

My Turn

Change the climate of the climate change debate

No need for a lose-lose scenario

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The climate change debate is a dead loser. The hot-air arguments over climate science, global catastrophe, emissions controls and trillions in new taxes and spending are all about who loses the most.

Meanwhile, a win-win strategy is being ignored.

We can achieve prosperity in nations rich and poor by addressing the real problem and solution.

Let's get back to basics. Since 1900, the global population increased by four times from 1.6 billion to 6.7 billion people, which is a marvelous achievement for life. What fueled that human growth was oil, coal, gas, wood, nuclear and hydro power. These fuels cannot sustain the current population, no less the expected arrival of 2 billion more - there's absolutely no debate about that.

Here's the problem: The top half of humanity is consuming most of the energy while wasting lots of it, and the bottom half is consuming little of the energy while starving in poverty. And it will get worse: The United Nations estimates that 97 percent of the 2 billion people to be added to global population will be born where the bottom half now lives.

Those facts cause global poverty, starvation and misery while laying foundations for warfare, genocide and terrorism.

By media we live in a global village, but by economics half live in wasteful excess while the other half lives in a wasteland of misery.

Globalization is unpopular among the bottom half because it hasn't arrived there yet. And until it does, expect more conflict and misery - in both halves of the world.

Top and bottom

Here's the solution: The top half needs to stop wasting energy and the bottom half needs renewable energy to drive sustainable economic growth. Both can be achieved rapidly and profitably. This is what the climate meeting in Copenhagen should be all about.

The top half can renovate its buildings for energy efficiency, saving 33 percent of annual energy use and costs, which is equivalent to removing all vehicles from the road if the United States did so. Since saving costs is a no-brainer for building owners, we need to accelerate financial incentives for them to do that.

Using virtualization software originated for jet airplane testing and construction, new buildings (such as the Bank of America building in Manhattan) can save half the expected energy use. Savings in vehicles are more difficult to achieve because so much technical and cultural baggage is involved in car behavior. Yet ironically, changes are occurring faster in vehicles than in the built environment in America.

The story for the bottom half is even more positive. Commercially finance-able renewable energy plants, when tied to sustainable economic development projects, can defeat poverty globally.

Take Panama for example. A 64-megawatt solar power plant, involving 12,000 solar roofs covering a new Green Town community, can be financed commercially via a power purchase agreement that amortizes construction costs over 20 years - profitably.

That solution can add 5 percent to Panama's GDP annually; produce 10,000 construction jobs and 6,000 permanent jobs; lift up to 100,000 Panamanians from poverty - a 10 percent reduction nationally; provide quality homes to 10,000 poor families; provide 1,000 schoolrooms, health clinics, police and fire stations in the Green Town; and provide 1,000 business places for lease to the private sector.

Panamanians own, direct, manage and secure the Green Town community enterprise that operates the solar power plant - all with no carbon footprint.

Financially, the Panama solution requires no public investment by Panama; no foreign aid; no new taxes globally or locally; and no government spending by or to Panama, which can earn \$2 million per year in carbon credits from the solar plant.

Since the sun produces six thousand times the energy that humans use daily on the planet, this solution is available to virtually all the 2 billion people on earth who live on \$2 per day or less.

Indeed, solar, wind and geothermal power, when tied to protein or pharmaceutical technology plants can feed billions of people and protect their health. There's literally nothing new under the sun if we start looking through the windshield rather than the rearview mirror for the solution to sustainable economy anywhere on earth.

Goals we can agree on

So the burning questions in Copenhagen should not be who wants to get taxed or who wants to go first in cutting economic growth but rather who wants to decrease waste in the top half and increase sustainable economy in the bottom half of earth's economy.

Everyone can agree on those goals, which if realized, will reduce carbon emissions far below the goals nations are now arguing about.

We have it in our power to reduce the tons of carbon we put in the air by far more than that being promoted or rejected at Copenhagen. Just get behind the incentives for commercial financings that will allow it to happen, and the top and bottom halves of humanity will take care of the rest.

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