

Where We Are Winning - Where We Are Losing: Futurologists Publish Annual Report on Major World Problems and Opportunities State of the Future Report- United Nations

Can civilization implement solutions fast enough to keep ahead of the looming challenges? The Millennium Project, a global independent think tank of futurologists, and thought leaders, today published its 14th report on global perspectives in Germany and around the world. Until two years ago the report showed a positive trend in the so-called "State of the Future Index" (SOFI). Triggered by the financial and economic crises and the failure of the climate conference in Copenhagen, the current SOFI shows that the prospects of success in solving some major global challenges have become somewhat clouded.

What the authors see as lacking the most, according to Jerome Glenn, Director of the Millennium Project, are a series of serious global strategies to be implemented by governments, companies, NGOs, UN institutions and other international bodies." The world is in a race between implementing ever-increasing ways to improve the human condition and the seemingly ever-increasing complexity and scale of global problems. After 14 years of research into the future within the framework of the Millennium Project it is increasingly clear that the world has the necessary capacity to cope with its problems. However, it remains unclear whether humankind will make the right decisions on the scale necessary to meet the global challenges appropriately", said Glenn.

Among the regular sections in the ninety page 'State of the Future' report are the annually updated analyses of the fifteen key global challenges, as well as the publication of the State of the Future Index (SOFI). The index identifies areas in which there has been either an improvement or deterioration during the past 20 years and creates projections for these scenarios over the coming decade. All relevant and recognised studies by the UN or World Bank are distilled as part of these projections.

Individual Results of the State of the Future Index

Where We Are Winning

Although poverty forecasts remain high they are far lower than several years ago. According to current estimates by the World Bank the number of people living on less than 1.25 USD per day will amount to approximately 1 billion in 2015 and 826 million in 2020. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010 currently puts that figure at around 1.4 billion people.

The infant mortality rate is expected to have declined by two thirds between 2000 and 2015. Despite steady population growth, 30% fewer children under five years of age died in 2008 than in 1990. UNICEF vaccinations are now reaching 55% of children worldwide and global health care partnerships have improved.

The 2010 Peace Index clearly shows that the risk of war in most world regions has decreased, although violent crime is on the rise. Most of humanity lives in peace, yet half the world's countries remain vulnerable to social crises and violence. In 2010 there were fourteen conflicts with 1,000 or more victims; five in Africa, three in Asia, two in America and three in the Middle East, whereby one conflict, the fight against Al Qaeda, fell into the "worldwide anti-extremism" category. In mid-2009 there were fifteen conflicts.

Since 1990 1.3 billion people have gained access to cleaner drinking water and 500 million more have access to sanitation facilities; however, 900 million people still lack clean drinking water and 2.6 billion have no adequate sanitation.

There are around 6.9 billion people in the world today. If current trends continue, the world's population will increase to around 9 billion by 2050. The good news is: The rate of population growth is declining. According to an estimate by the United Nations, had fertility rates remained unchanged since the late

1990s, the world population would have grown to more than 11 billion. While developing countries benefit from slower growth, a further drop in fertility rates represents a problem for ageing and shrinking industrial nations.

Women make up around 40% of the working population worldwide, but receive less than 25% of total pay. However, they control more than 70% of global consumer spending. Between 2000 and 2010 the proportion of women in national parliaments increased from 13.8% to 18.9%.

Currently, almost 30% of people have access to the Internet and within five years it is expected to be about 50% - including via mobile devices. It can be expected that within a few years it will be possible for everyone to have access to the Internet. The speed of development depends, among other things, on advances in mobile technology and its dissemination.

The worldwide life expectancy at birth is currently 68 years. The World Bank estimates that it could be extended, for example, through better medical care, better nutrition and fewer armed conflicts.

Where We Are Losing

Based on figures in the annual "Corruption Perceptions Index" (CPI) from Transparency International the SOFI's prognosis is of a worldwide increase in corruption. Estimates from the World Bank put the total value of annual worldwide bribes being paid at one billion USD. Governments can be seen as a chain of decision points where some people in these positions are susceptible to very high bribes. Decisions may be being bought and sold, just like heroin, and thus democracy becomes an illusion.

Between 1970 and 2000 the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere increased each year by 1.5 ppm and since then it has grown by 2.1 ppm per year. Developed and developing countries, which are responsible for more than 80% of global greenhouse gases, committed themselves to reducing their emissions for the first time in an agreement made during the UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen. The focus of the agreement was international cooperation to limit CO₂ emissions in order to limit the rise in average global temperature to 2°C by 2100. Scientists have pointed out, however, that these commitments are not sufficient to limit the CO₂ concentration to less than 450 ppm.

The current changes in weather conditions were not expected before 2020. Some of the worst assumptions have already become a reality. Hazardous feedback could accelerate climate change, for example, the melting of the Arctic leading to less light being reflected, which, in turn, increases heat absorption and causes melting at a higher rate.

According to the IMF the world economy shrank by 0.6% in 2009, the percapita income fell by about 2% to 10,500 USD, unemployment rose to 9% worldwide.

"Although some variables suggest positive development this should not lead to passivity. It simply shows that some of the action being taken has had a positive impact and we now have to show further engagement in order to meet the complexity and diversity of global challenges", said futurist Cornelia Daheim, the representative of the Millennium Project in Germany.

Other chapters in this year's report deal with Collective Intelligence, environmental security, Latin America 2030 and a survey of the key issues and research gaps in global future research. More than 7,000 pages of detailed information can be found on the CD which accompanies the report.

About the Millennium Project

The Millennium Project is a global think tank founded in 1996 that connects international experts in corporations, universities, NGOs, UN agencies and governments via 35 Nodes around the world in a participatory process and that explores how to build a better future.

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