

# TO BEAT CLIMATE CHANGE TOGETHER, WE ALSO NEED TO IMPROVE GLOBAL HEALTH TOGETHER

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In 2000, the world's countries agreed to cut extreme poverty by half by 2015 from 1990 levels. That goal was probably reached around 2010, although many of the related goals, such as ending hunger, cutting child and maternal mortality and achieving environmental sustainability, will not be fully achieved. Apart from on the goal of environmental sustainability, significant progress has been made with the other goals, especially over the past ten years.

Now, countries are discussing what our global priorities should be in the years after 2015. Many countries insist that sustainability—in particular, tackling climate change—must be the focus. Rightly so.

Reducing carbon emissions to slow climate change is a double challenge: (1) for the richest countries to dramatically cut their emissions, and (2) for the low and middle-income countries to develop their economies without a similar increase in carbon emissions to the one that fuelled the wealth in the West.

To have any hope of achieving this, burning carbon above target must be made very costly by taxing it, while remaining below target should be rewarded. These taxes would have to be applied all around the world, otherwise heavy carbon-emitting industries will simply move towards countries where carbon taxes are low or inexistent.

Yet, this is where the challenges of the future crash headlong into the unfinished business of the past. If we now abandon the poverty reduction job half done in favour of focusing on climate issues, we will fail in both tasks. How can we ask countries where many people live in abject poverty to refuse the carbon-emitting industries, if those industries provide economic growth needed to finance health, education and other basics? If carbon emission is a common concern, these basics must become a real common concern too.

In our efforts to beat climate change, the world is not divided into donors and beneficiaries. All countries must contribute to the common effort, and all countries will benefit. That is how the basics should be addressed in the 21st century. Instead of aid from a few to a few, we must look at ways of achieving a sustainable and genuine burden sharing for common good and enlightened self-interest. By fixing universal thresholds for health, education and other basics, we can consider that all countries are contributor and beneficiary in principle, but temporarily contributor or beneficiary, depending on their situation. As long as countries clearly cannot provide the basics on their own, they are beneficiaries. As they grow less poor, they can “graduate” and become contributors. We are already doing business this way through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, although with a far too narrow focus and on a too small scale to achieve lasting results. The Global Fund could become a model for how we can address other needs.

It has been argued that the Global Fund is focused on infectious diseases, because these diseases cross borders and are a common concern. If we understand climate change and where it came from, we should be able to understand that covering the basics for all human beings is a common concern, too.

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