

THE HILL

World's road out of poverty is paved by energy — and plenty of it

by Scott Tinker, opinion contributor - 04/07/23 1:30 PM ET



Solar panels work near the small town of Milagro, Navarra Province, northern Spain, Friday, Feb. 24, 2023. Spain is building on its reputation in renewable energy to position itself as Europe's future leader in green hydrogen. But some energy sector experts express caution over ramping up an industry that would be wholly reliant on massive increases in the availability of zero-carbon electricity made from sources like wind or solar. (AP Photo/Alvaro Barrientos)

The current banking crisis is the latest domino to fall in a long line of economic impacts resulting from shutting down much of the global economy during the pandemic. Another domino is economic poverty. In fact, one of the greatest challenges facing the world today is the overwhelming number of people still living in various stages of economic poverty. Over 4 billion people still live on less than [\\$7 a day](#).

When looking at underlying indicators of economic poverty, lack of access to energy looms large. The wealthiest nations in the world enjoy the greatest energy security — affordable, available and reliable — and the poorest nations are essentially [energy starved](#).

After Russian President [Vladimir Putin's](#) invasion of Ukraine — in which he weaponized energy both economically and physically through attacks on power plants — global leaders began saying publicly what their actions had indicated all along: Climate goals will not trump energy security.

Emerging economies like [Pakistan](#) and [Bangladesh](#) have announced significant increases in coal consumption over natural gas, solar and wind. More overwhelmingly, developing nations such as [China](#) and [India](#) continue to grow their consumption of coal to a point where Asia now consumes [80 percent of the world's coal](#). The blame can't fall all to Asia. To protect energy security, Germany [increased coal consumption](#) when Russia shut off the natural gas supply.

The best way out of economic poverty is to create jobs. And for the 4 billion to 6 billion people living in various stages of economic poverty globally, many of those jobs will involve manufacturing, agriculture and other highly energy- and emission-intensive industries. In other words, the road out of economic poverty is paved by energy — a lot of energy.

The energy needed cannot just come from electricity created by solar panels and wind turbines. It also needs to come from other sources. Dense energy, provided by burning fuels like coal, oil and natural gas, is needed to make the high levels of heat required to manufacture steel, cement and other materials that underpin manufacturing economies. And to move large vehicles like airplanes and ships.

Asia provides a vast majority of the products that the developed economies — led by the EU and the U.S. — consume. We are essentially asking (with our dollars and euros) China, India and other manufacturing nations to produce our stuff, use coal to keep it cheap and emit CO₂ so we can be “clean.” This CO₂ shell game does not reduce emissions into our single global atmosphere.

Is this dual challenge of energy security and climate protection intractable? No. But it does require more than the oversimplified and singular focus on a climate catastrophism narrative.

Wealthy nations should consider the relatively limited number of affordable and timely technologies that can actually reduce CO₂ emissions and begin to turn us toward a “net-zero” situation in which the amount of greenhouse gases removed from the atmosphere is equal to the amount emitted. At the same time, they must put equal attention and investment into helping the rest of the world emerge from poverty.

China has been investing in global infrastructure, most recently via its massive [Belt and Road](#) Initiative. In return, it has gained access to processing a vast majority of the critical metals and rare earth elements needed to make solar panels, wind turbines and batteries. China now controls the [global supply chains](#) for so-called clean energy. Good for China, good for poor nations that need infrastructure, but not so good for [human rights of miners](#), U.S. energy security and the environment.

The U.S. could assist various nations with energy development, including oil, gas, nuclear, hydro, wind, solar and even coal by supporting U.S.-based energy industries that bring technologies that accelerate energy access and help keep emissions low. The silver lining is that newly healthy nations will then be able to afford to invest in the environment, including its climate.

Net-zero poverty to accelerate net-zero emissions. Now that's something young people can rally around and that can make a tangible difference in the lives of billions.

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