

<http://www.oxfordprospect.co.uk/Bjornlomborgglobalcrisisglobalsolutions.htm>

Global Crises, Global Solutions: Costs and Benefits
by Bjørn Lomborg (Editor)

A book review by Nicholas Newman 6 January 2010

Increasingly, we are hearing the term that something must be done to solve the world's almost never-ending ending crises. The media is full of pressing appeals that every problem is urgent and must be tackled immediately, with often little regard to the economic and social costs involved.

Unfortunately, for policy makers, the real world of geopolitics and budgetary issues forces politicians to prioritise decisions. Often such policy decisions will be both tough to make and politically unpopular with the public at large. This book is designed as a set of tools to help equip both policy makers and philanthropists to make the most effective decisions, through an in depth analysis of the issues, solutions and thoughtful recommendations. In other words if you are looking for the most cost effective solutions to tackle such issues as civil war or improve the lot of women in third world countries, the research and results in this book will prove an instructive guide.

This tome has been written by a team of noted economists, including five Nobel Laureates who are specialists in the topics covered in this volume. The team is led by Bjorn Lomborg; they comprise the think tank known as the Copenhagen Consensus which is based at Copenhagen's School of Business.

In this book, both in the first (2004) and second edition (2009) the group examines ten major issues. These challenges include:

air pollution,
conflict,
disease,
education,
global warming,
malnutrition and hunger,
sanitation and water,
subsidies and trade barriers,
terrorism,
women and development.

Since 2004, as a result of progress in some of the challenges the order of priorities has changed.

Each topic chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, the topic is examined by a group of relevant experts. In the second part the findings are reviewed by a second set of outside topic experts who then make their own independent recommendations.

‘Global Crisis, Global Solutions’ aim to answer the following questions: How, with limited resources can we get the most ‘bang for your buck’ for the tackling of the ten challenges investigated in this book. This book not only examines the problems that face both policy makers and philanthropists, but also the available solutions, because looking at the effectiveness of solutions will help provide a criteria for determining policy priorities. At the end of this book the Copenhagen Consensus provides its list of priorities, but challenges readers to form their own conclusions.

As an example take the chapter covering the ‘conflict in small poor countries’, where a single conflict can cost a country billions in both societal and economic damage, which will often require many years of foreign intervention and aid. The potential causes are identified as lack of democracy and conflict in neighbouring countries. In addition, it examines the types of conflict that occurs from domestic coups to full blown civil wars as experienced in the Congo. Further, it examines the consequences of such violent internal conflict will have both on society, health and economic progress.

The research team examined a number of methods in use to lessen the return to civil strife after domestic conflict. These include international intervention in the form of over the horizon security guarantees such as in East Timor, where Australia maintains a small number of troops stationed on the island, but is able to reinforce their troops with large numbers when required. However from reading this chapter, it becomes understandable why the major powers adopt such a proactive role in countries prone to major civil unrest. Though, what is clear from this research tackling, these problems is a long and complicated process that needs a whole package of policies to resolve such matters.

It is interesting that the top three investments recommended in this book are not those currently fashionable or popular with the media. At number one is micronutrient supplements for children (vitamin A and zinc), at two the Doha development free trade agenda and at three micronutrient fortification (iron and salt iodization).

Overall, this is a remarkable book which provides essential data for any informed discussion of vital world problems, which is so often dominated by ill-informed debate. This book should prove necessary reading for all policy makers and philanthropists concerned with seriously tackling the world’s challenges.