

No sustainability without equity

Aubrey Meyer from the GCI tells us what the real issues should be at the climate negotiations.

The Global Commons Institute exists to explore and explain the linkage between Equity and Survival. This linkage is likely to become increasingly clear with the onset of human-induced global climate changes.

If the human causes of climate change - principally fossil fuel consumption - continue unchecked, more and more people in the present and future generations will suffer increasing hardship. If the consumption of fossil fuels is to be seriously cut back to avoid this and reduce the risks of a catastrophe, a global plan must emerge which achieves two things: - 'contraction and convergence'

This is the message that GCI will take to Geneva in July to the 2nd Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention (COP-2). By contraction we mean a fall in total carbon dioxide emissions. Drawing on the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), GCI believes that carbon dioxide emissions caused by fossil fuel must fall by at least 60% against 1990 levels by the year 2040. This would allow atmospheric levels of CO2 concentration to return to their 1990 levels of 350 parts per million by volume (ppmv). Failure to do this will not only trigger enormous social and environmental damage, it will also trigger massive political resentment towards the nations who are primarily responsible for the over-consumption which is causing this crisis.

By 'convergence' we mean per capita resource use meeting at the same level in each country. Over-consumers must reduce their consumption levels by more than the global average rate to make room for those

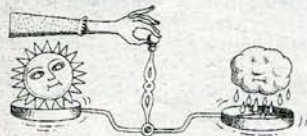
who consume very little to increase their resource consumption to a point where consumption levels are equal between people. However this levels must be one which does not destabilise the global climate system.

This agenda of 'contraction and convergence' is not going to be initially easy. The cuts in resource use and emissions for industrialised countries are severe. However, these reductions are possible. And the 60% cut can be achieved within 45 years from now, if we recognise that we have no other realistic options. The more time we delay starting to reduce emissions the steeper the curves will have to be.

We must therefore deal immediately with the principal obstacle to this programme. And that problem is political.

It is the forced and increasing inequity of the global status quo. In a nutshell, a minority of people increasingly

consume too much at the expense of the majority of people who consume very little. This is true both within and between nations. Correcting these inequities is not an act of charity. It is common sense. One might even call it the economics of survival. After all, like everyone else, people who consume too much are also at risk of the damaging consequences of over-consumption. These people cannot realistically expect the rest of the world to reduce their current consumption or their expectations of increased consumption, unless the task



is shared fairly between all people and all nations. This is especially true because if the global common property resources like the atmosphere belong to anybody, they surely belong to all of us equally. At the moment damage to global common property is clearly proportional to income, but ownership of these resources is assuredly not.

GCI believes that countries should aim to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions to 0.25 tonnes per person per year by 2040. At the moment, emissions are roughly distributed according to a country's GNP - the richer you are the more you emit. In the chart the existing 1990 distribution of CO2 production is shown - showing the large shares for countries such as Germany and Japan. In the chart we estimate the effects of overall emissions contracting on a feasible curve to the year 2040. By this time a 60% cut in emissions from around 5.5 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide to just over 2.5 gigatonnes will have been achieved. However in 2040 the distribution of emissions will be according to population - so shares for countries such as India and China will be a much larger proportion of total emissions. The table at the bottom shows what these curves would mean for various countries

It is vital that the current income-based distribution of resource use is replaced by equality between all humans in the global community.

In the graph annual per capita value for fossil fuel consumption has been reduced by 2040 to 0.25 tonnes of carbon. While this is a move in the right direction, this alone will not solve the problem of the historical responsibility of the industrialised countries who caused the problem in the first place. However it is a plan within

which everyone can agree to work towards reducing emissions. Activities to reduce emissions which may be jointly implemented between countries with high emissions and low emissions could easily be financed in a way which would lead away from dependence on fossil fuels, towards renewable sources

Some now say we need a new global ethic. As Buddhists recognise, no one is saved until everyone is saved. GCI believes that will be only saved by saved from global climate change if a new ethic of equity and survival takes root.

What is the GCI?

GCI is an independent group of people, mostly based in the UK. GCI's aim is the protection of the Global Commons. The group works on the ecological, economic and political aspects of global climate change.

The GCI was founded in 1990 after the Second World Climate Conference. GCI lobbied the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change where we helped to establish the language of equity in the Convention in the run up to Rio.

Since then, GCI has been part of the Economics Group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) where we

successfully overturned the mainstream economic ideas which asserted that the value of climate-change-related damages to developing countries and their peoples was less per unit than in the developed countries.

GCI does not have charitable status nor does it receive regular funding from any source. We urgently need financial support to carry our agenda to the COP-2. A substantial record of GCI's arguments and activities is available to anyone who may wish to offer us this support.

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We must therefore deal immediately with the principal obstacle to this programme and that problem is political. It is the forced and increasing inequity between the global status quo. In a nutshell a minority of people globally consume too much at the expense of the majority of people who consume very little.

This is true both within and between nations. Correcting these inequities is not an act of charity. It is common sense. One might even call it the economics of survival. After all, like everyone else, people who consume too much are also at risk of the damaging consequences of overconsumption. These people cannot realistically expect the rest of the world to reduce their current consumption or their expectations of increased consumption, unless the task is shared fairly between all people and all nations.

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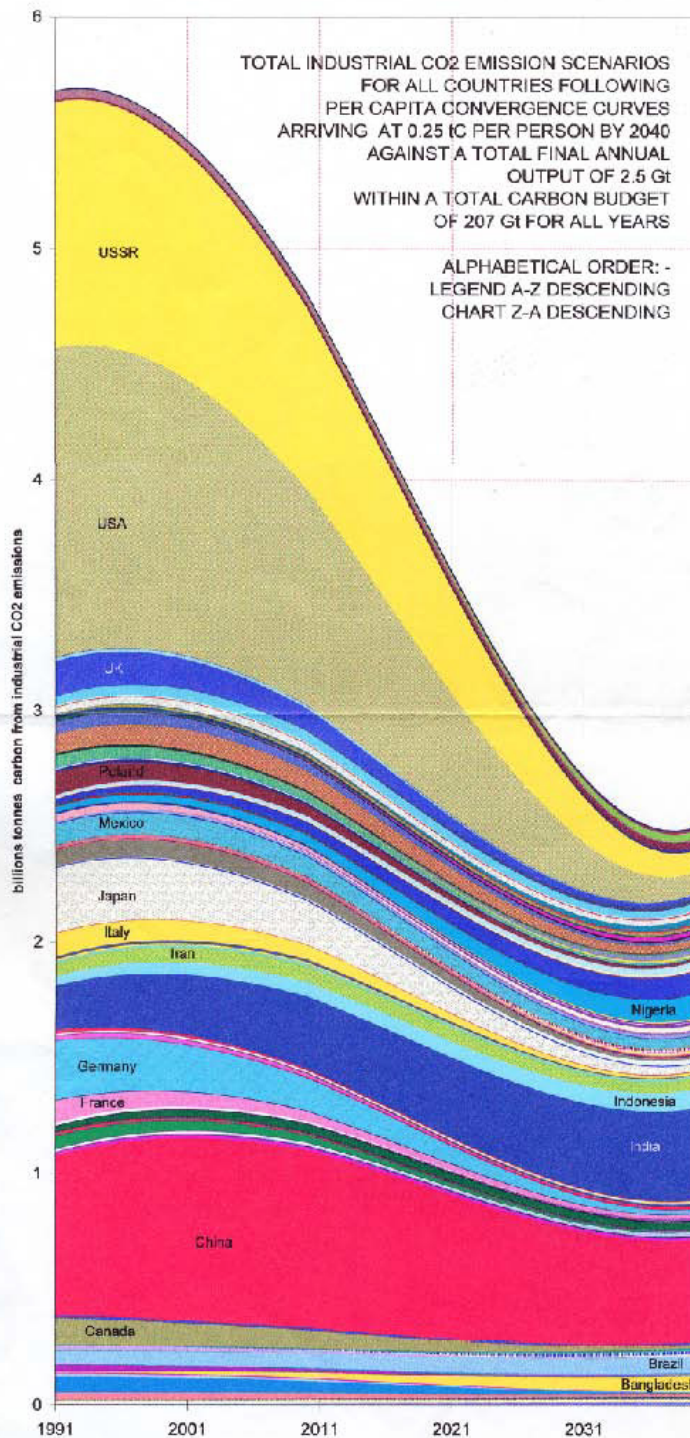
What does the graph mean?

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