



STATE OF THE WORLD 2008

Discussion Questions

Recommended for business leaders, book clubs, advanced students, classrooms, faith-based groups, policymakers and staff.

Chapter 1: Seeding the Sustainable Economy

Gary Gardner and Thomas Prugh

1. In past years, nature was perceived as a seemingly inexhaustible resource. (p. 4) Why has this view changed, and in what ways is the change manifested?
2. Netflix and Interface are two companies that have proactively reduced the waste associated with their products. (p. 10) How have they done this? What other waste reduction strategies might companies use?
3. Why do so few people control such a large share of the world's wealth? (p. 8) What can be done to change this?
4. Consumers are driving trends in "green" products such as hybrid vehicles, organic food, and compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs). (p. 16) But some critics argue that our entire agricultural and production systems need to be overhauled to achieve sustainability. What are the different roles of individuals and institutions in building a sustainable economy?

Chapter 2: A New Bottom Line for Progress

John Talberth

1. Critics increasingly question the value of many of today's most prevalent measures of progress, such as GDP. (p. 19) What do they see as lacking?
2. According to Irving Fischer, what type of value contributes to a product's "psychic income"? (p. 19) Describe some goods or services that have a high economic value but provide little psychic income.
3. In *Deep Economy*, Bill McKibben explains that when people achieve a per-capita income of \$10,000 or higher on average, the correlation between happiness and money no longer exists. (p. 21) What does this say about a consumer-driven culture? What type of economic policy would this analysis inspire?
4. Of the five microeconomic objectives for sustainability Talberth discusses, which one is poised to make the most impact: certification of products, operations, and supply chains; zero waste; eco-efficiency; workplace well-being; or community vitality? (p. 27)

Chapter 3: Rethinking Production

L. Hunter Lovins

1. Pick an object nearby. Do you think it is recyclable, reusable, and/or re-manufacturable? How could the object be made more eco-efficient? (pp. 33–34)
2. What makes large companies like Wal-Mart (pp. 35–36) and General Electric (p. 43) particularly poised to make significant improvements in energy efficiency and waste reduction?
3. One company profiled in this chapter is guided by the concept "in nature there is no waste." (p. 41) How can we integrate this outlook into our everyday lives?
4. Companies are now urged to value a "triple bottom line" or "integrated bottom line." (p. 44) What are some social and economic indicators that could be used to evaluate a company beyond its profit levels?

Chapter 4: The Challenge of Sustainable Lifestyles

Tim Jackson

1. Describe the concept of "environmental space"? (p. 47) Do you think you are using more or less than your fair share of such space? Should every person in the world have the same share of environmental space?
2. As incomes rise, people do not necessarily report more happiness or life satisfaction. (pp. 50–51) Why do you think this is? Would the ability to buy more things make you happier?
3. Do you think efforts like "downshifting" or "Buy Nothing Day" are effective? (pp. 52–53) Would you consider participating in these? How would you respond to critics who argue that lower levels of consumption would throw an economy into recession, or worse?
4. Each year, some \$605 billion is spent on advertising worldwide, and ads have been linked to rising materialism, childhood obesity, and other maladies. (p. 59) Would you favor curbs on advertising? How would you respond to the argument that restrictions on advertising are violations of a right to free speech?

Chapter 5: Meat and Seafood: The Global Diet's Most Costly Ingredients

Brian Halweil and Danielle Nierenberg

1. What technological developments have lead to the fourfold increase in meat production between 1961 and 2006? (p. 62) In what ways does less expensive, industrially farmed meat “cost” more?
2. What are some of the benefits of returning to a more natural method of meat production? (p. 64)
3. What role do government subsidies play in meat and fish production? What alternatives do Halweil and Nierenberg suggest to the current system? (p. 67)
4. What steps do you take in your own life to ensure that you are “embracing the ethical” with your food choices? (p. 69) What could government and industry do to make this practice easier for you?

Chapter 6: Building a Low-Carbon Economy

Christopher Flavin

1. In which regions of the world are carbon emissions rising most quickly, and why? (p. 77)
2. Why do buildings hold the greatest potential to increase energy productivity? (p. 80) What steps could you take to increase the energy efficiency of your home or office?
3. Look at Table 6-3, “Estimates of Potential Contribution of Renewable Energy Resources.” (p. 83) Which of these renewable energy sources would be well suited for your region? How could renewable energy become more widely used in your area?
4. Some argue that replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy is not sufficient to make energy sustainable, because of ever-greater energy consumption. (p. 79) How would you assess this argument?

Chapter 7: Improving Carbon Markets

Zoë Chafe and Hilary French

1. Have you bought (or considered buying) carbon offsets? (pp. 101–4) Do you think these are effective in combating climate change?
2. Should the current diversity of national and regional carbon markets eventually join to form one cohesive international market? What would the opportunities and challenges be? (pp. 105–6)
3. Is the Kyoto Protocol effective for addressing climate change? What more needs to be done to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions? (pp. 98–101)
4. Why is “carbon neutral” such a controversial term? (p. 103) Have you seen this phrase used before, and if so, do you believe the claims?

Chapter 8: Water in a Sustainable Economy

Ger Bergkamp and Claudia W. Sadoff

1. Why is it so difficult to put a value on water as an environmental resource? (pp. 107, 112, 114) What are some innovative ways to measure the value of water?
2. Why do diets in wealthy countries require significantly more water than diets in other countries? (p. 109) Do you think your diet requires relatively more or less water than average?
3. Why might water pricing hurt the poorest users? (p. 118) What are some ways of pricing water that might encourage sustainable water use?
4. How can cap-and-trade schemes, virtual water trading, and certification or ecolabeling, help with water management? (p. 121)

Chapter 9: Banking on Biodiversity

Ricardo Bayon

1. Bayon writes that, “for eons, the price of nature has been woefully close to zero.” (p. 124) Why does he say this, and how is the practice now being counteracted?
2. What is “wetland mitigation banking,” and how does it work? (pp. 127–30) In what situations can it be beneficial?
3. When it comes to conserving biodiversity, when do you think government regulation, market mechanisms, or voluntary efforts should be used? (p. 124)
4. What are “voluntary biodiversity offsets”? (p. 135) Why are some companies setting up these programs, and what do they hope to accomplish?

Chapter 10: The Parallel Economy of the Commons

Jonathan Rowe

1. Describe some examples of “commons management” in your own community. (p. 138) Have they been successful? What obstacles confronted the public “owners?”
2. What is an example of a privately owned management system that would lend itself to commons management? (p. 144)
3. Explain what Rowe refers to as the “tragedy of the corporate.” (p. 142)
4. What variable did Garrett Hardin not take into account in his seminal 1968 article, “The Tragedy of the Commons”? (p. 141) How does this oversight undermine his argument?

Chapter 11: Engaging Communities for a Sustainable World

Erik Assadourian

1. Review the definition of “community” that Assadourian presents in Box 11-1. (p. 152) How does this definition lend itself to the concept of a sustainable community? How does Assadourian’s “community” deviate from a more conventional housing community?
2. How is social capital a form of capital like financial capital? (p. 152) What “dividends” can be recouped from social capital?
3. Explain the concept of a “third place.” (p. 156) Is there a particular location in your own community that you consider a “third place?” What purpose does it serve for you?
4. What are some of the benefits of localizing food production? (p. 156)

Chapter 12: Mobilizing Human Energy

Jason S. Calder

1. What does Calder believe is the greatest untapped resource in solving the problem of global poverty and environmental decline? (p. 167)
2. What are the four common critiques of community-based development? (p. 170)
3. Explain Arjun Appadurai’s concept of the “capacity to aspire.” (p. 172) How does this relate to community-based development?
4. Calder acknowledges that the rich and affluent may need to reduce their consumption in order to allow the world’s poor to increase consumption, but he also suggests that poor countries should try not to emulate over-consumptive lifestyles. (p. 178) Can these seemingly contradictory recommendations be reconciled?

Chapter 13: Investing for Sustainability

Bill Baue

1. Of the four sectors of world sustainability investments (socially responsible investment, project finance, private equity and venture capital, and microfinance), which is poised to make the greatest impact on the economy? Why? (p. 181)
2. Joe Keefe, the CEO of Pax World, refers to a “sustainability revolution.” (p. 183) What are the driving forces behind this revolution?
3. Explain “regenerative investing.” (p. 185) What are the risks associated with this investment strategy?
4. In his acceptance speech for the 2006 Nobel Prize, microfinance pioneer Muhammad Yunus declared poverty an “artificial creation.” (p. 191) What did he mean? How does microfinance help overcome systemic poverty?

Chapter 14: New Approaches to Trade Governance

Mark Halle

1. Explain what Halle refers to as the “basic paradox of trade.” (p. 198) Why does such a seemingly beneficial economic system excite such disapproval?
2. Halle describes “Third-worldism” as an automatic resistance to change among poorer countries to proposals that come from richer countries. (p. 207) What could be done to overcome this distrust?
3. What conditions are necessary for trade liberalization to advance development goals such as social justice, human rights, equity, and a healthy environment? In what ways has trade hindered these goals in the past? (p. 207)
4. What changes in trade policy can be expected as countries such as China and India become increasingly influential in the global economy? (p. 206)

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