

Dübendorf, St. Gallen, Thun, 17th September 2009

World Resources Forum (WRF) presents Declaration

Sustainability needs new economic structures

Climate Change is only a symptom of another even greater problem: our current economic system needs too much natural resources. On 16th September, the participants of the World Resources Forum (WRF) in Davos launched a declaration listing suggestions how to solve this problem. Core message: Politicians must internationally agree on per capita targets for natural resource extraction and consumption.

On 15th and 16th September international leading experts convened in Davos and Nagoya (Japan) for the first World Resources Forum (WRF). The German Environment Minister, Sigmar Gabriel, warned in his message to the WRF: "Europeans use ten times more natural resources than people in Africa or Vietnam. If all people on this planet follow our European resource consumption model, we would need at least two more planets by 2050." Humans today extract 60 billion tons of raw material each year from the crust of the earth which is 50 per cent more than 30 years ago. Though the world economy uses fewer resources to produce one Swiss Franc or Euro of GDP than 30 years ago the overall resource use is still increasing.

New political framework

The participants in the WRF acknowledged the random extirpation of natural resources as the principal physical cause for the increasing ecological degradation and instabilities, including climate change. This is why the WRF Declaration suggests to massively reduce the material input into the western economy and to drastically increase resource productivity at the same time. To meet this enormous challenge we need to come up with huge technical innovations.

As long as the price for natural resources is low compared to that of labor, industry will not deliberately move in that direction. Only governments can provide incentives through adjusting the economic framework conditions. The prices for natural resources need to tell the ecological truth. Political measures like mentioned above plus an increased resource productivity will leave room for developing countries.

Declaration of the World Resources Forum – Call for Action

... we urge decision makers in all nations to adopt a strategy of resource governance consisting of the following elements:

1. Seek international agreements on world-wide per-capita targets for natural resource extraction and consumption to be effective by 2015 at the latest, the main objective being to bring about an absolute decoupling between economic development and resource use, the implication being less resource inputs for more value.
2. Introduce effective policy measures to greatly enhance resource productivity as well as curbing demand over time, in the form of standards, higher taxes on resource use with the possibility of reduced taxes elsewhere, cap and trade mechanisms, etc.
3. Introduce with urgency resource use targets in areas of particular concern – like fresh water, marine resources and tropical forests – to put a halt to the rapid destruction of ecosystem services and biodiversity.
4. Focus research and development on the goal of increasing resource productivity. The resulting innovation will create space for economic and social development. As a side-effect, national economies and cities will become less dependent on resource imports, in particular fossil energy carriers.
5. Seek societal consensus by 2012 on ecological and economic indicators (on micro-, meso-, and macro-levels) in tune with the laws of nature and beyond GDP. These indicators must be applied by industry and governments when reporting on the progress attained toward sustainability, and they must become the subject of learning processes at all levels of education.
6. Reshape the framework conditions for the economy to account for the scarcity of natural resources and recognize the need for their extraction and sale to promote the environmental sustainable development of the countries in which they take place.
7. Seek dialog with the business community to help redesign business models where revenues would be increasingly derived from quality of services rather than by selling material products.
8. Initiate process to rethink lifestyles and help develop consumption patterns based on sufficiency and careful use of natural resources. Traditional knowledge, wisdom and spirituality should inspire and help frame education and policies.
9. Strengthen education to increase awareness for resource limits, especially among economists, and foster the ability of decision makers to analyze long-term and systemic trends and to implement sustainability-driven innovation.

The complete declaration can be downloaded: www.worldresourcesforum.org

Further information

Dr. Xaver Edelmann, President WRF and Member of the Empa Directorate, Phone +41 79 222 71 29, xaver.edelmann@empa.ch

Prof. Dr. Friedrich Schmidt-Bleek, Factor 10 Institute, biovar@orange.fr

Editor / Media contact

Beatrice Huber, Empa, Communications, Phone +41 44 823 47 33, redaktion@empa.ch

WRF – co-organized by Empa

The World Resources Forum (WRF) was organized by Empa in cooperation with the Swiss Academy of Engineering Sciences (SATW), the EcoTopia Science Institute of the University of Nagoya and the Factor 10 Institute. In order to minimize the number of intercontinental air journeys by participants (the main source of environmental burden caused by scientific congresses) the meeting took place concurrently in Europe and Japan, with the two venues being linked to each other in real time by a videoconferencing system.

The following experts were among the speakers:

Prof. Paul Ekins, University College London

Prof. Marina Fischer-Kowalski, Klagenfurt University (Austria)

Prof. Kiichiro Hayashi, Nagoya University (Japan)

Dr. Fritz Hinterberger, Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI), Vienna

Prof. Lorenz Hilty, Empa, St. Gallen

Prof. Zhouying Jin, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Prof. Ashok Khosla, Co-President of the Club of Rome, President of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature

Prof. Harry Lehmann, Director, Umweltbundesamt, Berlin-Dessau

Prof. Wolfgang Lutz, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Vienna

Timo Mäkelä, Director, DG Environment, European Commission

Prof. em. Dennis Meadows, University New Hampshire (USA)

Prof. Bernd Meyer, Gesellschaft für Wirtschaftliche Strukturforschung, Osnabrück (Germany)

Prof. Friedrich Schmidt-Bleek, President, Factor 10 Institute, Carnoules (FR)

Prof. Helga Weisz, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Berlin

Prof. Ernst-Ulrich von Weizsäcker, UNEP International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management

Anders Wijkman, Former Member of the European Parliament

Detailed information regarding the WRF: www.worldresourcesforum.org