologically harmful lending.

Without certainty on the finance side of things and without relaxing stringent global intellectual property rules restricting free technology transfer, the Adaptation Framework and the Technology Mechanism the Agreements create will have little broad impact.

The Agreements also flash the green light on the eligibility of risky carbon capture and storage projects to receive carbon offset credits, giving polluters more ways to ‘meet’ commitments without abandoning carbon-based fuels and technologies.

Finally and most importantly, the Agreements are not grounded on a commitment by governments to steer the world in a new direction – towards a model centred on ending poverty, improving the quality of life, and ensuring basic material and social needs for all, rather than on endless growth, corporate accumulation, and overconsumption of the few.

We have little time left to accomplish a just and sustainable transition and the planet cannot wait for the foundering international negotiations to work. The ball is now in the hands of peoples, communities, and social movements in the North and the South to mobilize to resist big business, push governments, build alternative systems, and set the world on the path to sustainability from the ground up.

Continued from p. 11

have collective control over their work, influenced by consumer demand, community needs and government direction. And it's not opposed by developers or corporations who want to make a profit from the land.

What Cuba can teach us about changing from gigantic pesticide- and fertilizer-heavy monoculture to urban agriculture and sustainable farming points the way to sustainability for people all over the world.

Urban farmers in the United States face different opportunities and different challenges. On the one hand, community activists from Oakland to Detroit are organizing urban farms as part of a strategy of environmental justice and community empowerment, and it will be a topic at the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit in late June as activists converge under the slogan, “Another world is possible; another U.S. is necessary.”

And on the other hand, Fortune magazine in January featured an article on a Detroit financier who smells money in urban agriculture and is thinking of investing tens of millions of dollars in a land grab to run for-profit

urban farms on Detroit’s vacant land. Whether urban farming is a resource for profit or community power depends on what we are able to make happen in the next while.

Scott Braley is an Oakland-based photographer who works for educational, non-profit and social justice organizations. Mickey Ellinger is an Oakland-based freelance journalist. You can see more Cuba pictures and other examples of their work on their websites, www.scottbraley.com and www.mickeyellinger.com. This article was published in **San Francisco BayView** (<http://sfbayview.com/2010/havana-harvest-organic-agriculture-in-cuba%E2%80%99s-capital/>).

The Spirit Level:

Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better

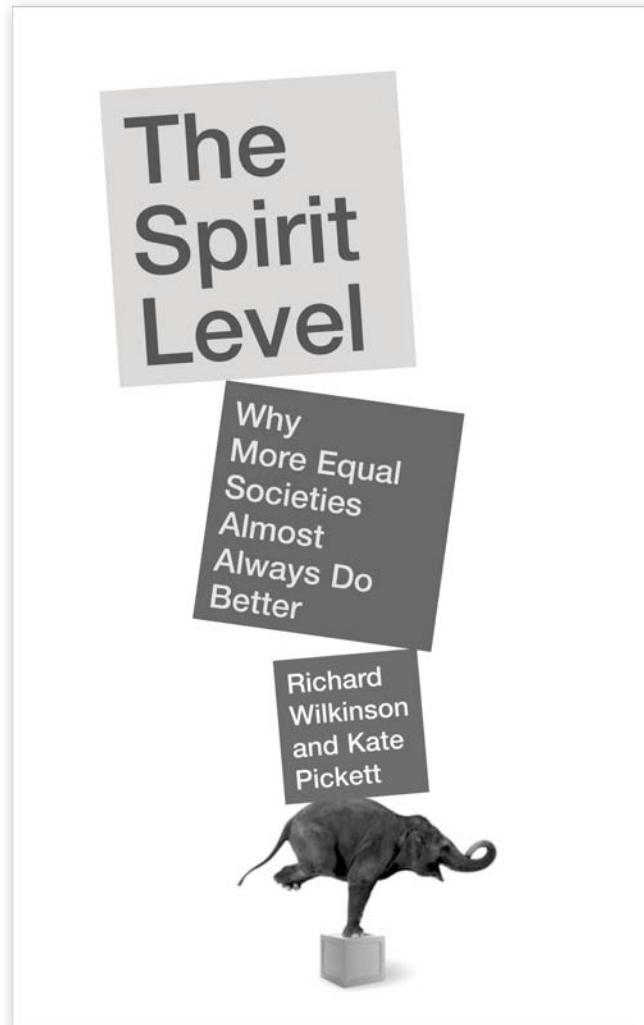
Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

By John Carey

This is a book with a big idea, big enough to change political thinking, and bigger than its authors at first intended. The problem they originally set out to solve was why health within a population gets progressively worse further down the social scale; they estimate that together they have clocked up more than 50 person-years gathering information from research teams across the globe. Their eureka moment came when they thought of putting the medical data alongside figures showing the extent of economic inequality within each country. They say modestly that since dependable statistics both on health and on income distribution are internationally available, it was only a matter of time before someone put the two together. All the same, they are the first to have done so.

Their book charts the level of health and social problems — as many as they could find reliable figures for — against the level of income inequality in 20 of the world's richest nations, and in each of the 50 United States. They allocate a brief chapter to each problem, supplying graphs that display the evidence starkly and unarguably. What they find is that, in states and countries where there is a big gap between the incomes of rich and poor, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, obesity and teenage pregnancy are more common, the homicide rate is higher, life expectancy is shorter, and children's educational performance and literacy scores are worse. The Scandinavian countries and Japan consistently come at the positive end of this spectrum. They have the smallest differences between higher and lower incomes, and the best record of psycho-social health. The countries with the widest gulf between rich and poor, and the highest incidence of most health and social problems, are Britain, America and Portugal.

Richard Wilkinson, a professor of medical epidemiology at Nottingham University, and Kate Pickett, a lecturer in epidemiology at York University, emphasise that it is not



What they find is that, in states and countries where there is a big gap between the incomes of rich and poor, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, obesity and teenage pregnancy are more common, the homicide rate is higher, life expectancy is shorter, and children's educational performance and literacy scores are worse.

only the poor who suffer from the effects of inequality, but the majority of the population. For example, rates of mental illness are five times higher across the whole population in the most unequal than in the least unequal societies in their survey. One explanation, they suggest, is that inequality increases stress right across society, not just among the least advantaged. Much research has been done on the stress hormone cortisol, which can be measured in saliva or blood, and it emerges that chronic stress affects the neural system and in turn the immune system. When stressed, we are more prone to depression and anxiety, and more likely to develop a host of bodily ills including heart disease, obesity, drug addiction, liability to infection and rapid ageing.

Societies where incomes are relatively equal have low levels of stress and high levels of trust, so that people feel secure and see others as co-operative. In unequal societies, by contrast, the rich suffer from fear of the poor, while those lower down the social order experience status anxiety, looking upon those who are more successful with bitterness and upon themselves with shame. In the 1980s and 1990s, when inequality was rapidly rising in Britain and America, the rich bought homesecurity systems, and started to drive 4x4s with names such as Defender and Crossfire, reflecting a need to intimidate attackers. Meanwhile the poor grew obese on comfort foods and took more legal and illegal drugs. In 2005, doctors in England alone wrote 29m prescriptions for antidepressants, costing the NHS £400m.

Status anxiety and how we respond to it are basic, it seems, to our animal natures. In an experiment with macaque monkeys, the animals were housed in groups, and the social hierarchies that developed among them

were observed. Then the monkeys were taught to administer cocaine to themselves by pressing a lever. The dominant monkeys in each group were relatively abstemious, but the subordinate monkeys took a lot of cocaine to medicate themselves against the pain of low social status. In a similar experiment, high-status monkeys from different groups were housed together, so that some of them became low status. The downwardly mobile monkeys accumulated abdominal fat and developed a rapid build-up of atherosclerosis in their arteries, just like humans.

The different social problems that stem from income inequality often, Wilkinson and Pickett show, form circuits or spirals. Babies born to teenage mothers are at greater risk, as they grow up, of educational failure, juvenile crime, and becoming teenage parents themselves. In societies with greater income inequality, more people are sent to prison, and less is spent on education and welfare. In Britain the prison population has doubled since 1990; in America it has quadrupled since the late 1970s. American states with a wide gap between rich and poor are likelier to retain the death penalty, and to hand out long sentences for minor crimes. In California in 2004, there were 360 people serving life sentences for shoplifting. California has built only one new college since 1984, but 21 new prisons. Whereas societies with high income differentials are exceptionally punitive, in Japan imprisonment rates are low and offenders who confess their crimes and express a desire to reform are generally trusted to do so by the judiciary and the public.

The authors' method is objective and scientific, so that the human distress behind their statistics mostly remains hidden. But when they quote from

One illusion that, cheerfully, they hope to dispel is that the super-rich are some kind of asset we should all cherish, rather than, from the viewpoint of social health, the equivalent of the seven plagues of Egypt.

interviews conducted by social researchers, passion and resentment flood into their book. A working-class man in Rotherham tells of the shame he felt having to sit next to a middle-class woman ("this stuck-up cow, you know, slim, attractive"); how he felt overweight and started sweating; how he imagined her thinking, "listen, low-life, don't even come near me. We pay to get away from scum like you". In half a page it tells you more about the pain of inequality than any play or novel could.

It might be said that *The Spirit Level* merely formulates what everyone has always felt. Western European utopias have almost all been egalitarian. Polls in Britain over the past 20 years show that the proportion of the population who think income differences too big is on average 80%. But what is new about their book, the authors insist, is that it turns personal intuitions into publicly demonstrable facts. With the evidence they have supplied, politicians now have a chance to "do genuine

good". By reducing income inequality, they can improve the health and wellbeing of the whole population. How this should be effected, Wilkinson and Pickett do not think it is their job to say, but increasing top tax rates or legislating to limit maximum pay are possibilities they suggest. They warn, though, that short-term remedies like this could be reversed by a change of government, and that we need to find ways of rooting greater equality more deeply in our society. This is their book's mission, and they have set up a not-for-profit trust (equalitytrust.org) to make the evidence they set out better known. One illusion that, cheerfully, they hope to dispel is that the super-rich are some kind of asset we should all cherish, rather than, from the viewpoint of social health, the equivalent of the seven plagues of Egypt.

This article was published in **The Sunday Times** (http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article5859108.ece).

FACTS & FIGURES

Crude oil production peaked - four years ago

We may not have noticed, but in 2006, world crude oil production reached **70 mbd** (million barrels per day), a peak it is expected never to return to. This information comes from the International Energy Agency's 2010 World Energy Outlook.

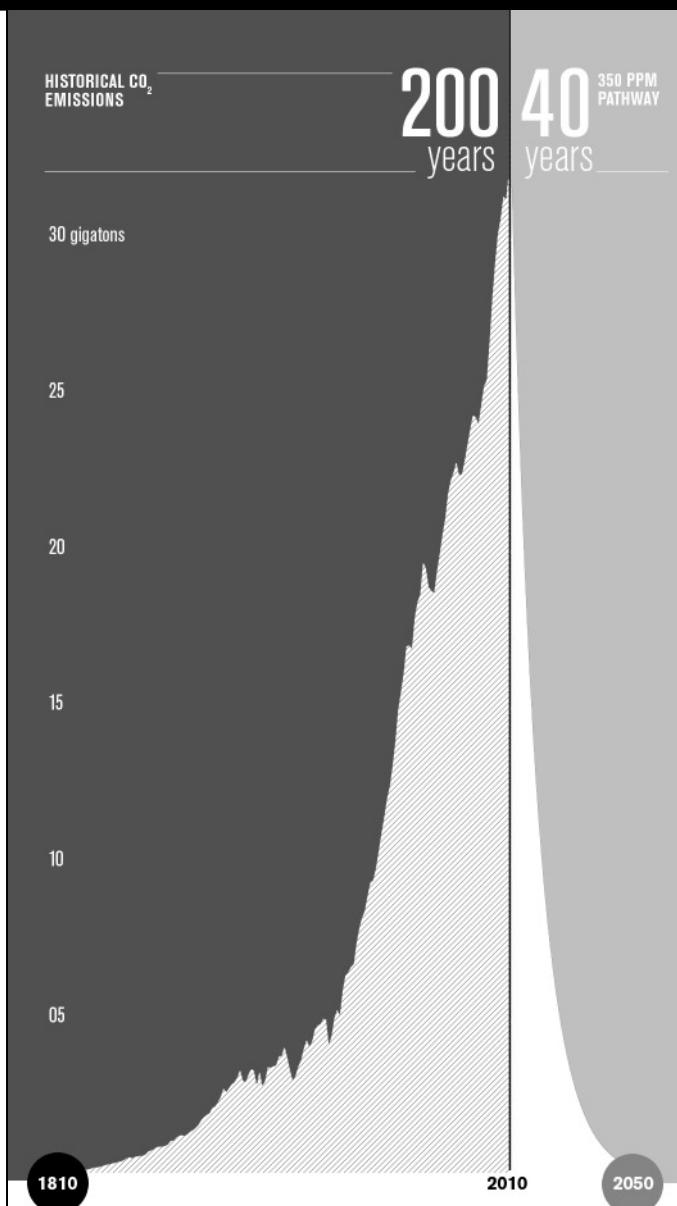
The report forecasts that global demand for oil will rise to 99 mbd in 2035, but that conventional oil production will plateau at the region of 68–69 mbd for the next 25 years. The slack will be picked up by growth in production of unconventional oil (e.g. tar sands), which is not only more polluting but also costlier to produce.

The IEA forecasts that crude production from existing oil fields, because of depletion, will steadily shrink to just 16 mbd by 2035. So where is the rest of the oil the IEA is counting on to hold future crude oil production steady going to come from? From undeveloped and yet-to-be-discovered oil fields. This means that much of the cheap oil that the IEA expects to power future economic activity and growth may actually not be there.

Somehow, over the next 25 years, new oil from undeveloped and undiscovered fields will have to turn up at a rate fast enough to offset shrinking production from existing fields—just to prolong the plateau. But peak oil experts argue the IEA's projected future rates of production from these fields are far too high and far too optimistic.

The era of cheap oil is over.

Fatih Birol,
IEA chief economist



Global CO₂ emissions will have to drop to zero by 2050.

Not only that: CO₂ emissions will have to peak in 2011, and then drop at a staggeringly rapid rate of about 10% per year.

This stringent emissions pathway, according to folks at the Greenhouse Development Rights project, has to be followed to keep the world within the carbon budget that will give us a good shot at returning atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ to the safe level of 350 parts per million (ppm) by 2100. We are now at 391 ppm.

It means we have 40 years to undo the level of annual emissions we achieved in a space of 200 years, but still have functioning economies capable of supporting the needs and well-being of as much as 9 times more people 40 years from now than two centuries ago!

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**Energy in the
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the Alternatives**

Solar voltaic panels

in Thies, Senegal

UN Photo

