

Questions & Answers / Discussion Part 2

Symposium on the Worldwatch Institute report
"State of the World 2005: Redefining Global Security"
Peace Palace, The Hague, 28 February 2005

Prof dr Wim C. Turkenburg, Utrecht University, Scientific Director, Copernicus Institute for Sustainable Development and Innovation, Department of Science, Technology and Society, Utrecht University

On R&D and innovation, I agree with the comments that have been made. That is why I did not quite understand the reaction of Chris. So, maybe he could clarify on that. I think that when we develop energy options that do not have a market let's say within five years, there is hardly an interest from the perspective of companies to invest. When looking for a sustainable energy economy, we need tremendous investments for the development of technologies in this direction. That means that if companies are not going to invest, the government should do it. I think that the development of wind or bio-mass or other energy sources shouldn't have to take place without the investments or the investments of the government. And this is still the case. If you look at the spending as was mentioned by Annemarie Goedmakers, the spending on innovation of for instance the energy companies, but also in general, partly as a result of the privatization, the liberalization of the energy market, the willingness of energy companies based for example in Europe is less, much less than in the past.

Another issue when discussing what the European Union is doing, as I indicated the spending on R&D globally are about \$ 7.5 billion a year. In the past, 25 to 30 years ago, this figure was about double, so it is decreasing on the governmental side. The EU - all the countries together - are spending about \$ 1.5 billion a year and \$ 9.9 billion is still on nuclear. So the focus is also in the EU mainly on nuclear fusion and fission, and much less on energy saving and clean use of fossil fuels and renewables. So in my view there should be a shift, I think that governmental intervention is needed, not only in terms of regulation to stimulate the implementation and application of options that are already there. It is also needed to get a level playing field to reduce subsidies that are heavily taking place on fossil fuels and nuclear, mainly. And that means intervention, but not only on this side but also for energy R&D. I did not quite understand why Chris was saying: "the market will do it." They have to do it, but they don't do it. In my view we need a strong government with different perspectives.

Chris Flavin, President, Worldwatch Institute

Let me make an effort to clarify the point. I am certainly not against R&D. R&D is going to be essential to advance all of these technologies. But I think most of it is going to be private sector R&D, when you look at the commercial part of the energy system. Because if government R&D were really the answer to new energy systems we would have a flourishing, rather than a dead, nuclear industry today, because we pumped billions of dollars into this and we continue to pump enormous amounts of government money to very little effect. The companies take the governments' money and they do relatively little with it. You need to create the conditions for a market, have the private companies invest their own money and then supplement it with some governmental R&D, as is already happening in bio-energy, in wind energy There is government R&D involved but it is a relatively small fraction in most of those sectors. Innovation and technology and R&D are critical. With wind you have literally a new generation of technology every three to four years. ... Clearly there is a tremendous innovation that is entrepreneurial. It is not the old mainline energy companies it is the entrepreneurial companies. Government needs to rather than dump money in, needs to be very clever in opening up the private markets by providing limited, targeted R&D money.

Prof dr Rudy Rabbinge, Dean, Post Graduate Education, Wageningen Agricultural Univ.

There were in fact several comments on efficiency and productivity in agriculture and it is very important to distinguish very clearly between the different areas around the world. The solutions for Europe won't work in Africa. So we have to take into account that if you are working in Africa and try to increase food security and agricultural productivity, the major thing

that has to happen is in fact to increase the productivity per hectare. And that is extremely low at this moment. It has not increased over the last twenty years or so. And that is only possible when external inputs are being used, because of the deteriorated soils in many places, in fact the lack of investment in agriculture and in soils. We need to invest now because the unsustainability spiral is continued. That means that you are out mining the soils, you are leaving and you are knocking down a tropical rainforest again. That is the threat in several places. And on a world scale you see that every year, only in South America at least twenty times the cultivated area of the Netherlands is being knocked down as tropical rain forest just for that reason. This is similar in Africa. If we are capable of helping those in the developing world - the producer organizations - by investing in agriculture it can be on a micro level, with micro credits, having women invest in agriculture and investing in soils that then can overcome that dreadful situation. But this requires major programmes, which are fine tuned to the specific needs of the different countries and the specific needs of different groups in those countries. This is one point.

But if you look at the other hand - at the situation in Europe - we have the possibility to fulfill our societal aims in terms of economic aims, environmental goals, nature goals and social goals by making use of less land. In the EU for example we are using 140 million hectare, it can be done with 50 million. But we can also reduce the amount of pesticides substantially. At the moment 400 million kg of pesticides is being used in the European Community, it can be done with only 5 to 20 million kg. You need to do the right kind of agriculture at the right place and at a high production level at those places where it can be done.

And that is the same in fact for nature conservation. Why is it not done? It is because there is a lot of inertia in our systems. And this inertia is determined by the short term profit of individuals, who don't see the dynamics which is necessary to transfer to a more sustainable agriculture system and to a more sustainable use of natural resources. That has to be done and this requires political will and political courage. That is not there at the moment. But when it is there, it could happen, it should happen; because the society asks it and the possibilities are there.

Wouter J. Veening, Chairman/Director Institute for Environmental Security

In summing up our discussion, I can say that the new definition of global security as proposed in the report was shared by almost everyone this afternoon. I think it is clearly on the political agenda. I think the speeches by the Minister for Development Cooperation and the State Secretary for the Environment made clear that, as far as they are concerned, it is very much an item on the political agenda.

But having it on the political agenda is one thing and implementing it is another. The panel was very clear in informing us about the directions that need to be taken. Their discussion about the numbers, about the instruments, about if it should be through markets or through governments, and about what vested interests cause the inertia which block policy developments were all very relevant regarding the policies that are needed. But at least the first step has to be made and it is on the agenda and this is a serious item in the political discourse nationally and internationally. I think that's a tremendous gain and I would like to congratulate the people from the Worldwatch Institute for presenting such a clear report. Of course the political debate ahead will be very intensive and interesting.

In conclusion, I would like to ask Chris Flavin or Michael Renner to say a few words about how this event compared to the other events where they could present their report in Washington or in Europe.

Christopher Flavin, President, Worldwatch Institute

Well, thank you very much. And it really has been a very lively and interesting discussion. I find that we are always learning more things and one idea that popped out of the discussion here is that we really should focus very specifically on the role of children and the need for a

child friendly approach to development. I think that would be a wonderful chapter for a future edition of the State of the World. One of the reasons we like to do these events is to come up with new ideas and maybe you can even propose a person or people who might be interested in working with us in authoring such a chapter because it would be wonderful to work with someone who has actual field experience on an issue like that.

Well, I don't want to compare and contrast or even - by implication - criticize individual countries. I must say that throughout the countries where I have done presentations we have had a very positive and, I think, proactive response to this book. You probably won't be surprised that that was the reaction in Geneva or even that it was the case in Madrid. In Geneva, we had the head of the United Nations Office in Europe join us for the press conference. At a symposium similar to this one in Madrid we had the relatively new environment minister. All were very positive and committed, I think, to a very similar agenda.

What you may be surprised to hear is that we also had a very positive reaction in the U.S. Congress, where we did a symposium co-sponsored by both a republican and a democratic member of Congress. They were ones that were particularly sympathetic to some of the issues we are dealing with. I would not claim that all 435 members of the U.S. Congress are necessarily equally inclined, but I do get the sense that a different kind of wind is blowing even in Washington these days. There is recognition – and I think you saw that beginning to take place in terms of some of the framing of issues on President Bush's recent visit - that a broader approach to security issues has to be taken.

I might just say in way of looking forward, that I am particularly looking forward to the launch of the Chinese edition this year. We have a new partner in China. We think China is an absolutely critical country to be working in these days and think it is going to be very interesting to see the reaction of the Chinese on these issues, on the degree of recognition of their problems, and also the degree they are beginning to anticipate some of the solutions. There were zero environmental NGOs in China five year ago; today there are 2000. This is the most rapid growth of an environmental movement in world history with the possible exception of India which has also been moving very rapidly in the regard.

So we are increasingly focusing our energies on out reach beyond Europe and North America to the global South, China, India, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East and to other parts of the world that are growing and changing in very important ways.

Let me just add again my thanks to the Institute for Environmental Security for its support of the event of here today and thank my fellow panellists. It's been a real pleasure to hear all of the thoughts and some of the differences of opinion. And also I'd like to thank all of you in the audience for joining us today. It's been a really productive meeting.

Thank you.