

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

Summary: Today's food and energy crises should not be seen solely as a threat to our well-being, but rather as a warning sign, and as a reason for people to accept temporary reductions of their wealth and conveniences in order to solve global problems and improve society's well-being in the long run.

Essay text: The question can be interpreted in two ways: How can society cope with the crises, or how can society use the food and energy crisis to improve its well-being. To what degree are the food and energy crises related, and to what degree is society's well-being the trigger of the food and energy crisis. Looking at it profoundly, it can be stated that the three issues are interrelated. Society's well being leads to a growing world population, technological developments and higher standards of living. Which lead to more energy use, thus a limitation on scarce resources (fossil fuels) and an increase in emissions that accelerate climate change. Climate change intensifies the occurrences of droughts and floods, or other natural disasters, which can result in food crisis (usually those parts of the world are impacted most by the crisis, that are not responsible for the high levels of emissions). Another man-made reason for food shortages are unequal distributions of power on the world market and dependencies of countries remaining since colonial times. Many developing countries suffer from food shortage because they are kept dependent by industrialized countries or because they do not get the chance to develop themselves due to unfair distribution of power on the world market.

But are food and energy crises solely negative? Or should we try to see them as a warning sign and as a chance to convince people to change?

People are naturally afraid of changes. They are afraid of the insecurity that comes along with it, afraid of losing power or wealth. Therefore, looking at a micro-level, change management literature suggests for drastic changes to use a disruptive style of change. Usually only when a crisis or a severe event happens, can employees be convinced that change is necessary, and that it is necessary to accept short term concessions in order to stay healthy in the long run.

The same can be observed at a macro-level. Looking at the financial crises that was the result of a long-term malpracticed financial system, which many economists already warned about, only the happening of drastic events made it possible that changes of the system could be implemented. Without the financial crises, most bankers would not have accepted cuts of their unreasonably salaries and boni, and it would have been harder to implement more severe criteria for granting loans.

Looking at the unreasonably high use of energy and burning of fossil fuels that is done by Western civilisation, only an energy crisis could be a big enough event to change people's minds and habits. Without the energy crises, people wouldn't accept cutting down their convenience, and enterprises would not start to search for alternative solutions, which might be more costly in the short run.

Therefore, the energy crises can also be seen as a positive event, a warning sign that is needed for society's attitude to change. Akin a burn-out of a manager who exploits himself.

Of course, it has to be regarded that the solutions found for one problem are not conflicting with other needs of society, like some biofuels that would help to minimize the energy crises but at the same time contribute to the food crises.

Today's society has the skills and resources to solve both problems, it is only a matter of allocating resources wisely.

The pervasive threat of the food and energy crisis has already raised consciousness for these global problems in society and has already entailed some changes. There is a (yet minor) trend in society towards more sustainability. Some citizens try to consume

more consciously and more and more people are interested in fair trade products and renewable energies.

Hopefully also the richer segments of the global society, who normally have more power to change the status quo, will understand, that there are solutions to these problems, and hopefully politicians can shape our market systems by incentives and subsidies towards "striving for a new, better equilibrium" (cp. Stieglitz).

Today's food and energy crisis shouldn't be perceived anymore as threat, but as warning system and as chance to trigger necessary changes. It should be used to convince governments to stimulate the development of sustainable energies and technologies and of stimulating new trade patterns that would enable developing countries to become more self-sufficient concerning their food supply. Hopefully the crises are reason enough for society to change from striving for short run gains while accepting long term losses, to accepting short run losses/inconveniences which would lead to long-term gains. This way, today's food and energy crises could be used to improve society's well-being in the long run.