

COP21: Progress at last?

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There has been far more optimism and positive thinking surrounding the Paris climate talks than there was in Copenhagen a few years ago. At last, governments and big businesses, including some of the fossil fuel companies, realize that something must be done and done quickly. The COP21 talks in Paris were seen by many as the last chance we have of avoiding catastrophic climate change. Indeed, together with other nations China and the USA have pledged significant carbon reductions and although India is still planning to burn more coal it has an almost unlimited source of renewable energy that it has yet to tap fully.

So, hope remains. The increased efficiency and reduced cost of solar means that India could shift from having a fossil fuel based economy to a renewable one in a few short years. More generally, a significant public and private investment in renewable energy throughout the globe could save the day.

It is not surprising therefore that the world's news media have hailed the results of COP21 as a great success, a landmark agreement, an opportunity presented and taken. However, the national implementation of the various pledges remains voluntary, a great deal of faith has been placed in technological innovation which will probably mean investment in 'clean coal', carbon capture and storage, more nuclear power generation as well as renewables. This suggests a policy framework that is in line with 'business as usual' rather than business with a qualitative and substantive difference.

Additionally, the ideology of economic growth still needs to be confronted and discussed. Governments, big businesses and business schools see it as the cure for virtually all our social and economic ills. Unfortunately, it is not as simple as that even though the idea of 'green growth' promoted by various global foundations, think tanks, big businesses and governments has generated considerable interest, we continue to produce more and more stuff. This will not help the climate.

We need to re-articulate our economic and social priorities to concentrate on well-being and social wealth rather than more stuff and more profit. We need to recognize that despite the attractiveness of green growth theories, actual increases in energy use and material throughput have yet to be completely decoupled from increases in GDP. We are still heading for a global climate temperature rise in excess of 1.5C.

It is imperative that businesses, governments, NGOs and ordinary citizens go beyond Paris and recognize that the future of our planet is intimately connected to changing the way we do business, organize our economies and live our lives. We have only one planet to live on and we are acting and producing as if we have three. We cannot have our cake and eat it too. We cannot arrest the rate of global warming unless we curtail economic growth, focus on well-being and integrate social responsibility fully with sustainability in our business practice. Like it or not, we are living in a post-growth world.

Blewitt, J.D. (2014) [*Understanding Sustainable Development*](#), 2nd edition. London: Earthscan.

Blewitt, J.D. and Cunningham, R. eds (2014) *The Post-Growth Project: how the end of economic growth could bring a fairer and happier society*. London: LPP/Green House.