

Manageable Solutions and the Global Problematique

by

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Introduction

There is a tremendous amount of information accumulated within the Canadian Association for the Club of Rome (CACOR) and the mother organization the Club of Rome (CoR). There is also an almost institutionalized anti-Club propaganda offensive that has not only challenged the intentions of efforts and publications, but outright ridiculed the basic tenets of the Club's philosophy, without engaging in an honest dialogue. These forces are well entrenched in conventional economics and often succeed to demonstrate their opposition by temporary successes brought about by new, more efficient technologies, completely ignoring that in a finite resource system even better efficiencies will only offer temporary reprieve from the global pressures, that keep mounting.

However, there are changes in awareness, public and political concerns and hopefully they will produce a social/political force that will drive future changes at an increasing rate. The challenge is to harness, engineer and manage these changes. Producing ideas, reports and sounding alarms without persistence and tangible methods with solutions, has run its course. Time has come to do things, and demonstrate how to find solutions and manage their execution. To paraphrase the caption from a very old cartoon: The meek shall only inherit the Earth (Ecosystem!) if they become aggressive. To be productively aggressive without being offensive is also part of the challenge

One of the conditions set in designing a program was to create sufficient interest that will result in a broad participation in various sub-programs by members. The intention is that to work on the various issues on a continuing basis and not to bring a particular activity to halt after a luncheon presentation. The issues are not only interrelated, but they can grow in scope as

well as participation, depending on the success achieved.

I. What is the Global Problematique?

"Problematique" is a compromise term coined to incorporate the major problems that threaten the natural balance of the global ecosphere and the well being of its population. Key elements of the problematique are: uncontrolled population growth, renewable and non-renewable resource utilization, irresponsible global waste management, regional and economic differentiation, free reign of the free market, bottom-line philosophy and the unchallenged legitimacy of the profit motive, unclear notion of the global carrying capacity and the inability of the commons to come to terms with the increasing need to seek solutions.

The term *problematique* is not well known, understood and appreciated, therefore, it needs continued efforts to explain and publicize it.

II. The Nature of the Problem

The magnitude and complexities of the component problems are staggering. While they are present in varying degrees in different regional/national units, they defy a unified approach to both quantifying them and resolving them.

Theoretically, the possibility of solutions sounds more reasonable:

- Population control can be achieved by education, economic incentives, and political control,
- Resource utilization can be brought into better balance by maximizing use efficiencies, replacing non-renewable resources with renewables, wherever techno-economically possible, and waste

management can be controlled by a system of penalties and incentives for recycling.

Since these things are not happening, the question is why not? And the question "who should make them happen" is justified and leads to the pragmatic issues of seeking real-term solutions and discovering the barriers to achieving them.

Realistically, the difficulties of finding solutions and making them work are frightening, because:

- global dynamics work with an infinite number of variables that will prevent bringing them into a workable relationship,
- global regional economic disparities demand individual treatment, and
- ditto for religious, cultural and political diversities
- components of the Problematique cannot be segregated and solved separately, a holistic approach is inevitable, i.e. we cannot expect to educate everybody, then solve the population problem first, everywhere, then move on to resource utilization, waste recycling, etc.
- the symposium in Rio demonstrated that we cannot expect to find a single global authority that will take the ball and run with it, or even manage and orchestrate a unified approach to problem solving.

III. Past Attempts

Since the publication of *Limits to Growth*, an adversary intellectual/economic global cottage industry came into being. The Club of Rome and its affiliates continued convincing authorities to consider changing ways that will, sooner or later, but inevitably, bring about major, irreversible changes in the global ecosystem. The opponents tagged it unsubstantiated doomsaying. Both camps achieved some success: there is a definite international awareness and environmental protection movement, and there are the economic directions still claiming the global resource system as infinite and resource availability as only a function of efficiency and technology. However, neither of them has the irrefutable push to: either give up the current practices, or force a legislated changeover to a new world-wide econo-political system with ecosphere priorities.

The environmentalist movement is looking at political authority for action. The global free-market economic system is still comfortable with the status quo and is unwilling to yield ground to still unproved and

conventionally non-profitable changes. Since political powers are economy dependent, it will be a long struggle for securing the ecosystem from slow destruction. Manageable solutions to the global problematique is but one small step towards finding the right approach to setting the supertanker of global problematique in new directions.

Past efforts are characterized by repetitive situation diagnosis, limited attempts at curbing harmful emissions and legislating limits to toxic waste disposal. The partial solutions were always mitigated by such economic factors as employment, cost of exports, loss of markets and many others. The Brundtland Commission's report and the Rio Symposium were key events, less notable for direct successes and more for helping appreciate the difficulties solving problems will face. To resolve the problems these factors will need to be reasonably cost effective and economically compatible.

Two recent CACOR studies addressed the changes that occurred since the publication of *Limits to Growth*. The first diagnosed the danger of treating the finite resource system as infinite. The second one explored the impediments to change. Both studies were diagnostic. There were calls for replacing the term Sustainable Development with Sustainable Ecosystem, albeit without suggesting a realistic methodology. Having completed countless diagnostic circles, the ultimate challenge remains finding and recommending **manageable solutions to the world problematique**.

IV. The Nature of Solutions

Anatomically, solutions to the global problematique can be divided into three groups: Possible solutions; likely solutions and **manageable solutions**.

- Possible solutions are the largest group that is incorporating most of the problems caused by uncontrolled human interaction with the ecosystem. The key phrase is reversibility of action and results, achievable in most cases, except with lost living species, or terminally exploited non-renewable resources. To succeed, we must have the resources required to make the necessary changes with unconditional cooperation from political and economic operatives. Then, and only then, can populations be controlled, stabilized, or even reduced, resources used with greater efficiency and substitution and attitudes toward the ecosystem changed by education.

What is possible will depend on economic restrictions, political will and the availability of resources.

The core issues are:

- holistic national/regional approach to seeking solutions,
 - determination of the level of investment required, value of targeted long term benefits and timeframes,
 - economic dislocations; scale of individual and collective sacrifices demanded,
 - the level and limitation of political influence as an engine of change,
 - securing broad economic cooperation and support for action.
- Likely solutions will be the ones that will require the least of the core issues listed for possible solution. There will be special solutions to specific problems of unique locations and of limited importance, e.g. a teaching institute engaging in a program to increase environmental awareness and initiate attitude changes on a very small scale, or, introduce very strict population control within physical limits, where the alternative would be non-survival.
 - Manageable solutions are a combination of parts of possible and likely solutions. It is a compromise with possible solutions, and an extension of the likely solutions. The key question is not **what** solutions are manageable and manageable by CoR affiliates, but **how** most problems can be matched with manageable solutions.
 - To appreciate the concept of manageability, we take a look at the CoR principle of approaching the global problematique:
 - **CoR organizations function within existing economic and political systems. They advocate evolutionary changes for improvement and avoid revolutionary disruptions that may bring unforeseen disasters of greater magnitudes. Their greatest challenge is to exploit this strength to the fullest, bringing on board apparently adversary forces and designing solutions that will be manageable.**

V. Creating Manageability for Solutions.

Given the deepening concern for the safety and survival of the global ecosystem and the inherent resistance of a purely profit motivated "bottom line" economic system to changing the current practices of:

- differential and inefficient global resource utilization,
- uncontrolled, or partially controlled hazardous waste disposal,
- uneven global distribution of goods and services,
- increasing irreversibility of ecological damage,
- non-acceptance of global resource finiteness,
- inability to initiate attitude changes on a significant level,
- inability to recognize the dangers that accompany the temporary market benefits of uncontrolled population growth, etc.,

CoR organizations can be the catalyst in facing the challenge and proposing manageable solutions.

Actions leading to manageable solutions to problems, listed above, need some base assumptions. Some of the key ones are:

- An all encompassing global agreement that inaction will threaten survival of certain species, and commitment to cooperate for remedial action; this may have been agreed to in Rio.
- No single political force, or institution exists that could possibly initiate and manage the necessary changes required to switch to a sustainable ecosystem.
- The only workable solutions must initially address the problems within manageable human entities, regions, countries, or economic alliances and address all of them simultaneously, on that level.
- An international/global integrating organization, required to take the results of the diverse initiatives and creating a comprehensive global action plan with it.

CoR manageable solutions will start with National Initiatives, which even in the least developed countries have a well defined, functioning political and social structure. Only within such structures can problems be identified and solutions defined in terms of the existing capability to address the problems, or identify the need

for external assistance and available sources for such assistance.

Social, ecological and economic problems will exist, to different degrees, in countries of different stages of development. To begin finding solutions, especially manageable ones, a reliable survey of the existing situation is a prerequisite. Such a survey can only be obtained with the full cooperation of the national governing, but not necessarily purely political forces. The collaboration of CoR organizations is a definite advantage and it is easy to show that cooperation for problem solving will benefit the participating countries.

VI. Proposed Action Plan

Solutions and their manageability will depend on specific cases. Past efforts identified the general scope of the problems, the Global Problematique and offered recommendations for birth control, education and the need to change attitudes, usually in a benevolent, but unsupported way and without specific action. However, suggesting general solutions cannot eliminate specific problems. The problems are different for Iceland and Bangladesh and for every other country in between. To be effective, our efforts ought to concentrate on concrete situations, propose matching solutions and recommend action for its management. The following action plan is offered for debate and refinement and with a view to manageability.

1. Establish an information resource system, with UN and national statistics; rank countries according to the magnitude of their problems of population, resource availability/use, environmental practices, health and education standards and design a system to measure the urgency for solutions. Recommend the creation of a Global Problematique Info-Source Project.
2. Establish national and international contacts, to determine the level of existing activities with regard to elements of the Global Problematique, and the activities of CoR associates, or if not available, other suitable national organizations in charge of resolving problems. CACOR can do it initially through the embassies located in Ottawa. Recommend the creation of a CACOR Liaison with the embassies.

3. Initiate a study to investigate the possibility of reconciling current bottom-line, cost-effective economic practices, which disregard the finiteness of global resources, with evolving, ecology friendly, resource conscious economics, to minimize the existing, natural resistance to the gradual, ecologically viable changeover. Call it the **Eco-Profit Generation Project**
4. Assess the most critical national situations first and continue with a ranking in terms of global significance and the major problem sources: population, resource use, pollution and social services; e.g. Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Andorra perhaps would be very low in most aspects; Russia, China, India, Bangladesh and the highly industrialized countries would demand urgent attention with most items. Draft a list of National Action Priorities with respect to the Global Problematique.
5. Assess the status of ongoing national efforts combatting the Problematique with the cooperation and assistance of national and already participating international agencies. Determine areas of program shortcomings, new directions and the need for additional resources.
6. Establish the available national economic resources flexibility to improve the ongoing efforts and problem solving, identifying any additional influences that can be redirected. Identify Promoters and Hinderers.
7. Draft a specific and long term CACOR work program for an initiating and coordinating role that includes information gathering and analysis,
 - preparing a demonstration project, perhaps Canadian,
 - preparing a long range CACOR Work Plan with resource requirements,
 - forming project teams for modelling, economic and technical analysis, international liaison, publication/education and others as required.