

A change of course

How to
build a fair
future in a
1.5° world



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How to build a fair future in a 1.5° world

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At the tipping point

The climate crisis is posing an old question with increasing urgency: What kind of world do we want? One that respects the basic needs and desires of all people for a good life in a healthy environment? One in which fair rules ensure social justice and prevent individual interests from becoming detrimental to the common good? One in which democratic involvement and social participation are possible? And one that offers all this to our children and their descendants on every continent?

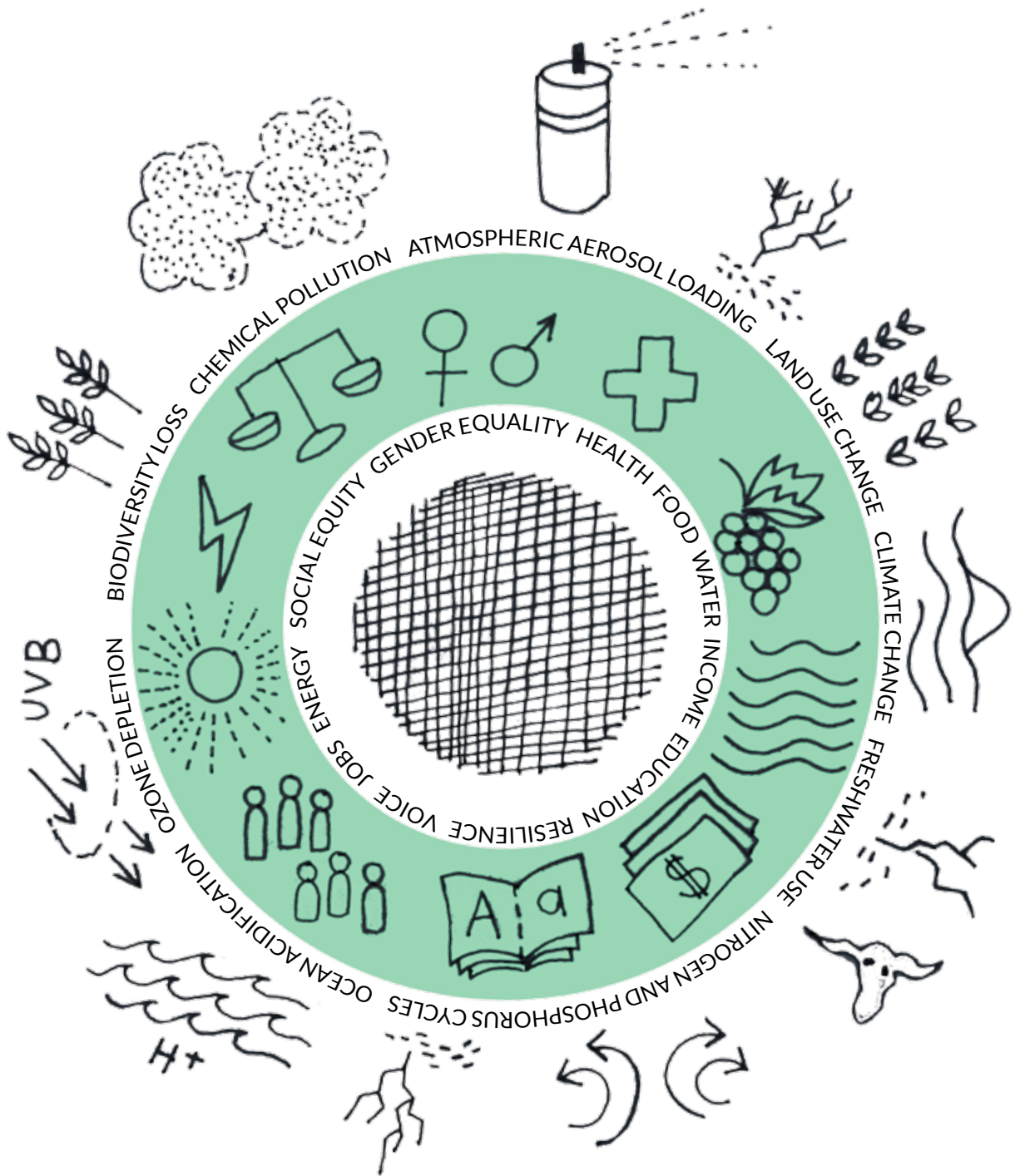
Instead of coming closer to this type of world, we are constantly moving further away from it. People drown in floods triggered by extreme rainfall. Typhoons destroy their homes. Droughts force hundreds of thousands to abandon their parched fields for urban slums, and millions will lose their homes to rising sea levels. All these things are happening now and their frequency will increase dramatically (p. 4/5) if we do not address climate change before its momentum becomes unstoppable.

Is it utopian to push for a good life for all in the face of the climate crisis? Perhaps. Yet it is no less realistic than the utopia of infinite growth on a finite planet. Numerous practical examples show how we can realize a sustainable and habitable world for all – from decentralized renewable energy generation to proven concepts for sustainable forest management (p. 21), ideas for modern mobility (p. 15) and ecologically sound food production (p. 19). The one thing they have in common is that they show us how we can live a good life, work and do business – within the planet's limits. And how we can do so without trampling human rights and democracy and subjecting millions to marginalization and lives of poverty.

The urgency with which we need to address social, environmental and democratic issues alike becomes terribly clear when we take stock of our current situation: Since 1970, the lifestyle and consumption habits of the global middle class have led to the extinction of half of all vertebrate species. A quarter of all global soils are degraded. Unprecedented coral bleaching is taking place in the increasingly acidic oceans. More than one billion people lack access to clean water. The gap between the rich and poor has widened to the point that the 62 richest people have now amassed as much wealth as the 3.6 billion of the poorer half of humanity combined. Of the 16 warmest years on record since 1881, 15 have been in the new millennium. Worldwide, the number of weather-related natural disasters has increased. Between 1970 and 2012, nearly two million people lost their lives as a result.

Can the climate crisis be stopped by even more markets – albeit “green” ones and those for greenhouse gas emissions? Can economies and political systems that are geared toward growth deliver effective answers for setting absolute limits on resource and energy consumption? Can we still afford to put all of our hopes into technological solutions to resolve the numerous social and environmental crises of our time in one fell swoop? (p. 8)

Graphic inspired by Kate Raworth's doughnut of social and planetary boundaries. See <http://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>



From 2 degrees to 1.5 degrees: no half-measures

Cheers broke out in the Le Bourget conference center on the evening of December 12, 2015, when French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius brought down the gavel and declared the Paris Agreement to have been adopted. Climate diplomats and senior negotiators who normally maintain a polite distance fell into each other's arms. Policymakers and heads of state who otherwise keep a tight rein on their emotions shed tears of joy. Years of preparations, two weeks of stressful summitry and a nail-biting finale lay behind the negotiators.

It was time for grand words: The Paris Agreement that conference president Fabius concluded with his gavel was an "historical breakthrough," a "turning point," a "peaceful revolution" and "a victory for all of the planet and for future generations." Indeed, the agreement far exceeded even the expectations of optimists. Humanity now declares that it will not permit warming to exceed 2°C. The new limit is "well below" 2°C – ideally only 1.5°C. The world is supposed to be "climate neutral" by the second half of the century.

The Paris Agreement – an unequivocal call to action

The new 1.5°C limit is an unequivocal call to action: More needs to be done at once to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, as all 196 member states of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have recognized. Small island states and other countries that are particularly vulnerable to climate change will no longer be fobbed off with fine words and a shrug.

Strictly speaking, however, the international community is only following through on its own promises. For more than 20 years, the UNFCCC has been clear and straightforward about what a climate agreement should achieve: food and water security, as well as the prevention of ecosystem disruptions that could jeopardize these two goals.

Studies have shown with increasing clarity that this cannot be achieved with a 2°C limit. With an increase of this magnitude, no one would seriously be able to guarantee universal access to even the most basic human needs – food and water – any longer. Should it be possible to limit global warming to 1.5°C, the risks would decrease considerably, however.

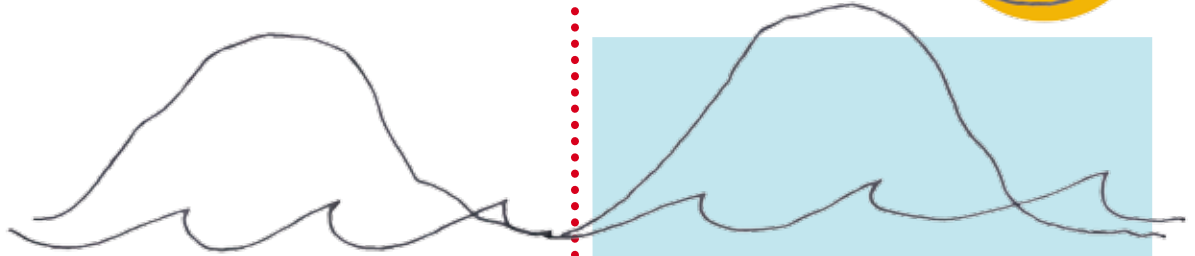
In tropical regions – or even the Mediterranean – crop failures for key staple foods would then amount to "only" 10 percent, instead of at least 20 percent. The prolongation of heat waves will be less pronounced. Sea level rise would be reduced by an estimated 10 centimeters. Marine researchers have long warned that the oceans would not be able to handle more than 1.5°C of warming. The oceans absorb most of the sun's energy, as well as 24 million tons of CO₂ – every day. Acidification is disturbing the balance of marine ecosystems and is a further existential threat to overexploited global fish stocks. Security experts and military strategists are also warning against unchecked climate change. Droughts, crop failures and water shortages exacerbate the potential for conflict in many regions of the world. For the climate, 1.5 versus 2.0°C does indeed make a world of difference.

A major political goal is more easy to proclaim than bring to life, however. Based on the national climate plans that have been submitted to the UN by the signatories of the new agreement, the world is still heading for 3.0°C of warming.

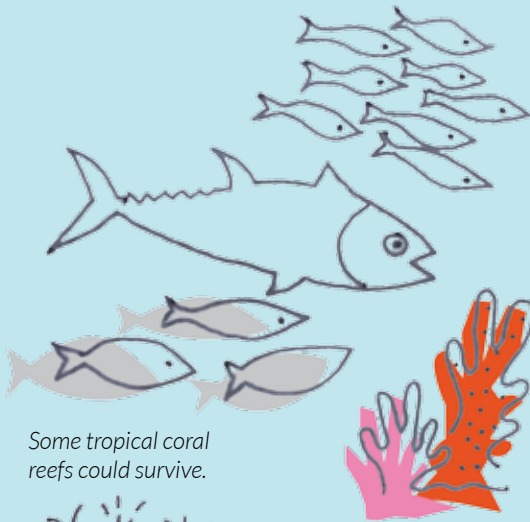
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1.5°

<



Sea level rise of 40
centimeters by 2100



Some tropical coral
reefs could survive.

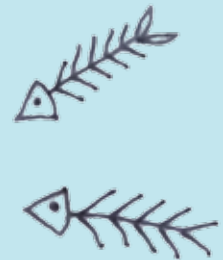


In the Mediterranean,
availability of fresh
water would be
reduced by 10
percent

Sea level rise of 50
centimeters by 2100



All tropical coral reefs
would be at risk



In the Mediterranean,
availability of fresh water
would be reduced by 20
percent



In tropical regions and the
Mediterranean, 20 per-
cent of crops would fail

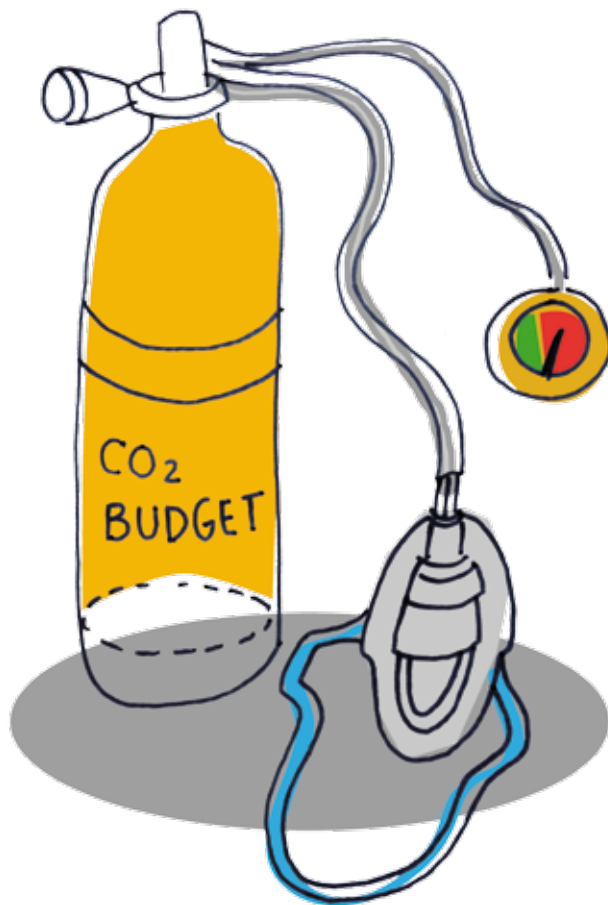


The overdraft mentality

It was a desperate attempt to make policymakers aware of the urgency of climate protection. Climate scientists figured that if there is one thing politicians can do, it is juggling budgets – and thus they introduced carbon budgets in 2009. The underlying idea was to calculate the maximum amount of greenhouse gases that humanity can still emit. As of 2016, the limit needed to ensure a 60 percent chance of keeping global warming below 1.5°C was 200 billion tons of carbon. If all currently planned coal-fired power plants (p. 17) are actually built and operated over their normal service life of 40 years, they alone would emit around 300 billion tons of CO₂.

There is a catch to the logic of budgets, however: The budgets that policymakers normally work with can be exceeded from time to time, and they therefore expect the atmosphere to grant us an overdraft as well. The world is under tremendous pressure to pursue this idea, as we will have exhausted the CO₂ budget dictated by the 1.5°C limit by the year 2021 if we keep emitting at our present rate.

The current proposal is to rely on risky technologies to pay back that overdraft in the distant future. One such idea would be to grow biomass on a grand scale and burn it, while capturing the millions of tons of CO₂ thus released and storing it underground. To date, however, this “bioenergy with carbon capture and storage” (BECCS) technology only works on paper; it would also entail devastating ecological and social consequences (p. 10). All ideas for negative emissions technologies have a critical flaw: The perspective of an “atmospheric overdraft” reduces the pressure to dramatically reduce carbon emissions in the here and now. An idea that could at best serve as Plan B is thus well on its way to upstage Plan A – a fundamentally different economy that would keep the planet habitable for all.



Fair play – not just on the football pitch

The countries of the Global North are largely responsible for climate change with their fossil-fueled development and their growing predilection for sports cars, air travel, steaks and power-hungry electronics. However, the consequences of this development – which on a positive note boosted millions of people into the middle class – are being felt especially strongly by the Global South, which has far fewer financial and technical resources to adapt to increasing droughts, storms and floods.

The Paris Agreement (p. 4) only reflects this to a limited degree. Each state is free to define how aggressively it wants to reduce emissions. This is unjust, however: A country's fair share of the global climate protection burden depends on its past emissions and its financial resources. Seen in this light, the climate targets reported by many developing countries are actually stronger than those of the industrialized countries.

Individual countries should not be allowed to decide for themselves what constitutes equitable climate protection – climate justice must be the fundamental principle of climate policy and the benchmark for the initial evaluation of national climate plans of all countries in 2018. This includes requiring greater contributions toward climate protection from historically responsible countries, as well as ensuring that they support poor countries adequately. Those who do not act, reinforce the injustice. The international community must push for climate justice in implementing the plans. Furthermore, climate protection measures must be ecologically sound and socially just while being compatible with fundamental democratic principles.

CO₂ EMISSIONS

USA

per capita 2013: **17 tonnes**
% of global historical emissions since 1850: **29%**



GERMANY

per capita 2013: **9 tonnes**
% of global historical emissions since 1850: **7%**



INDIA

per capita 2013: **1.4 tonnes**
% of global historical emissions since 1850: **2.5%**



We are on the wrong track

More than one billion cars currently exist on our planet, and tens of millions of new ones are produced every year. Global meat production has quadrupled in the past 50 years and continues to rise. The volume of international air traffic is growing rapidly. And even after the signing of the Paris Agreement, more than 1,400 gigawatts (GW) of new coal plant capacity is under construction – or planned – worldwide, and many corporations have been granted new oil-drilling permits. Although the expansion of the renewable energy sector is proceeding, and the global appetite for energy is growing more slowly than before, it is still growing nonetheless, even though it needs to decrease dramatically. A radical turnaround is needed in dealing with the climate crisis, and yet, wherever you look, it is business as usual. The feel-good rhetoric of the “green economy” that promises steady growth with increasingly intelligent green technologies is not helping. The

reliance on emissions trading (p. 16) and offsetting (p. 14) is an attempt to make climate protection and ecosystem conservation comply with the market economy. And an increasing number of hands are grasping at the straws of negative emissions technologies (p. 10), as the remaining emissions budget melts away rapidly under business-as-usual conditions (p. 6).

In this case, the technocratic paradigm – the one-dimensional belief that technology and economic activity can solve all problems – is part of the problem: It does not know how to address the fact that we have millions of more fuel-efficient cars and drive billions of additional kilometers in them. It ignores the influence of powerful lobbies that benefit greatly from perpetuating business-as-usual. Our faith in technology is encouraging us to make the highly risky wager that we can fix the world's climate system by using BECCS (p. 10). Furthermore, CO₂ cannot serve as a suitable universal currency for sustainable action, as it establishes a global zero-sum game in which the Global North can buy its way out of its responsibility to take action, while weighing the rights of indigenous peoples against ton-nages of CO₂.



The way to go

The good ideas – as opposed to offsetting, emissions trading and negative emissions technologies – are anything but new: The surest way to slow the climate catastrophe is to begin the fastest possible exit from coal, oil and gas. Sound policy could help us advance swiftly to the day where solar power, wind and other renewable sources provide 100 percent of the energy we need to heat our homes, run our machines and move us from Point A to B. Bicycle-friendly cities with efficient public transportation systems testify to the quality of life our residential environments could offer with a fundamental change in transportation policy. The small farms worldwide that deliver 70 percent of all food products with only 30 percent of agricultural resources prove that the planet can feed us without the massive use of fertilizers and pesticides. Forest conservation is successful wherever corruption is combatted effectively, and local people can reach a consensus on forest use. Change becomes possible wherever the lobbyists of fossil fuel corporations, agricultural giants and the automotive industry no longer have access to politicians and decision-makers. We are on the right track whenever we recognize that the goal is not just the ever-more-efficient production of the same quantities, but greater sufficiency – that is, less production and consumption.

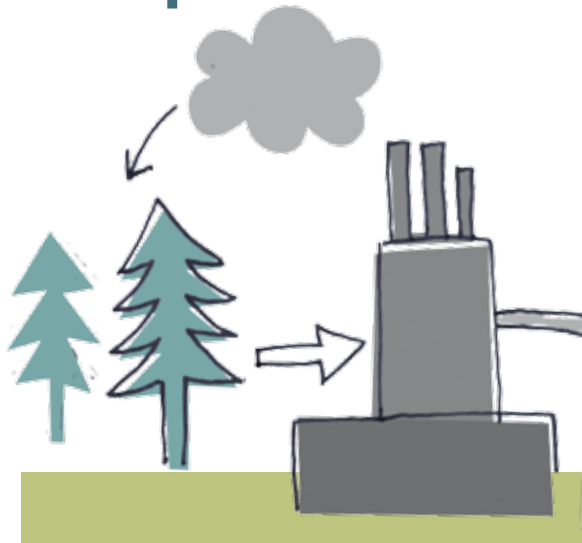
These are the feasible concepts that we must advance significantly over the next five to ten years

– not as a global master plan, but in numerous regionally adapted varieties. They make climate protection a reliable goal without negatively impacting ecosystems, social issues and democratic participation.

A key element in all of this is the question: Will we succeed quickly enough? Will we drastically curb the burning of fossil fuels and ban internal combustion engines from the roads in the very near future? Will we manage a sufficiently fundamental transformation of industrial agriculture and stop the rampant exploitation of our forests? The alternatives are available. We need to implement them – swiftly and globally.



BECCS – a mirage with bold promises



i **Idea:** By themselves, neither the large-scale and problematic use of bioenergy, nor the controversial carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology work. However, the combination of both methods gives rise to one of the seemingly most promising current technologies: BECCS is intended to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, thus giving us greater leeway in our remaining budget for dealing with climate-damaging carbon emissions (p. 6). The technology involves burning biomass in power plants, capturing the emitted CO₂ and storing it underground. So far, BECCS only exists on paper. It remains to be seen whether the technology will ever be ready for use on a large scale. So far, it has only been used on a small scale in the fermentation of biomass to ethanol.

CO₂ **Climate effects:** Although untested, expectations of the technology are immense. The cultivation of biomass, however, also has a climate impact: It is virtually impossible to

use biomass as a “carbon-neutral” source of energy. Its large-scale cultivation and transport already consumes a lot of energy, while industrial agricultural methods result in the release of CO₂ from the soil (p. 18). In addition, the process itself requires a great deal of energy. And whether the CO₂ will actually remain in the ground for good is more than uncertain. Nevertheless, most scenarios used in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that limit global warming to less than 2°C rely on the “negative emissions” that BECCS technology will supposedly provide. Mainstream climate science does not offer any paths that would meet the 1.5°C limit without BECCS.



Ecological impact: Keeping global warming below 2°C with BECCS would require about 500 million hectares of land – one and a half times the area of India. The vast monocultures using massive quantities of pesticides and fertilizers would reduce biodiversity further while contaminating groundwater and degrading the soil. An additional danger is that escaping CO₂ could lead to an acidification of the ground water.

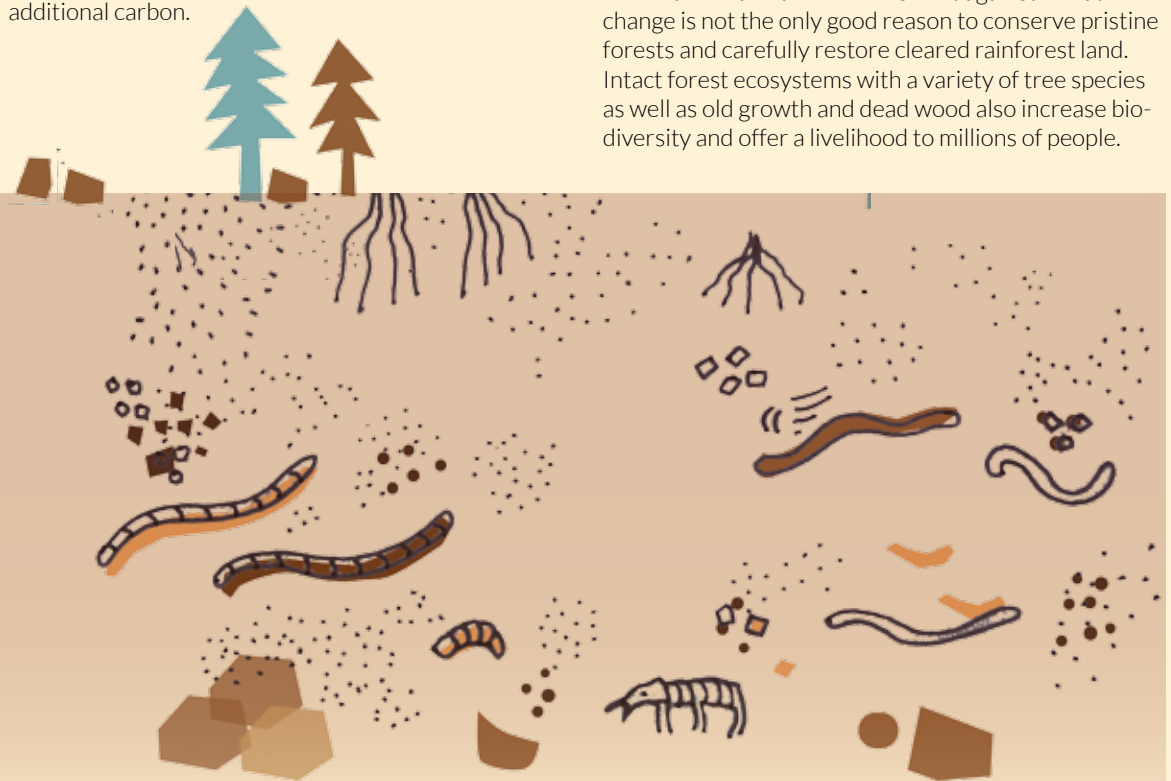


Social impact: Farmland that people rely

on for their livelihoods and ecosystems worthy of protection would be sacrificed for the gigantic BECCS plantations. Land conflicts would ensue. The consequences of today's land-grabbing illustrate how this would impoverish people, stoke violence and destroy communities.

It's all in the soil!

Proven and rediscovered cultivation methods are a sound alternative to relying on the latest technologies with uncertain outcomes and high risks. Organic farming (p. 19), with longer and more diverse crop rotations, helps build organic matter to nourish the natural microorganisms in the soil and improve soil quality. This reduces emissions from agriculture, as the organic carbon stored in soils is the planet's second-largest carbon reservoir after the oceans. Human activity – the selection of plants, the type of fertilization and the methods by which the soil is tilled – directly influences how much carbon is bound or released. Studies show that with the correct cultivation methods, soils can even store additional carbon.



Living wetlands

In recent decades, numerous wetlands have been drained to obtain additional arable land for agriculture. A great deal of CO₂ is released in the process. Restoring wetlands causes the emissions to fall again – and the unique habitats can help ensure the survival of endangered plant and animal species.

Vital forests

The fact that intact forests (p. 20) store considerably more carbon and are more resilient against climate change is not the only good reason to conserve pristine forests and carefully restore cleared rainforest land. Intact forest ecosystems with a variety of tree species as well as old growth and dead wood also increase biodiversity and offer a livelihood to millions of people.

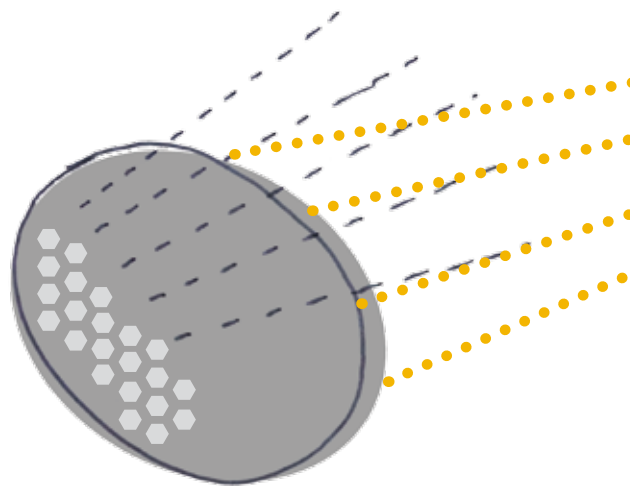
Geoengineering – treating symptoms and causing side effects



Idea: So much CO₂, methane and other gases are being pumped into the atmosphere and oceans that the Earth is being transformed into an ever-hotter greenhouse. The more evident humans' reluctance to radically cut their emissions becomes, the greater the temptation for some to fix the problem with technological interventions. In the logic of the technocratic paradigm, this would be just another technological wonder devised by the engineering mind – like rockets flying to the moon, supersonic aircraft and refrigerators that take care of the shopping. The idea of actively controlling the climate is known as “geoengineering.” Broadly speaking, there are two approaches. **Solar radiation management** would use giant mirrors in orbit or inject sulfate aerosols into the atmosphere to simulate the effect of a volcanic eruption. **Carbon dioxide removal (CDR)** aims to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere through CCS or bioenergy CCS, or by fertilizing the oceans with iron to stimulate the growth of phytoplankton to absorb more CO₂. Urea could also be used as an alternative to iron.



Climate effects: Technologies such as sulfate aerosol injection could essentially “freeze” global warming – but with huge, virtually unpredictable regional differences. Some countries would benefit from the intervention, whereas others would experience more heat and droughts. Overall, worldwide rainfall patterns would change strongly and often decrease – bad news for global food security.



Ecological impact: Already in 2010, the member states of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity agreed on a moratorium. The reason: Geoengineering cannot be reconciled with the conservation of ecosystems.



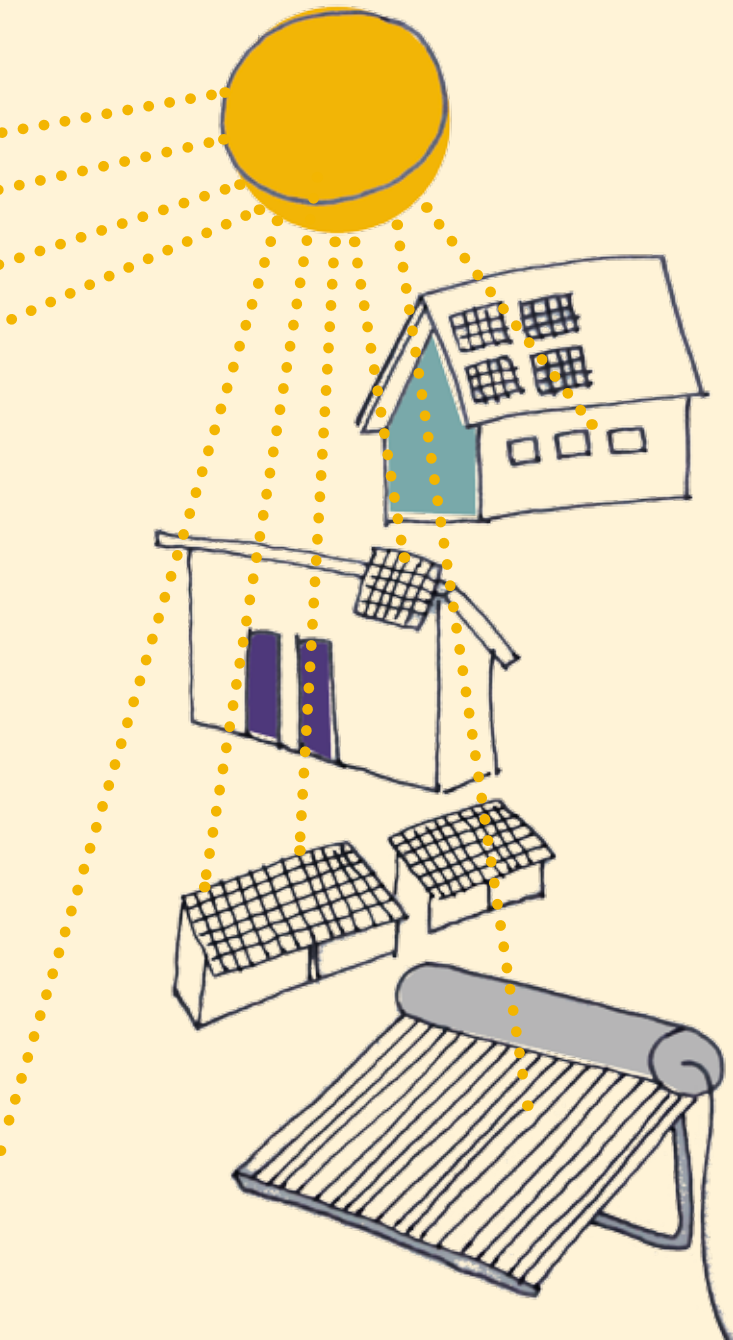
Social impact: Geoengineering would dramatically change the face of the planet – and thus raise the question of who has the authority to make such far-reaching decisions with largely unknown outcomes for the entire world population. This also holds true for less invasive technologies such as bioenergy CCS ([p. 10](#)). To remove enough CO₂ from the atmosphere, a large share of the world's arable land would have to be dedicated to this purpose. No one can say how it would then be possible to feed a projected population of nine billion in 2050.

Radical emission reductions!

Instead of relying on risky large-scale technologies and their hardly foreseeable consequences, the climate problem could simply be dealt with at the root – by drastically reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. The burning of fossil fuels causes two-thirds of global emissions, so it is crucial that we phase out coal, oil and gas completely. The multibillion-dollar subsidies that are still fattening the fossil-fuel companies could then be dispensed with – and the funds could instead go toward education, health care, social security systems or providing a social safety net for those impacted by the transformation of energy systems. If countries such as Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United States were to scale back their huge subsidies, this would already lead to a reduction of their emissions by more than 10 percent over the next four to five years.

Renewable energies are taking the place of fossil fuels. Their expansion must be accelerated and promoted using laws such as Germany's Renewable Energy Act (EEG). Technically, it is already feasible to supply many industrialized countries with 100 percent renewable energy – at least with regard to electricity. For total energy – including heating and transportation – the year 2050 would be realistic. In terms of global investment in new electricity generation, renewables have already outstripped fossil fuels.

However, around 1,500 new coal plants are still under construction or on the drawing board. If they were to become operational, they alone would account for more CO₂ emissions than the carbon budget would allow for under the 1.5°C limit. The number of plans for new plants is at least now declining. In the first half of 2016, the generating capacity currently in the pipeline for the number-one climate killer dropped from 1,090 to 932 GW. Perhaps the Paris climate summit is already having an effect.



Carbon offsetting: the zero-sum game



Idea: In principle, it does not matter for the planet's climate where greenhouse gases are emitted or reduced. You could therefore fly from Berlin to Munich and undo the damage inflicted on the climate by planting trees in South America – a case of carbon offsetting. The idea, which has its roots in the Kyoto Protocol, envisages industrialized countries initially cutting emissions where it is cheapest to do so. And if that is not the case in Germany, France or Britain, then cutting emissions in Uganda, Chile or India on behalf of the paying party is quite acceptable. A huge market has since sprung up in which companies or private individuals can voluntarily offset their flights, bus trips or events.



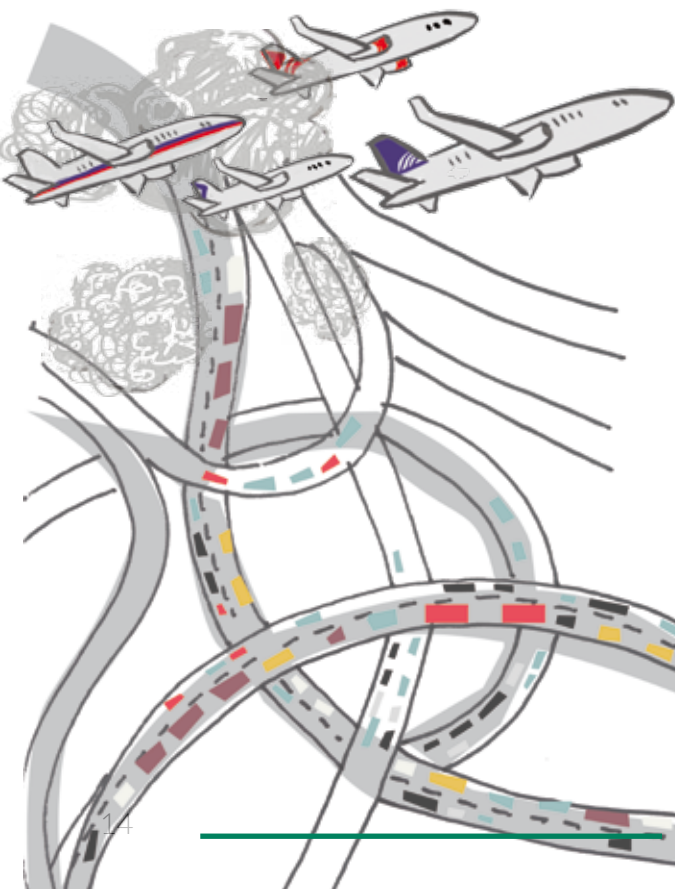
Climate effects: Carbon offsetting is not about preventing CO₂ emissions. Offsetting the emissions of fossil-fueled cars or aircraft does nothing to change the root of the problem – pollution from transportation. In addition, it is often difficult to document that a climate protection project has resulted in additional savings of CO₂, and if so, to what extent. Moreover, offsetting narrows the perspective of the climate debate, which mainly revolves around CO₂ and sees other greenhouse gases in terms of CO₂ equivalents. Although this may work for cars, which emit CO₂, it falls short for agriculture – its methane and nitrous oxide emissions relate to completely different biological and physical cycles. Carbon offsetting does not take this into account.



Ecological issues: CO₂ is not the only pollutant emerging from tailpipes and smokestacks. Particulate matter hazardous to the environment and health continues to have a local impact. Moreover, not every type of offsetting is sustainable: Afforestation, for example, is mostly realized in the form of plantations, not by restoring healthy ecosystems.



Social/justice issues: A sprawling array of companies are offering to organize carbon offsets, either by running their own projects or by purchasing allowances from other providers. Although a hodgepodge of standards have been established privately to ensure reputability, a number of deep-black sheep have been uncovered on both the compulsory and voluntary markets.



A course change instead of creative accounting

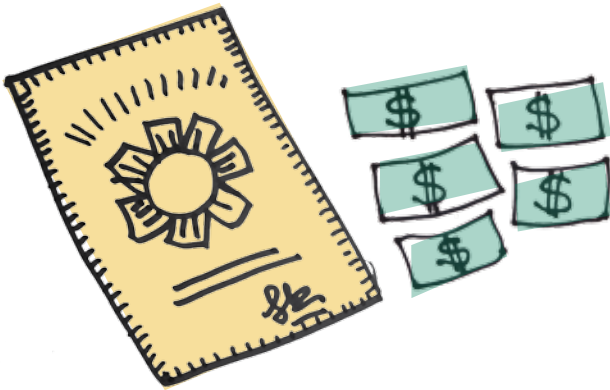
It is time to set aside the calculators and abacuses and simply get started with the transformation! In many cases, the course of action has long been known. Take the transportation sector: The dream of owning a car – and the freedom and independence it promises to each and every person – has been obsolete for some time. What is needed is a new transportation system focused mainly on rail transportation, phasing out the internal combustion engine and avoiding traffic. Buses could be deployed in areas where the expansion of railways is not feasible – in rural areas or megacities, for example. Car sharing or bicycles are suitable options for covering the last mile from the last stop to the final destination. Transportation systems must mesh tightly to ensure convenience and flexibility for users.

“Dieselgate” has shown that we cannot rely on the automotive industry to be even remotely as interested in the climate as in its sales figures. Policymakers must radically change course and make climate-friendly transportation attractive. Available measures include strengthening public transportation, encouraging the use of railways for freight traffic, building bike paths and subsidizing delivery bicycles. Intelligent action could reduce transportation-related emissions in Germany, for example, by 95 percent by 2050.

A transportation revolution need not fail due to lack of funding. In Germany, for example, it could be financed through levies on climate-damaging fuels, taxing company cars and raising the vehicle tax. In other countries, phasing out fossil fuel subsidies can free up public funds. India is already taxing luxury cars and SUVs. A transportation revolution is urgently needed – for the climate, and to ensure that long-suffering city dwellers can finally breathe easily.



A license to pollute



Idea: Gently motivating business to protect the climate without harming the economy:

That was the idea behind the introduction of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme in 2005. To ensure that emissions-intensive industries such as coal-fired power plants or aluminum smelters do not have to shut down overnight, emissions are subject to gradually decreasing legal caps. The technological transformation is thus supposed to be realized in a “market-based and cost-effective” manner. Utility companies and the manufacturing industry are allocated mostly free allowances based on tons of CO₂ equivalent. Trading in allowances is intended to promote climate protection where it is most cost-effective. More than 15 countries and regions have introduced emissions trading, including California, New Zealand, Japan and seven Chinese provinces.



Climate effects: The incentive effect of European emissions trading is marginal due to the drop in prices – CO₂ allowances that

once traded for €30 have declined to junk status, with prices in the single digits. A high CO₂ price was intended to make coal power and aluminum production more costly in order to promote climate-friendly technolo-

gies. Yet, the opposite happened: A glut of generation capacity has caused the market price of electricity to drop. Coal is cheap, and so gas plants are shut down first. This is a declaration of bankruptcy for climate protection and a terrible development for the electricity market, which relies on highly flexible gas plants to complement the increasing share of renewables. Despite its lack of incentive effect, emissions trading is set to remain the EU’s central climate protection instrument after 2020. As a consequence of the Paris Agreement, climate protection certificates (“mitigation outcomes”) could soon be traded globally – opening a whole new dimension of worldwide offsetting. (p. 14)



Ecological impact: Emissions trading in the EU currently covers around 45 percent of European emissions. Although intra-Europe-

an air traffic was included in 2012, major sectors such as agriculture and road traffic have still not been taken into account. Energy-intensive materials such as aluminum are still inexpensive and are being mass-produced despite the high energy consumption this entails. At the same time, airports are being expanded throughout Europe – to the detriment of the local populations and ecosystems.



Social impact: Instead of raising the price of fossil fuels and making polluters pay, the opposite has happened: Many large companies

have made good money in emissions trading. Businesses have made more than €24 billion in profits with the trading system. German industry alone pocketed €4.5 billion. The alleged costs of trading were often directly passed on to end-customers and consumers.

Coal phase-out legislation with a clear time frame

How can we ensure that the most damaging fuel for the climate – coal – is not still being burned on a grand scale 10, 20 or 30 years from now? Coal is responsible for more than a quarter of total annual greenhouse gas emissions. Coal mining displaces people, contaminates water and pollutes the air breathed by millions of people the world over with particulate matter and mercury. Instead of hoping that a poorly controllable market in allowances will make coal power and heat expensive and unattractive in time, we need a legal framework to enforce the fastest possible coal phase-out. Industrialized countries – above all Germany, as the world's largest lignite mining country – must lead the way.

For countries where coal is mined or burned, this means that certainty is needed about when individual coal power plants will be taken off the grid and coal mines closed forever. This could be realized by legislation setting maximum operating periods for existing power plants that would be compatible with the 1.5°C limit. Or it could establish minimum efficiency levels that would force the closure of old power plants in the coming years, or establish emissions ceilings for individual power plants. An immediate moratorium on all new coal mines would be a useful measure. In Germany, the end of coal power over the next 20 years must be regulated by law.

To have a realistic chance of staying within the 1.5°C limit, phasing out coal must be at the top of the list of the most urgent climate protection measures. It would eliminate one-quarter of all global greenhouse gas emissions in a very short time. With concepts for a just transition and democratically developed ideas for the structural change, we can ensure that this does not work to the detriment of the weakest.



Climate-smart agriculture: the hijacked idea



Idea: For years, a number of industrialized nations and biotech corporations have been pushing to include agriculture in emissions trading (p. 16). By purchasing CO₂ allowances, companies would be able to keep their calculated net emissions low, as many soils have significant carbon storage potential. The IPCC estimates the worldwide carbon-sink potential of soils to be around 6 billion tons of CO₂ equivalent.

The agricultural industry and developed countries have managed to reinterpret the original concept of climate-smart agriculture, developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). When the FAO introduced the approach in 2010, it was about a variety of – mostly sustainable – agriculture and forestry measures for adapting to climate change and preventing emissions. Thanks to intense lobbying, the massive use of fertilizers and herbicides as well as genetically engineered seed and industrial meat production have been deemed “climate-smart” as well – with the aim of creating new markets for fertilizers, herbicides and seed. The hijacked label has thus long since been applied to non-sustainable practices.



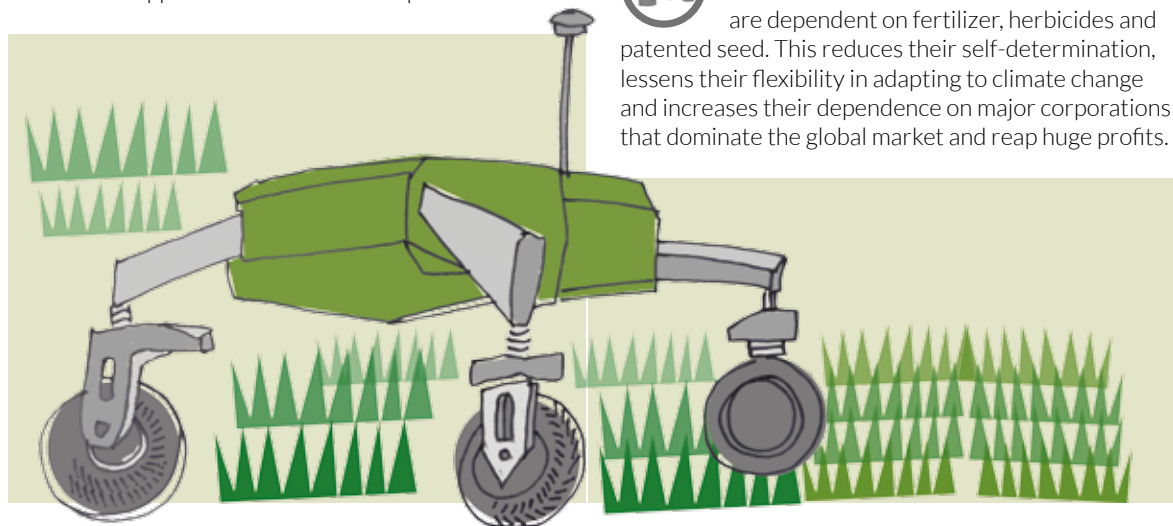
Climate effects: Specific details of how much CO₂ climate-smart agriculture could store are not available, as the concept is too arbitrary for reliable conclusions to be drawn. Furthermore, the CO₂ content of soils varies. Soils are by no means suitable for offsetting emissions from the burning of fossil fuels. Furthermore, the energy-intensive use of fertilizers, pesticides and fossil-fueled machinery, as well as the long transportation distances on the global market all contribute to agriculture’s carbon emissions.



Ecological impact: Monocultures and the heavy application of fertilizers and pesticides to them is not only a serious burden on soils and groundwater and a threat to biodiversity – for example to vital pollinators such as bees. Industrial agriculture also leads to the destruction of humus and soil organisms; the soils become compacted and more vulnerable to erosion by wind and water.



Social impact: Instead of saving their own seed – a centuries-old tradition – farmers are dependent on fertilizer, herbicides and patented seed. This reduces their self-determination, lessens their flexibility in adapting to climate change and increases their dependence on major corporations that dominate the global market and reap huge profits.



Combining agriculture and climate protection

Only good, intact soils are ideal carbon sinks. World-wide, 10 percent of manmade emissions could be stored in such soils. Farmers have long known how to till the soil so that it stores more carbon: with sustainable and locally adapted land use and the farming practices of agricultural ecology. Carbon storage potential is increased if the crops cover the soil completely or it is protected by mulch or harvest residues. The soil then does not dry out so quickly and the soil life is more vital. Changing cultivation cycles, regular fallow periods and the use of compost and green manure are also important. These measures also help reactivate the agricultural nutrient cycles, as soil carbon aids in storing soil particles, nutrients and water. This not only increases soil fertility, but also protects biodiversity.

Industrial agriculture is not only responsible for one-third of the world's greenhouse gases, it is also

destroying the soil. Poor soils can once again become fertile, however. A new agricultural policy is needed in place of industrial agriculture with its high consumption of artificial fertilizers manufactured with great energy expenditure: more support for small-scale organic farming and local structures. Local, organic food production strengthens communities, ensures family farms' incomes and avoids CO₂ emissions.

The production of meat on an industrial scale places a particularly heavy burden on the climate and soils and is cruel to animals. For this reason, the number of animals that can be kept per hectare must be limited by the volume of manure and chicken droppings that can be applied in an ecologically sound manner to reduce the nutrient loads on soil and water. A tax or levy on nitrogen can mitigate the effects of excessive fertilization, as can promoting a meat-reduced diet. Clear policy guidelines on the degree to which agriculture must reduce emissions are long overdue.



REDD – the business of forest protection



Idea: Humans have been cutting down forests for thousands of years, and wood has always been a sought-after commodity. Today, deforestation is global. It is no longer solely about harvesting wood, but also about accessing valuable land – be it for cattle rearing in Brazil, growing soybeans as animal feed in Argentina or for oil palm plantations in Indonesia. But forests not only provide vital habitats for many animal and plant species, they also serve as one of the planet's most important carbon sinks. The carbon stored in trees and soil is released as CO₂ when a forest is cleared, and so forest conservation is an essential element of climate protection. REDD – which stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation – is an instrument that is part of the global climate agreement. Those who conserve forests are supposed to receive money as an incentive to prevent deforestation. But who owns the forest? And who owns the CO₂ stored in the trees?



Climate effects: Countries can have forest conservation credited toward their climate goals (p. 4/5), reducing their need to act in other areas. However, CO₂ can only be deemed “saved” or as “avoided deforestation” if plans already existed for actual deforestation. This does not contribute to an absolute reduction in emissions. Areas that have already been destroyed or are slated to be cleared are often reforested by corporations that invest in plantations and monocultures of fast-growing tree species. According to the definition of the FAO, such tree farms are considered “forests.” Plantations store only a fraction of the CO₂ of a natural forest, however. Furthermore, they are farmed intensively and the wood is sold, putting it back into circulation.



Ecological impact: Tree monocultures prevent the formation of natural forests, degrade soils and destroy biodiversity. If the land thus used is owned by corporations or the state, the plots can be sold at any time – to companies that want to mine the land, for example. Its protection is not guaranteed and the forest habitat is thus reduced to its CO₂ storage function, with biodiversity losing out.



Social impact: Tropical forests in the Amazon Basin, Central Africa and Southeast Asia in particular are often jointly managed and inhabited by indigenous peoples and local communities. Many forests are being privatized or being declared state reserves for REDD, however, and in the eyes of self-proclaimed REDD “forest guardians,” local people are usually just in the way. Reports of land-grabbing and expulsion for REDD projects have been coming from numerous countries. Governments that do not – or only inadequately – recognize and protect traditional land rights are accomplices in the expulsions and the “sale” of the land.

Rethink – but how?

Every year, millions of trees are felled or burned worldwide to produce goods: palm oil in sandwich spreads and skin cream, steak dinners, grilled chicken or fuel for the car – all are everyday products in which we hardly imagine the forest to be involved. Deforestation is not automatic, but is often planned in the boardrooms of multinational corporations. Forests do not disappear by accident, but because of business plans. Political actors and decision-makers selling the land – often illegally and in connection with large bribes – are also implicated. At the end of the chain, consumers are accessories to forest destruction.

Combatting causes

The exploitation and marketing of natural resources causes deforestation – rainforests are being turned into oilfields, grazing land for mass cattle rearing, soybean fields or oil palm plantations. A first step must therefore be the fight against corruption, cracking down on organized crime, and sanctioning companies and those politically responsible for the clearing of precious forest. The one-sided privatization of natural resources must be prevented as well. Only joint management by public authorities, local communities and civil society can guarantee the transparent and democratic protection of forests. Forest conservation is not just a challenge for the Global South. Europe – where most of the forest was destroyed a long time ago – also needs concepts for environmentally sound forest management. Furthermore, Europe needs policies and laws to prevent, rather than drive, deforestation worldwide. These include the reduction of environmentally harmful subsidies, an ecological turnaround in agricultural policy and a stop to Hermes guarantees for companies that are destroying tropical forests.

Globally, the protection and restoration of natural ecosystems could result in the storage of 220 to 330 gigatons of CO₂ – an important but one-time contribution that cannot be repeated as needed.







Closing remarks

Climate change has been a reality for some time. Heat waves, droughts, floods and cyclones have been responsible for deaths, injuries and massive economic damage, and are displacing increasing numbers of people. Although it was long taboo to include climate change among the root causes of migration, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon now unquestioningly counts fleeing the consequences of global warming as being among the key reasons why more than 65 million people could soon be leaving their homes.

By mitigating climate change – limiting global warming to 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level – we could also diminish one of the causes of migration. We would be protecting ecosystems and enabling the survival of millions of people and countless animal and plant species.

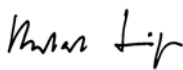
In Paris in 2015, the international community made a commitment to do whatever it takes to keep global warming below 2°C. But how can this be achieved? The Paris conference is now history, and the worldwide climate agreement is due to enter into force already in early November 2016. It is still unclear, however, who can – and should – do what to drastically reduce emissions and ensure that the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere does not continue to rise. So far, the pressure to act has hardly been reflected in national policies or led to appropriate measures. Germany and Europe are no exceptions in this regard.

Many of our colleagues in civil society as well as scientific and policy experts are already anticipating that we will not stay within the maximum emissions budget needed to keep global warming below the 1.5°C threshold. Considerable resources are thus being dedicated to researching technologies that could store the anticipated CO₂ surplus underground, or otherwise remove it from the atmosphere and render it harmless. Many of these proposals have in common that they are expensive, unproven and involve high quantities of land consumption as well as major risks for the people and ecosystems that are directly affected. They also tempt

us into believing that we can continue with business as usual. Reality and the new Paris Agreement are calling for the opposite approach, however.

Nevertheless, technological fixes to address these critical issues are currently finding a great deal of favor in the mainstream climate policy debate. Often they are seen as being the only conceivable or feasible options. There are, however, many other strategies for mitigating emissions that strike us as almost “traditional” by now – phasing out coal, expanding renewable energy, conserving forests and wetlands, applying ecological principles to agriculture and rethinking mobility. If such measures were to be implemented by the international community before 2020, enormous progress could be made toward climate protection, ecosystem conservation and poverty reduction. They might even be enough to avert the most catastrophic effects of climate change. Is this a utopian belief? Hardly more so than the vague hope that we somehow could deal with the consequences of global warming levels of 3°C or more.

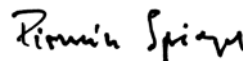
Can we succeed in bringing about the required change in course and the fundamental transformation of our societies within such a short time period? Can we do it soon enough to avert climate collapse, and with it the collapse of civilization? The first step must be to help ensure the breakthrough of real alternatives, fair solutions and less dangerous courses of action. With this publication, we hope to contribute toward that goal.



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Further reading

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