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HUFF
POST

WORLD

Alarmism At World Bank Endangers Poverty Reduction

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The World Bank offers a shoddy climate catastrophe in its latest report.

It is depressing the World Bank has embraced this worst-case thinking in a series of highly tendentious reports, co-written by Germany's leading doomsayer Schellnhuber and Bill Hare, long-term Climate Policy Director for Greenpeace.

The report estimates that temperatures will increase 0.7°C in about 20 years (by the 2030s, page 22). This is far outside the current reality. It is almost twice as the rate of temperature increase over the past 160 years. It is exactly twice the rate of the 1980s and 1990s, when temperatures rose the fastest. And given the almost flat recent temperature, it is more than 4000% the speed of the temperature rise in this century so far.

It assumes 0.5°C/decade for the rest of the century, which is just silly. It assumes an increase that is higher than the absolute highest decadal temperature rise in the average of all the UN climate panel's worst-case scenarios (the so-called RCP 8.5) over the similar time period. Stunningly, it assumes a worse outcome for the world than the worst of the UN's worst-case scenarios.

The report briefly mentions the very recent studies that increasingly show high temperature increases to be unlikely (in technical terms, that the world has a relatively low climate sensitivity). Yet, such un-scary scenario clearly doesn't fit the storytelling of the report: it almost comically rejects the multiple findings of the last year or two by citing just a single paper -- from 2008 (page 7).

The report details pretty much all bad things it can conjure from rising heat. It seems unwilling to list anything but worst case outcomes riding on the back of worst case scenarios.

Take food production. The report is very eager to show that food production will suffer from increasing temperatures. Yet, it only emphasizes downsides.

Increasing temperatures will by themselves likely reduce future yield increases in developing countries, where temperatures are already high. This, however, neglects several counterweighing factors. First, CO₂ acts as a fertilizer for most crops, which translates into higher yields. In a recent study in *Science*, it is estimated that over the past three decades temperature increases have reduced yields for maize, rice, wheat and soybeans by an average of 2.8%. Yet, the CO₂ rise has simultaneously increased yields by 2.2% on average, almost cancelling the temperature rise. And of course, overall, yields have risen 42.9% over the past three decades (using the average of the four crops in this study, meaning 1.2% increase). Mentioning only the reduction, while neglecting to mention CO₂ fertilization and downplaying the total yield increase is unhelpful.

Second, across the century farmers will begin to grow more heat-loving varieties or entirely switch to more heat-loving crops, which will increase total production growth. And thirdly, cold areas will see increasing agricultural productivity, which will increase future production increases.

In total, it is unclear which of these trends will win. Models that try to incorporate all of these with global agricultural trade show virtually no impact on global production before mid-century, and at worst perhaps a total reduction of 2-4% by the end of the century (using the worst-case A2 scenario, p114-115). With an annual production increase of almost four percent the past three decades, this is at worst the equivalent of not reaching a new, global agricultural production maximum in the year 2099 but one year later in 2100 (based on FAO data from 1980-2011, global production cereals).

Yet, the World Bank report makes no effort to balance its view, and even ludicrously admits in parts of its summaries that it assumes (page 144) the CO₂ fertilization will magically stop in the future: "assuming the CO₂ fertilization effect does not increase above present levels."

A similar one-sided approach is on display for conflicts, where the report speculates that higher temperatures will lead to more conflict (page 55), although peer reviewed studies show that historically it is cold that has led to more conflict both in China and in Europe.

Likewise, there are lots of mentions of more heat waves with higher temperatures, but no consideration of many fewer cold waves, which kill many more almost everywhere in the world.

The list goes on. And it is depressing, because it steers the World Bank and its president, along with large parts of the global population, towards focusing on useless or highly inefficient ways to help. One good example is the world's ill-advised foray into biofuels, costing tens of billions of dollars per year, increasing food prices and starvation while actually making global warming worse.

A Greenpeace commentator puts it very clearly: "Currently, fossil fuels are being extracted and burned in the name of development and prosperity, but what they are delivering is the opposite, as the World Bank's report so clearly underlines."

This is scarily wrong. 680m Chinese have been lifted out of poverty over the past 30 years, and they were lifted out by cheap coal

power, not heavily subsidized, unreliable wind turbines.

Billions around the world would love to get access to cheap power. This is likely to be their way out of poverty.

At the entrance of the World Bank headquarters in Washington, brass letters on the marble exclaim: "Our dream is a world without poverty."

With this shoddy worst-case analysis, there is a real risk we're going to endanger that dream.