

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition

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Faced with a food and energy crisis, how can society improve its well-being?

Summary:

The food and energy crisis has certainly revealed a number of critical truths, one of which is our limited capacity to anticipate future eco-behavioural trends as a global community. Another is the questionable capacity of humans to form a global team towards a truly collective sense of wellbeing. In a bruising underestimation of the goodness of new agro and energy technologies, a sense of complacency in an era of wealth and abundance may be blamed. Improving our wellbeing has been short circuited by the poor support of relevant technologies, namely by leading nations and decision makers from the ground up.

Essay:

At the centre of many historical events of the modern world, has been an illusion, an illusion which has embedded itself in the collective mindset. The Great Depression was based on an illusion that stock prices were worth more than their 'real' price. The pretext of legitimacy for the Iraqi invasion was based on the illusion of illegal weapons of mass destruction. The financial crisis was based on the illusion that material goods could be obtained on the premise of future payment, seducing our needs for instant gratification with the very popular philosophy of borrow-borrow-borrow. These Illusions are real but difficult to resist.

The current illusion we seem to be are under is that whilst appreciating our fossil fuel deposits, we have in ourselves placed such confidence assuming a solution will be found 'as and when the time comes'. These simple words espouse the type of philosophy that future generations of poor, rich, young and old will look at in dismay. They will laugh at our idleness and count it as a weakness to be overcome in future. Complacency is a critical theme in this era of wealth creation and abundance, and once again has created an illusion that seduces us into a state of over-satisfaction and improvidence. Where a proven loyalty to Capitalism has recently been questioned, perhaps we also need to question our past and current capacity to foresee and deal with emerging economic issues.

Nelson Mandela once said that the 'The most difficult thing is not to change society – but it is to change yourself'. Clearly, we need to change our individual selves first to improve our wellbeing as a global community. Food and energy concerns epitomize what it means to survive, grow and develop. Unfortunately however, some dues remain unpaid. Whether we pay dues now or pay them later, ultimately they will still have to be paid, be it by this generation or the next. There exists an already astounding array of *bona fide*, privately sponsored/funded initiatives, but these are isolated and perhaps not being given the recognition they deserve.

Several structural problems have caused the food and energy crisis. One of these includes the hitherto hypocritical nature of advanced nations to champion globalization and free trade, whilst blatantly propping up domestic farmers with subsidies and grants. The reason for the sustained implementation of these policies boils purely down to the reality of relative power and influence, as wielded by these leading decision makers. Reduced agricultural protectionism would allow price and quality to be the decisive factors between trading nations.

The negative repercussions of overcrowding and food shortages suggested by Malthus threaten to ring true. Indeed, quite resoundingly so. If agricultural modes of production are not streamlined for the benefit of the global community our actions will surely determine whether we sink or swim. This requires the entire spectral support of the food production cycle, ranging from the lone farmer tending to the sheep and rearing crops, to the top agro-techno executive in Silicon Valley. It can be done.

Meanwhile, numerous options and doors are increasingly opened by scientific advancements in the agricultural sector. No need to panic here. A calm, open minded mentality is perhaps what we can panic about not having. More so in a culture of frequent trade talk breakdowns and stalemates between nations. To also be noted is how developing nations look up to developed ones. Where the latter goes astray, developing societies subconsciously or consciously tend to follow suit. Zero sum trade-talk games are not the best starting points for free market trading. Sound economic justice is said to be the keystone of every peaceful society. Surely this includes the ultimate implementation of truly 'free' trade between farmers and agro-co-operatives.

International organizations and volunteers need to be well positioned in their target areas to resolve these problems. Are they doing enough? Can or will they do enough? These are all questions that may have to be posed for each and every project for agriculture and energy creation equally. Much more urgency needs to be placed on simple but effective ways to kick start our wellbeing to its rightful level. This would include, amongst other strategies, a massive government backed rolling out of simple rain water collection techniques, the building of low budget food storage silos, low cost irrigation schemes, best seed researching practice, and more. The difference these small steps can make could be tremendous for well being.

All countries can eliminate their dependency on all energy sources extracted from non-renewable, fossil fuels. Such a significant reconfiguration of the world's energy creation requires that instincts for immediate gratification be tamed and tagged down our priority ladder. Continuing to work with nature is the ultimate key to harnessing all her energy-giving characteristics. Mother Nature blessed us with the sun, the wind, the deep water currents, geothermal currents and many more gifts. The gifts and dangers of Mother Nature are numerous and all too familiar. Her gifts to us can positively transform our collective well being. Have we been underestimating them? The recent discovery of methane gas on Mars illustrates the potential for energy extraction. Indeed other planets may have more and different forms of energy. Furthermore, a new tidal technology developed by Scottish engineers allows water to be harnessed carbon free, regardless of the depth of the water. With more water than land surface, the possibilities seem almost endless.

The blind pillaging of our finite resources will only invite condemnation from future generations. In gauging our response to these dwindling resources the question is if we actually mind, or simply prefer indifference. If we happen to choose the former, then all agents of significant economic transactions, scientific advancements, and organizational modes need to be on the same page and same team. The latter choice unfortunately will take its natural course. Let's hope not.

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