

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

Summary

Reducing the wasting of food and energy resources and environmental pollution, a push for technological innovation and use of renewable resources, development of transnational networks, self-sufficiency in food and energy production are the rational options for addressing the food and energy crisis. The implementation of those principles could be greatly facilitated by the widespread promotion of different forms of cooperation, the acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of the food and energy issues and the need for the symbiosis of different economic, social, environmental and technological solutions and open-mindedness towards different ideas that are the steps towards improving society's well-being.

Essay

The looming energy crisis and the continuing food crisis are multifaceted problems that bear often the same, but also different social and economic faces in societies across the world. The famine and malnutrition are everyday realities in many societies. Besides them there are multiple other issues, e.g. food safety and cost, environmental pollution and diminishing biodiversity, social and economic impacts, that are deeply intertwined with each other and with the energy crisis. Besides the obvious that food production consumes energy, the well-being of every society depends on the availability of enough energy resources to maintain and improve its current level of development. With the growing population, the exhaustion of natural resources, the un-sustainability of fossil energy, the world is very hungry for energy and food and the demand is constantly increasing.

It is easy to formulate the goal for any society— to provide its members sufficiently with affordable and healthy food and affordable energy while not undermining the environment, social and economic development. However, it is considerably harder to implement that in reality. With no easy and “magical” solution in sight the society's rational options for improving its well-being are the much repeated aims of reducing the wasting of food and energy resources and environmental pollution; a push for technological innovation and alternative resources, especially renewable ones; development of transnational networks; self-sufficiency in food and energy production. The implementation of those principles could be greatly facilitated by the widespread promotion of different forms of cooperation. Also the acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of the food and energy issues and the need for the symbiosis of different economic, social, environmental and technological solutions are the steps towards improving society's well-being.

Cooperation should not only be viewed as international relations, transnational networks or collaboration between different institutions, but as a guiding principle of an active search in all levels of society for solutions to improve the society's well-being. Cooperation of the population is essential for reducing the waste of resources and promoting open-minded thinking and for the implementation of new technologies. The open-mindedness is necessary foundation to any sort of innovation. The cooperation of the wider population forms a basis to the collaborations between and with the scientists of different disciplines, societal leaders and different segments of the society and therefore improves the outlook for actually improving society's well-being. Different forms of useful cooperation range from microlevel solutions, e.g. cooperation of individual farmers in marketing their produce together to add value and receive higher income or in developing a small-scale energy production, to macrolevel solutions, e.g. energy or food policies, that affect the course of development of the whole society. The

cooperation of scientists is necessary to push the innovation, to understand the nature of food and energy problems and to explain it to the wider population and to political leaders who make decisions on funding and implementation. As more different cooperation networks are formed the better the chances are of finding ways to improve well-being and carrying those out.

Part of the complexity of food and energy problems is that there is a web of connections between them. An example of the interconnectedness is the soaring of food prices in 2007 that was influenced by the fuel prices that affected not only the agricultural producers, but everyone in the production chain down to the final consumer. The rise of the food prices was also blamed on the increase of biofuel production on agricultural land. Yet this should not be a reason to discourage the exploration of biofuels' potential altogether. This applies also to the first setbacks in the exploration of other energy resources. Every new technology has its cost and impact and those should be studied. Although the cost renewable energy in economic terms for now is relatively higher than the cost of fossil energy it is vital to keep exploring its possibilities. In future the technological advances, development of suitable infrastructure, scale effect and exhaustion of fossil fuels would reverse the situation. But without the research on other energy resources, the society will find itself in considerably worse off when it runs out of fossil fuels.

A successful implementation of any policy is highly dependent on the social and economic forces in the society. When the leaders disregard the social and economic realities in a society, then no matter how innovative and resource saving a technology or food and energy policy may be, its implementation will be hampered. For example, if a society turns to a new and more environmentally friendly energy resource that is yet considerably more expensive to the individual members of the society, the social and economic backlash would delay its implementation and result in reversal of the policy that would calm the situation, but would offer no solutions for the future. But if there was an active cooperation and discourse between different forces in the society that would have anticipated and addressed those social and economic impacts and explained the complexity of the issues, there would be a better outlook for finding solutions. Another example of what happens when the social and environmental forces are disregarded is the sudden application of free market principles in agriculture in many countries around the world. Usually it has resulted in the worsening of natural environment and impoverishment of majority of their agricultural producers who are unable to compete in the international market and lose their livelihoods. Without the countermeasures, e.g. local cooperation initiatives, training for agricultural producers, research on new modes of production, dissemination of information on alternative production etc, to dampen the catastrophic effects there are dire consequences that in one form or another ripple through all the segments of the society and affect its well-being.

In conclusion, the key to improving society's well-being lies in understanding the problems, integration of different solutions, open-mindedness to variety of ideas and cooperation that are necessary to implement already set aims to solve the energy and food crisis.