

## Book Launch Event during the 7<sup>th</sup> IHDP Open Meeting

### *Facing Global Environmental Change*

#### *Environmental, Human, Energy, Food, Health and Water Security Concepts*

Editors: Hans Günter Brauch, Úrsula Oswald Spring, John Grin, Czeslaw Mesjasz, Patricia Kameri-Mbote, Navnita Chadha Behera, Béchir Chourou, Heinz Krumpal (Berlin/Heidelberg/New York: Springer, 2009)

**Wednesday, 29 April 2009, 14.00-15.30**

**World Conference Centre, 53113 Bonn, Görresstrasse 15,  
Room “Süßmuth” at TNT (formerly UNU-EHS)**

### **Comment and Laudatory**

**Prof. (em.) Dr. Eckart Ehlers, Geographic Institute, Univ. of Bonn; ZEF, Bonn**

It is difficult to say something new and meaningful after so many distinguished predecessors in this book launching ceremony. Were it not for the fact that some of them are good personal friends, with whom I have had the pleasure to cooperate and to collaborate for many years, I might have been more reluctant to accept the kind offer to take up the role and challenge of a commentator from the perspective of science.

I just mentioned the terms: cooperation and collaboration – terms that are not only at the very basis, but also the very essence of earth systems science (ESS) in the Anthropocene. It was almost 10 years ago when Jane Lubchenco in the Presidential Address as Chair of AAAS formulated the thesis of an upcoming “**Century of the Environment**”. And she combined this statement with her demand for “**a new social contract for science**”. This demand: a new “contrat social” ...

has developed into a permanently reiterated slogan and philosophy of almost all serious proclamations and actions in the pursuit of a goal- and solution-oriented ESS. As such it has powerful comparisons from Kofi Annan’s well remembered demand that the new millennium should be one of

freedom from want, freedom from fear,  
and the freedom of future generations  
to sustain their lives on this planet.

via the 2001 Amsterdam GC Open Science Conference with its overarching title  
Challenges of a Changing Earth

towards the quadrennial state-of-the-art reports of IPCC. It is especially IPCC that – with increasing intensity and as part of an increasingly dense and international network of research and science – points to human interferences and impacts on climate change and GEC and its dangers. While 10 years ago, IPCC (1997) still argued that

“the balance of evidence suggests discernable human influence on global climate”.

Nowadays, 10 to 12 years later, it not only confirms with >90% certainty that the human factor is one of the most important drivers of CC, but that it will continue to be an active force for centuries to come. It states clearly and unmistakably:

“Anthropogenic warming and sea-level rise would continue for centuries..., even if greenhouse gas concentrations were to be stabilized.”

So, there we are – and it is at this point where the book, the publication of which we are celebrating today, comes in. And also the location of this event, the Open IHDP Science Meeting with the title “Social Challenges of Global Change” is more than appropriate. The book itself is a real heavy-weight publication – not only in terms of kilograms and pages, but also – and that is surely more important – in terms of contents and research findings. The very title of this book

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seems to me both assertive and timely: No, we do not have to predict or to model it – GEC is there and Yes: we have to cope with it. Therefore, also the subtitle of this impressive volume raises expectations. It promises to offer security concepts, based on a sectorialized understanding of the term “security” covering

environmental/ecological issues as well as those of energy, food, health, water and humanitarian issues at large.

The concept of “**Securitization of GEC**”, elaborated by H.G. Brauch, chief-editor of the Hexagon Series on Human and Environmental Peace, in the introductory article concludes with the emphatic call for “needed proactive policy responses” and with the no less emphatic reiteration of a “new multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary research agenda with qualitative and quantitative, historical and sociological methods, as well as modelling, simulation and scenario-building motivated by the policy goal to develop early warning indicators and models to address the probable conflict situations...”.

To be quite honest: these challenges and demands are surely not new. As a matter of fact: IPCC and MEA, the German Advisory Council on Global Change WBGU, the IGBP series on GC and many, many other publications – they all provide a lot of models and scenarios. And they all are also not stingy with policy advice and recommendations for action...

What then is new (and unique) about this 1500-page book? What makes it a desirable and necessary addition to the already existing scientific literature on CC and GEC? Where does it go beyond trodden paths and opens new horizons?

I will try to give three short answers, comment on them and derive a few suggestions from these answers and comments:

1. What has been called the “**sectorialization of security**”, which to me is the basic concept and guiding principle of this book, is a commendable and innovative approach. The very fact that CC/GEC are taken for granted, opens an unbiased and concentrated focus on threats of and reactions by individuals and societies. This focus, then on impacts and specific challenges of fragile environments, livelihoods and human groups is something that has been missing so far, at least in this complexity, stringency and coherence. The book therefore fills a gap – and that is an achievement for which editors and authors have to be congratulated and applauded.

2. There is an Irish proverb that says: There is nothing so bad that it could not be worse. I want to turn it around and say: There is nothing so good that it could not be better) – What do I mean?

I am asking myself whether the quest for thematic and regional completeness of sectorialized security concepts does not overtax a one-volume book and its readers. The split of human security concepts into 8 parts/sectors is sometimes difficult to digest:

- Not only because of unavoidable overlaps and problems of contextual coordination;
- But also because of imbalances in human security issues within the book.

Is it justified to have only 3 contributions in regard to “food security” versus 18 on the issues of “water security”?

I do not want to be misunderstood: my criticism may be somewhat narrow-minded, especially since I do not have a better solution. But can/should water – food – health be separated? To me they are closely interconnected as so many other security issues. As a matter of fact: security concepts are comprehensive, interrelated and therefore hardly separable. Fortunately, individual authors and contributions refer to these inter-connectivities again and again. The careful and enduring reader will thus be guided carefully through the sometimes overwhelming flood of concepts and information.

3. “Facing Global Environmental Change” understands itself as a “handbook”. And it is a handbook in the very best sense of the word: comprehensive, well researched, well written and well edited, covering an innovative and urgent topic of international political importance, well equipped with figures, data, bibliography. And it urges to proceed from knowledge to action, from re-active to pro-active policies. Thus, the final part of the book (Part X: Conclusions) deserves special attention. Much can be learned from the 80 to 90 case studies and surveys that are accumulated in the book. Some of them suggest concrete and viable cooperations and collaborations beyond disciplinary boundaries, others proceed from knowledge to action, a few even succeed in developing pro-active policies in the pursuit of adaptation to or mitigation of CC/GEC. However, does the book derive general conclusions from the new wealth of information and up-to-date security concepts? Does it come forward with generally applicable recipes in regard to its own aspirations and in regard to so far unanswered questions? These include:

- the demand for a generally acceptable and applicable human security paradigm;
- an overarching and comprehensive securitization concept, under which the impressive, maybe even: alarming versatility of security sectors are united and represented in their mutual dependency and interconnectivity;
- the questions of best practice solutions and their transferability;
- a general discussion of the scales of security concepts in time and space; especially in regard to their local-regional-global dimensions;
- practical solutions and suggestions of how to proceed from research experiences to policy-relevant applications....

... and so on.

In order to give a fair and realistic assessment of this book “**Facing Global Environmental Change**” one has to consider the fact that this volume is one of three. It has an elder brother that came out/was born in 2008, called

“Globalization and Environmental Challenges: Reconceptualizing Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.

And it will be followed by a younger sister, whose birth is expected for 2009/2010:

“Coping with Global Environmental Change, Disasters and Security-Threats, Challenges, Vulnerabilities and Risks”.

Within this framework our present birthday party has to be seen: We are celebrating the arrival of a strong, intellectually and physically heavy brain-child, whom I would attribute the characteristics of a milestone event. Together with its older and expected younger brother and sister it really marks a milestone along the way of CC/GEC discussions between past and future. It is an impressive and irrevocable marker in so far as

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is finally accepted as an unquestionable event which needs active and scientifically based aggressive counter-measures. Thus, this book is not retrospective, but future-oriented. It is not complaining, but action- and solution-oriented. It is not looking backwards, but it looks into the future and for holistic-integrative approaches to overcome far-spread insecurities.

To sum up: “**Facing Global Environmental Change**” is a promising step in the direction of coping strategies. It is a commendable methodological handbook on which editors, authors and the publisher have to be gratefully congratulated. And I want to add: the international GEC community is looking forward to the expected third child that will round up the impressive enterprise on methodologies towards human and environmental security and peace!