



**GLOBAL ISSUES:
SUMMARY OF A NUMBER OF PIONEERING
PROSPECTIVE STUDIES**

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| List of works reviewed |
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MEADOWS Donella / MEADOWS Dennis / RANDERS Jorgen / BEHRENS William
The Limits to Growth

New York, Universe Books, 1972, 205 p.

MESAROVIC Mihajlo / PESTEL Eduard

Mankind at the Turning Point: The Second Report to The Club of Rome

New York, Dutton, 1974, 210 p.

LEONTIEF Wassili

The Future of World Economy

New York, Oxford University Press, 1976, 255 p.

TINBERGEN Jan

RIO, Reshaping the International Order: a report to the Club of Rome

New York, Dutton, 1976, 325 p.

HERRERA Almicar O.

Catástrofe o nueva sociedad? Modelo Mundial Latinoamericano

Argentina, Fundación Bariloche, 1976, 108 p.

INTERFUTURS

Face aux futurs. Pour une maîtrise du vraisemblable et une gestion de l'imprévisible

Paris, OECD, 1979, 450 p.

COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY / BARNEY Gerald O.

The Global 2000 Report to the President: Entering the Twenty-First Century

Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980, 857 p.

WORLDWATCH INSTITUTE / BROWN Lester

State of the World 1984

New York, Norton, 1984, 252 p.

**WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT /
BRUNDTLAND Gro Harlem**

Our Common Future

London, Oxford University Press, 1987, 400 p.

FUTURIBLES INTERNATIONAL

Le Monde à l'horizon 2000

Paris, Futuribles / Unesco, 1987, 70 p.

GRENON Michel / BATISSE Michel

Le Plan Bleu. Avenirs du bassin méditerranéen

Paris, Economica, 1989, 442 p.

Global issues: a summary of a number of pioneering prospective studies

II. Main conclusions and recommendations

The many prospective studies which, in the wake of the first report to the Club of Rome, dealt with global issues highlighted a range of issues or challenges (see Part I). While the studies may have gone into detail about the nature of the issues, they were generally less forthcoming about how to solve them.

In some instances, the authors even considered that their models or scenarios spoke for themselves and that were sufficiently elaborated to show either what should not be done, in trend scenarios (“We feel that the model described here is already sufficiently developed to be of some use to decision-makers”, *Limits to Growth*), or what should be done, in regulatory scenarios such as those developed by Leontief, Herrera or Plan Bleu.

Where they put forward recommendations, some of the reports may seem radical, not to see utopian in outlook. The authors of the Fundación Bariloche report describe an egalitarian society where the basic needs of every individual will be satisfied and where civic participation in social decisions is guaranteed for everyone, where “production will be driven by social needs and not by profit”.

Meadows *et al.* suggest levying a tax on industry in order to curb its growth and to reallocate the resources thus gained towards agriculture, services and the fight against pollution.

Among the many proposals made by the Brundtland Commission which we will examine below, one recommendation was to reallocate military spending to finance sustainable development.

The Leontief and Meadows reports also called for a more equitable distribution of wealth on a global scale, without explaining how this could be achieved.

Different studies make a number of the same general proposals: improve awareness of the problem (UNESCO/Futuribles, which also recommended broadcasting special TV programmes); improving the monitoring of problems and the introduction of environmental monitoring (the Brundtland report called for each country to compile an annual “balance sheet” on changes to the quality in the environment and in the nation’s “stock” of natural resources to published alongside the budget); continuing prospective study (Interfuturs).

A recurring theme in the studies is fostering **improved cooperation** on these issues among all countries, North and South.

“We absolutely must begin an era of unprecedented cooperation. The United States can take the lead in this movement” (*Global 2000*).

In Plan Bleu's alternative scenarios, north-south cooperation is strengthened (scenario A-1), or south-south cooperation is reinforced (scenario A-2). Interfuturs pointed to improved policy coordination among OECD member states.

Measures to be taken for each domain

Among the more concrete recommendations, there are a number of proposals concerning **international trade**: stabilization of farming prices (RIO), as well as the prices of commodities and raw materials through stocking operations or setting up compensation funds (Interfuturs); improvements in exchange conditions (UNESCO) which would translate in an increase in the price of agricultural goods and raw materials in relation to the price of finished manufactured goods (Leontief); setting fair prices for products from developing countries (Herrera). All of this should lead to a "major change in the international economic order" (Leontief, RIO).

It would also be advisable to improve the framework of international trade to make it more transparent and stable (Interfuturs).

The creation of large-scale regional economic bodies based on the complementary aspects of members' economies is something that the experts surveyed by UNESCO hope for.

The authors do not overlook the **international financial system**. It should be reformed (Interfuturs/UNESCO) and gold and the currencies of international exchange should be replaced by the SDR (Special Drawing Right, the unit defined by the IMF based on a basket of currencies; RIO).

A number of proposals focus on the poor countries' **debt**, which needs to be reduced immediately (UNESCO). Rich countries must accept concession as debtor countries over-use their natural resources in an effort to repay their debt (Brundtland). Improved access for developing countries to medium and long term credit is necessary, according to the Interfuturs survey.

Development aid is the cornerstone of many current strategies. Such aid must be increased, it could even be possible to create an international tax to finance "automatically" the transfer of money from rich to poor countries (Leontief).

Apart from the issue of increasing the amount of aid, its quality is also in question. According to Interfuturs, the quality of aid should be seen in the development of agriculture and rural

activities. The Brundtland report calls for a substantial part of aid to be dedicated to the investments needed to improve the environment and the productivity of the different resources sectors.

One report also calls for the setting up of an international foundation to distribute a part of public aid (Interfuturs).

Measures to promote **investments** in developing countries are also desirable. Developing countries' levels of public and private savings are insufficient to finance the necessary degree of investment. The Leontief report called for measures involving taxation, credit, monetary and fiscal incentives to save, as well as structural changes to make it easier to redirect savings and channel them towards key sectors. The Leontief report's regulatory scenario calls for more than two-thirds of capital exports from developed countries to be directed to developing countries by 2000 (as opposed to one-third in 1970).

Interfuturs envisages the existence of safety mechanisms to reduce political risk (the main obstacle to investments) in poor countries.

Aid could take the form of **technology transfers**. There should be an intense flow of such transfers from the North to the South (Leontief, RIO) and they should focus especially on protecting the environment (UNESCO).

The major multinationals have a role to place here, and they are all more the more responsible in those developing countries where they operate and where, according to the Brundtland Commission, they should be helping to promote industrialization.

Interfuturs calls for the creation of one or more international foundations that would provide the driving force in developing countries for research centres with a mission to develop technologies suited to conditions in the countries in question.

The experts surveyed by UNESCO go as far as to call for a "Marshall Plan for know-how", which would involve setting up databanks and developing the exchange of knowledge across the world. They also call for the creation of regional centres to promote industrial and scientific cooperation.

As to those domains where the major issues have identified, there is general consensus concerning the kind of policies to be implemented in the field of **energy**. The proposals focus on energy saving policies (Brundtland, Interfuturs), and the development of renewable energy (Plan Bleu). The RIO report calls for research into nuclear and solar energy to be stepped up.

The Brundtland Commission holds that improved energy efficiency is a desirable goal, and advises governments to include specific precise goals for consumers in their energy pricing policies.

“Urgent measures are required to limit extreme **population** growth”, according to the Brundtland report. *Limits to Growth* calls for a maximum of two children per couple. The measures promoting family planning include education for all who need it on the subject, contraception and the necessary services. These measures are also mentioned in *Global 2000*.

A number of reports state the need for a green revolution in **agriculture**. The majority of industrialized nations need to adjust their present systems in order to reduce their excess output, to lessen unfair competition with countries which could benefit from similar advantages and to promote ecologically rational agricultural practices (Brundtland Commission).

Governments will have to develop clear strategies for land use in order to guide **urbanization**, reducing the pressure on the large population centres and create smaller towns and villages which would be more closely linked with their own immediate hinterland (Brundtland).

An increase in the means to develop urban infrastructure must be supported by public policies to slow down urban sprawl and the growth of cities, in other words, economic and urban planning policy. The aim should be to achieve a city/countryside balance (Futuribles/UNESCO).

Woodlands

According to the Brundtland report, by changing the profit framework and concession systems for woodland use, it could be possible to improve forest yields, increase their lifetime and put an end to deforestation.

In its alternative scenarios, the Plan Bleu envisages a sharp increase in the number of pilot projects in the field, as a result of long-lasting, proactive policies focusing on replanting and the protective administration and organization of woodlands.

The Worldwatch Institute points out that without considerable financial support, reforestation programmes will lag far behind real needs. The Institute adds that there is also a social

dimension to the issue, and that something must be done to tackle the question of subsistence for the inhabitants of woodland areas.

Governance, a transversal issue

Inevitably, there is the question of who is qualified to take the decisions made necessary by such wide-ranging challenges.

The authors of the RIO report point out that it is crucial to **choose the right level of decision-making**. Given the interdependence, or interlocking nature, of the issues, the notion of sovereignty must be reassessed. The new international order is founded on the general principle of the “optimal level of decision-making”: each major decision to be taken should be made at the most relevant level, from the local to the national, to the international. The RIO group goes on to identify issues to be dealt with at international level in ten different domains. Plan Bleu’s alternative scenarios call for the decentralization of decision-making power.

According to the Brundtland report, regional bodies such as the then EEC or ASEAN could work together to draw up emergency response plans, or jointly work out basic principles and shared guidelines for the protection of the environment and the use of resources.

Plan Bleu underlines the importance of **involving the population** in issue-management. According to the Brundtland report, “when the impact of a given project on the environment is particularly significant, the question should be put to the public and the public’s opinion should be sought on every possible occasion, even by referendum where necessary”. The experts surveyed by UNESCO express their hope for greatly increased participation from citizens in those decisions which involve the whole community; to this end they propose to set up a network of citizen volunteers.

Non-governmental organizations (NGO) and the scientific and business communities should also be given appropriate consideration (Brundtland).

Another questions: how to make decisions matter more?

The Brundtland Commission recommends that at national level, the central finance ministry and relevant “technical” ministries have joint responsibility for the quality of those areas of the environment affected by their decisions, and that the power of bodies in charge of environmental matters should be increased.

Plan Bleu’s alternative scenarios factor in the internalization of the cost of protecting the environment in decision-making mechanisms.

Institutional reform

Institutions do exist, but they lack any real grasp of the issues. A range of institutional reforms are called for in order to deal with the problem.

The experts surveyed by UNESCO propose that the UN become an effective political forum, that is, that power within the organization be shared, that its management become collective and that the great powers' veto be suppressed.

According to the Brundtland Commission, the UN's influence is fragmentary and less effective than it might be because of the independent nature of specialist bodies and the endemic weaknesses in coordination. Each institution should reallocate a certain number of staff and financial resources to create an administrative and technical centre that would be smaller but highly expert. Such a centre should be involved in drawing up the institution's programme and budget.

Each institution should be directly responsible for ensuring that the parts of their programme and other projects which affect the environment and the financial resources required are financed by its own budget.

In line with these new responsibilities, the following institutions should also take on full financial responsibility, using their own budgets, for a series of programmes currently financed by the UNEP Environmental Fund, namely WHO and "environmental health", FAO and "agrochemical products and residues", UNIDO and "transport and industry", ILO and "the workplace", and so on.

According to the Brundtland report, **UNEP** should continue its close cooperation with these bodies as well as taking an active role in identifying new areas for action and monitoring the results. Furthermore, UNEP's role should be strengthened and in order for it to exercise real influence on national policy, governments should increase their participation and raise the level of representation (in future, the national delegations participating in meetings must be headed by a minister supported by high-level advisors with clear expertise in administrative and scientific matters). The report adds that financing of the Environmental Fund should be widened and deepened.

Multilateral financial institutions also have a crucial role to play. "It is vital that the World Bank, the regional development banks and the IMF incorporate the goals and criteria of sustainable development in their policies and programmes" (Brundtland).

New institutions

Alongside, or instead of, these institutional reforms, new bodies could take charge of global issues, or at least some of them.

According to the Brundtland report, a special UN council on sustainable development should be set up under the authority of the UN Secretary General. This body would be chiefly responsible for deciding which tasks the various institutions should undertake together in order to tackle efficiently the many problems raised by sustainable development and which involve a range of institutions and a number of countries at one and the same time.

The experts surveyed by UNESCO suggest that an “independent ethics committee made up of irrefragable figures” be given the responsibility and all available means to publicize as widely as possible each and every violation of Human Rights.

The implementation of the world risk assessment programme is also put forward by the Brundtland Commission. Such a programme would act first and foremost as a framework for establishing cooperation between national and international bodies, scientific organizations and industrial groups which for the most part would be non-governmental in nature. The management and direction of the programme would be entrusted to a group of leading figures from the main branches of science and the professions as well as the from the world’s large regional groups and the main organizations concerned.

New policies

As regards policies to be adapted at the international level, international agreements on compensation for ecological damage must be drawn up (UNESCO), or a charter proposing new rules of conduct between nations (including, for example, an obligation to inform and warn neighbouring countries in the event of accidents/incidents that could have harmful consequences for those countries’ environments; Brundtland).

Moreover, governments should draw up a “foreign policy for the environment” (Brundtland).

Common goods

Particular attention is paid to the so-called “global commons” (the oceans, space, Antarctica, biodiversity). The RIO report calls for a Confederation of international bodies responsible for the different aspects of use of the oceans in order to guarantee a fair division and access to

international oceanic waters. The report goes as far as to declare that the whole of the earth's resources (energy, mineral and so on) should be considered as part of humanity's common heritage.

According to the Brundtland Commission, all the world's nations should ratify the maritime rights treaty. Fishing agreements should be reinforced in order to avoid over-fishing, just as the application of international conventions regulating and controlling the discharge of dangerous waste into the sea must also be reinforced.

Finally, governments should examine the possibility of jointly adopting a "species conservation convention" which would also confirm the principle of "universal resources" (Brundtland).

The income generated by the use of international common goods (deep sea fishing, for example, or maritime transport, the wealth of mineral resources on the ocean bed, under the Antarctic, or the rights to shared use of geo-stationary satellites) could be used to finance international actions promoting sustainable development (Brundtland).

Conclusion

It would be very interesting to take each of these proposals, or the most concrete in any case, which have been implemented, in part or in whole, since the reports were first published in the 1970s and 1980s.

Without wanting to go into such detail (indeed, being unable to do so), there are some clear examples of implementation or progress in the management of global issues which we can hold up. Among the most noteworthy, we can cite the creation of UNEP in the wake of the Stockholm Earth Summit and in the stir caused by the first report to the Club of Rome; the 1987 Montreal Protocol on the reduction of CFC emissions, followed by the Kyoto Protocol which came into force in 2005 and aimed at eliminating CO₂ emissions.

Existing institutions were reformed in keeping with some of the guidelines set out in a number of the reports: for example, the World Bank now takes environmental issues into consideration in the projects it finances, as well as social problems. The EU has developed a significant degree of cooperation on environmental matters, but the same cannot be said for other regional organizations.

A number of the proposals made in the reports are central to current debate and may even lead to concrete results in the near future. This is the case for the elimination of agricultural subsidies in the North and, more generally, of the idea of improved regulation of world trade (the idea behind the creation of the WTO). Another example is the creation of a global tax,

levied on, for example, financial transactions (the Tobin tax), taxes on pollution or air transport (such a tax was applied in France from mid-2006) in order to protect common goods or to finance development.

It is difficult to say whether these examples of progress can be attributed to this or that report, or if they would have occurred regardless of the contribution from these prospective studies. There is no question that the studies did help place certain issues firmly on the international political agenda and to raise public awareness of the matters. It would not be an exaggeration to say that credit for the highly successful expression “sustainable development” goes entirely to the Brundtland report.

It is also well worth comparing the list of challenges identified in the corpus of reports that we studied with the list of Millennium Goals.¹ It is immediately obvious that a number of the issues are still all too topical, such as population growth (despite the fall in the birth rate in poor countries and improved life expectancy, this issue remains a worry for the future); food and water are still not universally available in sufficient quantities and of sufficient quality; with the end of cheap oil, energy is once more a primary concern; the economic inequalities that persist between, and within, countries nations are increasingly decried ...

But since the first report to the Club of Rome, a number of new issues have emerged or have been consolidated: globalization, AIDS, new information and communication technology, the digital divide, global warming ...

It would seem that the time is ripe for a return to those ambitious prospective studies that involved whole teams and took years of research as well as large sums of money. Prospective studies have become more sector-based. They no longer attempt to forecast the state of the world in 20 or 50 years time, or cover every aspect (social, ecological, economic). There are also fewer debates like those that followed the publication of *Limits to Growth*.

On the other, there are many more local initiatives, and grassroots progress. “Fair trade” is gaining ground as part of the effort to improve “trading conditions”, to use the expression from the 1970s.

We have perhaps embarked on a less ideological but more pragmatic age – perhaps that’s something we should celebrate.

¹ ANNAN Kofi. *We, the Peoples. The role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*. New York : United Nations, 2000, 80 p.