

Discussion Group Background Paper

Environmental change, insecurity, conflict and migration

Should climate change alter the way we see the relations between development, security policy and migration policy? What are the implications of this for development agencies?

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Climate change is the long emergency, more easily seen in a rear view mirror. It is a question of trends, of shifting fundamentals. In the present day there is severe weather or the lousy season, and uncertainty. The consequences of more intense and regular cyclones (e.g. Burma) and rising sea levels (e.g. Bangladesh) are evident already. As years pass there will just be more of this. A 'perfect storm' as articulated by UK Foreign Minister Mark Malloch Brown. (1)

The impact of climate change on both security and migration is interlinked, a potential increase in climate change migrants and contestation over resources, particularly renewables like food, fishing, water and forestry – strain on local and national governance structures – brings more potential for violent conflict in those areas already affected by violent conflict. As a long emergency it also amplifies uncertainty – when will this ever end? How bad can it get?

The impact on development implies a greater need to support communities to adapt to these strains and prevent more violence – to become resilient, peaceful communities that can deal with conflict, including that generated by the consequences of climate change. In short:

- To develop kinds of leadership and power relations that communities need
- To generate necessary income and assets
- To address the psychological wellbeing of individuals
- To put in place security systems so that people feel safe
- To provide laws and justice system that gives people confidence that grievances will be dealt with

Does this mean a **different relationship between development, security and migration policy**? No, in the sense that even without the added pressures from climate change there is already a need to support conflict affected communities to adapt and strengthen resilience and capacities to deal with conflict. This doesn't mean development is necessarily doing this effectively, but

the discourse is not a new one. But yes, in the sense that climate change will bring conflict over resources more to the fore, up the stakes, and will require new innovation and imagination (2)

Climate change is not only a *long* emergency but its **scale** overwhelms existing development policy. 'Societies have a long record of adapting to the impacts of climate through a range of practices...but climate change poses novel risks often outside the range of experience, such as impacts related to drought, heatwaves, accelerated glacier retreat and hurricane intensity.'(3). Policy is also implemented within an international economic framework favouring liberalization and the integration of local economies into the global marketplace – despite the difficulties this poses for economies such as conflict affected Mindanao in the Southern Philippines, Aceh and Timor Leste.

Development, security and migration **policy** will need to take on and engage with the political implications of this. As we discuss later climate change may also throw into sharp relief the decline of an unsustainable economic system built on cheap fossil fuels and to the need for new modes of thinking here too.

For climate change is part of **the broader carbon issue**. The consequences of climate change cover economic inequity, political insecurity, food insecurity and large scale migration (4). Carbon is fuelling climate change through its effect on the atmosphere. But the very sources of these emissions, gas, oil and coal, are rapidly rising in price due to supply constraints and increasing demand (5). Easy-to-source oil in particular may be close to its maximum yearly output and the end of the era of cheap energy seems to have arrived. Is there an opportunity here not only to strengthen the capacities of communities to adapt to climate change, but also to support the development of different, low-carbon economies that will sustain these communities in the long term? Is there a need to shift the existing/likely direction of development policy more towards low carbon economies as an important contribution towards strengthening adaptation? (Fig 1).

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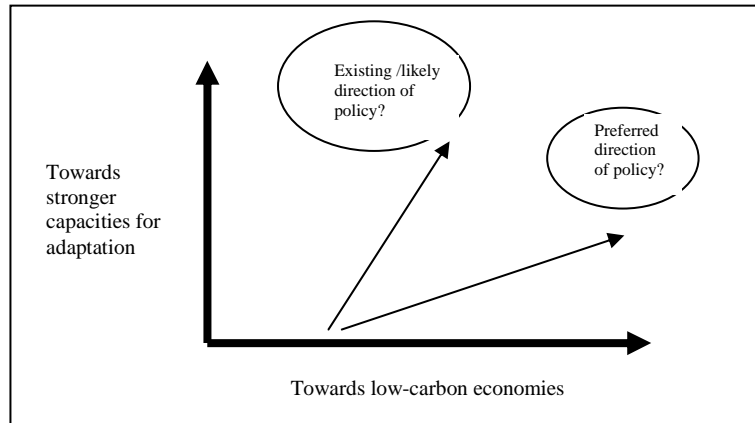


Fig 1

If the carbon issue has two sides, the supply of hydrocarbons and carbon emissions it has a context too – a linear take–make-and-dump economy of staggering inefficiency (see Fig 2). Policy development will have to take account of the supply of hydrocarbons, the sustainability of the economy and the impact of carbon dependent economies on conflict.

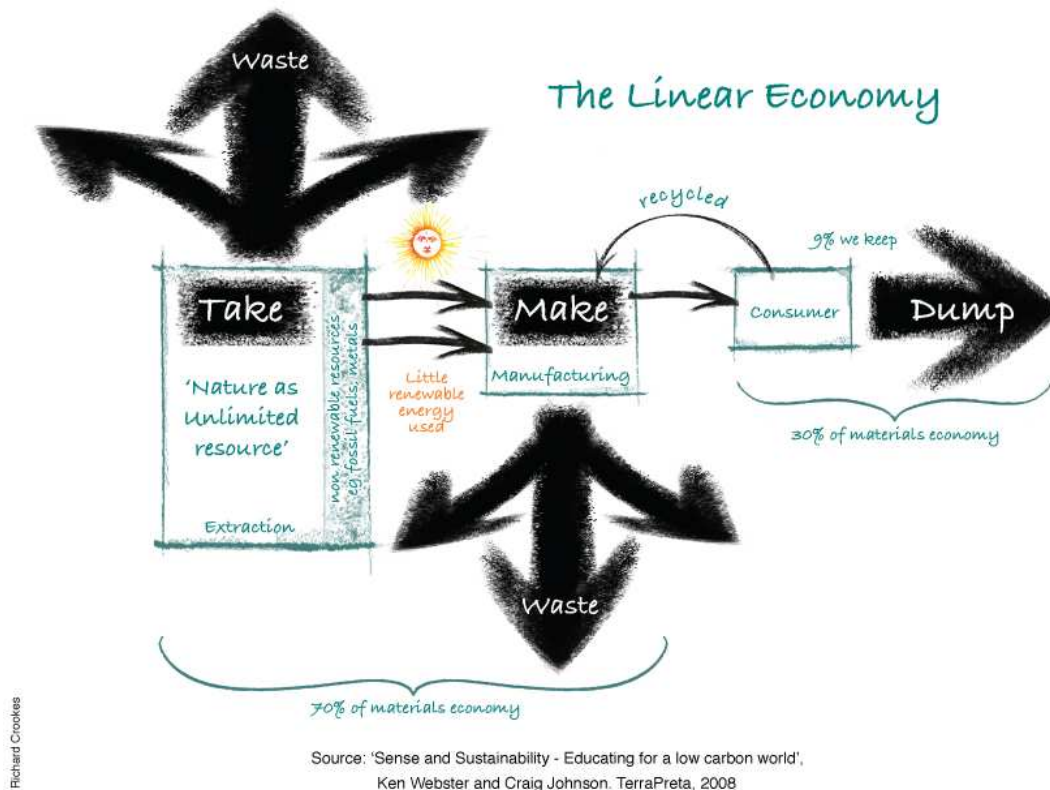


Fig 2 Existing linear economy with typical materials economy flows

In this sense, development policy cannot rationally isolate its work around the notion of 'climate change' alone, since the very resilience of communities to the consequences of climate change and their ability to adapt to them are wrapped up in the way social and economic systems are organized.

In 2008 the notion of '**peak oil**' or the end of easily sourced oil has come to the fore and may yet prove to be the more urgent, or at least the more immediate of the carbon issues – as evidenced by gasoline, fertiliser and food prices rising steeply with violent conflict in its wake.

Political moves to price carbon emissions in the cause of climate change mitigation, if successful, will also contribute to a reworking of the economy of the world. However, the extent to which carbon does or does not have a price which reflects its true social and environmental costs is a large determinant of the likely policy response to climate change, security and migration issues. It is a big part of the 'rules of the game.' Moreover, if efforts continue to focus on providing cheap energy - 'cheap energy is the opiate of the people' (6) - more sustainable solutions are disadvantaged and the prospects for successful adaptation to climate change are progressively reduced until more of Schellnhubers climate tipping points (7) are passed and the discussion here becomes moot. Meanwhile, rising energy prices affect the poorest the most, and this adds to the potential for conflict and distress.

A carbon constrained world will rapidly tend towards a 'closed loop' (more sustainable) model where waste = food (see Fig 3). This is partly a market response to carbon having a significantly higher price. A higher carbon price makes the need to support 'low carbon' development in areas subject to especially severe climate change pressures and low incomes, both obvious and problematical, while policy incentives currently work in the other direction. There is a struggle of ideas here. As Wolfgang Sachs (*Wuppertal Institute*) notes:

"Eventually, the world will no longer be divided by the ideologies of 'left' and 'right,' but by those who accept ecological limits and those who don't."

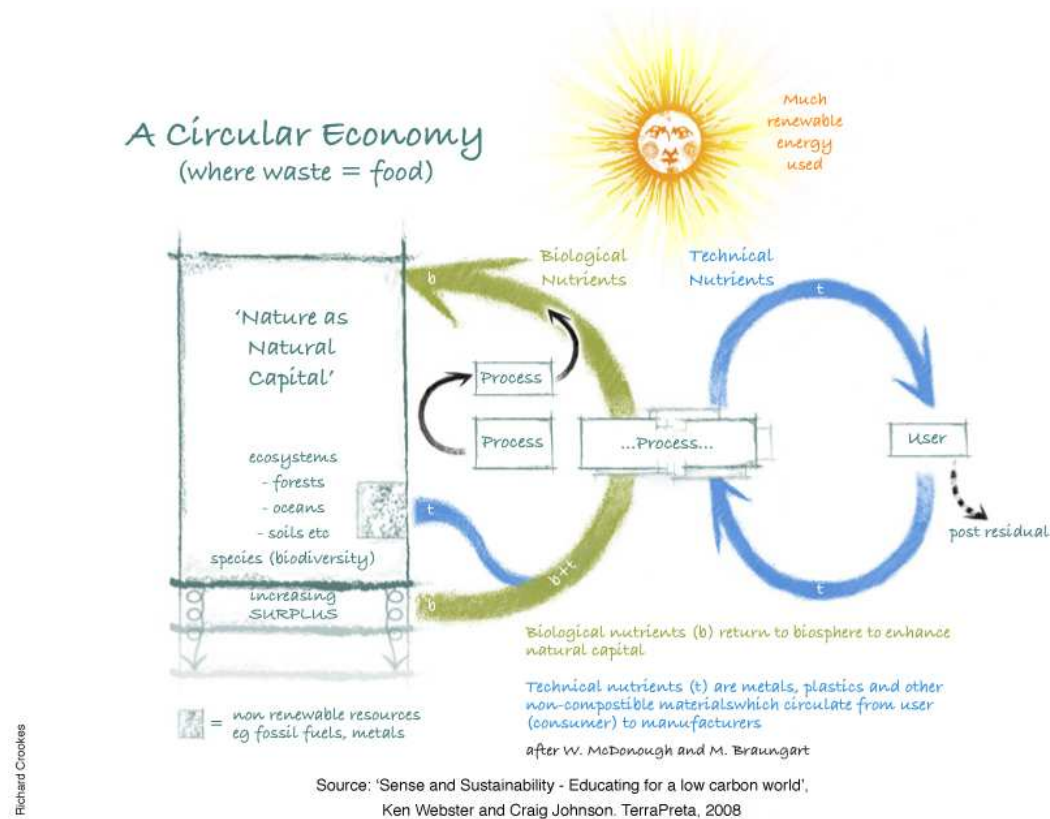


Fig 3 One model of a sustainable low carbon economy

Changed perspectives are however clearly on the cards - the ambition for a circular economy is mainstream Chinese Government policy already (8) – and it isn't even that challenging an idea - as Gus Speth the founder of the World Resources Institute noted recently:

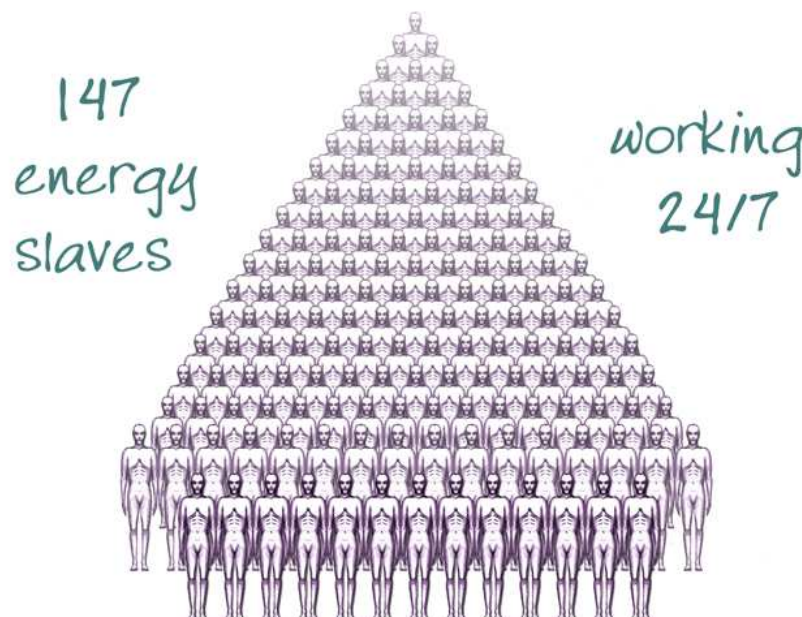
"if you want to hear something really radical, the really radical proposition is that we can make it just continuing to do what we do today. That's a really radical proposition, that business as usual will suffice, because if we just keep doing what we're doing today, releasing the same amounts of greenhouse gases, the same impoverishment of ecosystems, the same toxification, you know, well in the latter part of this century the planet won't be fit to live on".

Since change may be rapid and profound there is a benefit in new modes of thought - being able to increasingly frame discussion and test policy and proposals against what is implied by this newer model: say, a more localised, low carbon, circular economy, with a tax shift away from people towards energy and materials perhaps? (What it does imply, *exactly*, is a very important arena for policy makers and is a large research and educational task).

Climate change is unlikely to change processes of engagement, as International Alert's report *Climate of Conflict* notes - "peacebuilding and adaptation [to climate change] are effectively the same kind of activity, involving the same kinds of methods of dialogue and social engagement, requiring from governments the same values of inclusivity and transparency. At the same time as adaptation to climate change can and must be made conflict-sensitive, peacebuilding and development must be made climate-sensitive. Climate change could even reconcile otherwise divided communities by posing a threat against which to unite and tasks on which to cooperate."

Paradoxically, cheap energy has had a tendency to fragment communities as the old social relationships required to provide goods and services were replaced by 'energy slaves' (see Fig 4) and a more individualistic, consumer orientated culture.

This won't just go into reverse but policy to support *resilience* within communities, to discover the ways in which skills and resources within the community can be re-envisaged/reapplied to provide welfare rather than act as potential conflict points in climate change and high-cost energy circumstances may be very important. (There is the interesting case study of Cuba which faced a drastic curtailment of oil imports post cold war) (9). But there is also the difficult question of the balance of support – where should help go?



Richard Crookes

Source: 'Sense and Sustainability - Educating for a low carbon world',
Ken Webster and Craig Johnson. TerraPreta, 2008

Fig 4 *The benefits of the fossil fuel energy US citizens command as individuals, translated into equivalent human effort. A veritable slave army.*

This is a complex issue but one core element of a cheap energy economy is its *extension* – consumer and producer can be at different ends of the world. Energy can be transmitted, it can substitute for people, through machines, can substitute for soil fertility etc etc. This is obviously very vulnerable in a high cost world faced with climate change. Decentralised networks are then favoured over centralised national grids in a more fluid, turbulent situation: in terms of energy efficiency as well as adaptability and resilience. (This was the basis for the original internet architecture after all – it assumed disruption due to nuclear war). Elites also fed from the surplus created by the way resources could be processed ever more rapidly with cheap energy on a large scale and their authority and resources may be undermined in a carbon constrained world, with the concomitant risk of more ‘resource wars’ to maintain the status quo.

Failures to meet the basic social contract between governments and people to ‘deliver’ cheap food, power, water and security centrally is already evident. Targeting aid to promote local and network innovation directly seems preferable as the vulnerable nation state becomes more sclerotic.

In short, policy interventions which are not reframed by a sense of a low carbon, sustainability are more likely to contribute to decline and conflict in the medium and long term, whilst opportunities within climate change/ low carbon economies include a coming together to meet a common threat and the building of local social capital and innovation in the wake of the end of cheap energy. Ultimately, people will need each other more.

Some concluding questions

How far can we contemplate development, security and migration policy in relation to climate change without engaging with the broader carbon picture – the end of cheap energy and its consequences particularly?

To what extent does adaptation to low carbon solutions need to be coupled with processes that are more the purview of peacebuilding approaches?

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Is there a need to shift the existing/likely direction of development policy more towards supporting low carbon economies as an important contribution towards strengthening adaptation?

Does climate change as an example of a dynamic natural system on the move (but at a scale and over a duration we have not encountered before) suggests we inform our policy making with what science tells us about resilience in human-ecological systems?

Notes:

(1) A Perfect Storm

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/may/10/food.unitednations>

(2) John Paul Lederach – *The Moral Imagination*, Oxford University Press, 2005

(3) RK Pachauri Nobel Lecture (IPCC)

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2007/ipcc-lecture_en.html

(4) *A Climate of Conflict*, International Alert, November 2007. www.international-alert.org

(5) Various see <http://energybulletin.net/primer.php>

(6) http://www.aspo-usa.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=370&Itemid=91

(7) See *Potential Anthropogenic Tipping Elements in the Earth System* <http://www.pik-potsdam.de/infodesk/tipping-points>

(8) Madame Deng Nan, China's Party Secretary for Science and Technology 2007

'If we are to succeed...it is very important to develop a circular economy based on cradle-to-cradle design principles.[These principles represent] what China's central government wants to achieve.' <http://chinauscenter.org/getinvolved/founders.asp>

(9) <http://www.energybulletin.net/1024.html>