

Essay on why a healthy global environment is a collective good

[Environment](#), [Climate Change](#)



"Explain why a healthy global environment is a collective good? How can problems of collective global goods be overcome?"

Nowadays the topic of global environmental problems, and of global warming in particular, ranks among the most frequently discussed on all levels and gradually, the scientific research carried on this subject add to our understanding of the reasons and future prospects of global warming process. Now it is evident that over recent 60 years the human activity has contributed significantly to the increase of greenhouses gases concentration in the atmosphere (Soroos, 2001, p. 1) , and consequently, to the change in climate patterns which occurred in the respective period. The problem of preventing the further global warming is the priority issue for the whole mankind. Such global character of the problem and the need for global cooperation to tackle it arise from the environment being a collective good. Following simple logic with a little knowledge from the theory of economics collective or common goods are those which are (1) collectively owned and (2) collectively used. In relation to the global warming it means that nobody in particular could be considered the owner of the healthy environment.

Although the rights for some elements comprising the term " environment" (natural resources such as fossil fuels, forest, water reservoirs) could be assigned to some particular person or entity there is no mechanism of ownership for the elements forming the favorable climate patterns, including temperature, wind force and direction, humidity, etc.

Similar to the common access to the healthy environment the negative consequences of the climate change could also influence the planet globally. Among the most obvious negative effects of global warming are the increase

of average annual temperature, the raise of the global sea level, melting of the ice sheets, intensification of droughts in the most vulnerable regions, more frequent intense weather patterns (like El Niño and La Niña) and others. Further to these initial changes the food production could be affected and the human and animal deceases would probably spread (Natural Environmental Research Council, 2005, p. 3). Even the territories which at first could win from a slight increase of the temperature (e. g. extension of the agricultural period in the northern regions) are likely to suffer from the negative consequences of the climate change, such as both internal and external violent conflicts induced by the environmental migration and the struggle for scarce natural resources (Barret, 2003, p. 7-15).

It has been widely acknowledged that in order to tackle the global environmental problems the combined forces of all the countries are required. Accordingly, a number of intergovernmental panels, meetings and conferences were held to address the threats of global warming, including Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro (1972), annual UNFCCC conferences, etc. However, as of today the nations have not reached the common denominator and agreed on the list of global actions to be undertaken. The process of negotiations tend to be cumbersome since it appeared that the global interest to maintain the healthy environment is often in conflict with the local interests of participants. The example of Kyoto protocol shows that the developing countries refused to undertake the obligations to reduce the level of emissions since such actions would slow down their economic growth rate and, therefore, would prevent the achievement of the desired level of economic and social development (Soroos, 2001, p. 6-7). The fact that in

2005 the Kyoto finally came into force after being ratified by the Russian Federation has not changed the picture significantly.

In addition to the “ selfish” national interest another factor which prevents the adoption and execution of the global environmental policy is the existing uncertainties regarding the future climate change which are still numerous. The existing variety of scientific opinions on global warming scenarios contributes to the unwillingness to undertake urgent actions now due to the vague evaluation of the effect of such actions on the global environment and climate change.

Summarizing the above, the human impact on the global climate patterns is the widely accepted and scientifically proven fact. Since the healthy environment is considered to be a collective good the combined global actions are requires to tackle the challenge of global warming. With all that in mind, the nations have still been unable to develop the worldwide policy aimed to manage the climate change issue due to the unwillingness to sacrifice local economic and social interests as well as due to the remaining uncertainties regarding future climate change scenarios. Based on the above, I agree with the opinion of Soroos (2001, p. 2) that as the negative consequences and the future prospects of the climate change and environment degradation become more evident, the states are likely to demonstrate more readiness to “ set aside their narrow national interests to contribute to the “ common good”.

Bibliography

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