

Redefining Wealth in a Resource-Constrained World

Palabras clave: Huella ecológica, restricción de recursos, red mundial de la huella ecológica.

En un mundo ecológicamente constreñido, las naciones empiezan a reconocer la ventaja de alinear sus prioridades y sus riquezas naturales para garantizar la salud humana y el bienestar, asegurando el éxito económico sostenible, y evitar el despilfarro de los recursos. La riqueza de las naciones será redefinida, tomando en consideración la escasez de recursos. Los países centrados en los servicios financieros, que presentan una gran dependencia de los recursos extranjeros, se volverán extremadamente vulnerables. Mientras tanto, los países con reservas ecológicas, como Chile, podrán beneficiarse de su ventaja competitiva.

Key words: Ecological footprint, resource constraint, global footprint network

In an ecologically-constrained world, nations will start to recognize the advantage of aligning their priorities with their natural wealth in order to ensure human health and well-being, secure lasting economic success, and avoid resource calamities. The wealth of nations will be redefined in an age of new resource scarcity. Countries banking on business-as-usual – depending extensively upon ecological resources from abroad – will become extremely vulnerable. Meanwhile countries and states with ecological remainders, like Chile, will be able to benefit from their competitive advantage.



Redefining Wealth in a Resource-Constrained World

Mathis Wackernagel

Climate change, food shortages, declining wildlife populations, drought – these are not separate environmental crises, but expressions of a deeper problem: human pressure on nature outpaces nature’s ability to meet those demands. In addressing this underlying crisis, we must confront one of the most crucial questions of our time: Can our aspirations for human society can be achieved within the limits of what the planet can provide?

In the modern era, the world geopolitical map has been shaped by military might, technological advances and industrial power. Yet in this new era of climate change and escalating resource pressures, it is likely to be shaped by an altogether different force: competition for ecological resources. The question of who has these resources, and who needs them, will be a defining force in the coming century, determining which societies flourish and which struggle. Reshaping our societies and economies to work within the limits of nature is imperative, but it does not mean sacrificing quality of life. Indeed it may be the only way a high quality of life can be maintained.

63

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ERA OF PEAK EVERYTHING

Clearly the resources of the planet are finite. Yet humanity’s metabolism of these resources has been increasing steadily. Since the mid-1980s, humanity has been using resources and producing waste at a rate faster than the planet can regenerate and reabsorb. Climate change is the most prominent and visible indicator that human pressure on the planet has reached a critical point. Yet we are already seeing other disturbing signs: peak energy, food shortages, biodiversity loss, depleted fisheries, soil erosion, and freshwater stress. We are facing a global supply-demand crunch on essential resources – an era of “peak everything.”

Globally, according to Global Footprint Network calculations, we are now using the resources of 1.4 pla-

nets to produce all the resources we consume and absorb our carbon dioxide emissions. Moderate United Nations scenarios imply that if current trends continue, humanity's Footprint will be twice what the Earth can sustain by the early 2030s – around the time today's preschoolers are entering the workforce. Such a level of human pressure on resources may be physically impossible to maintain and would likely cause major ecosystem collapses around the world.

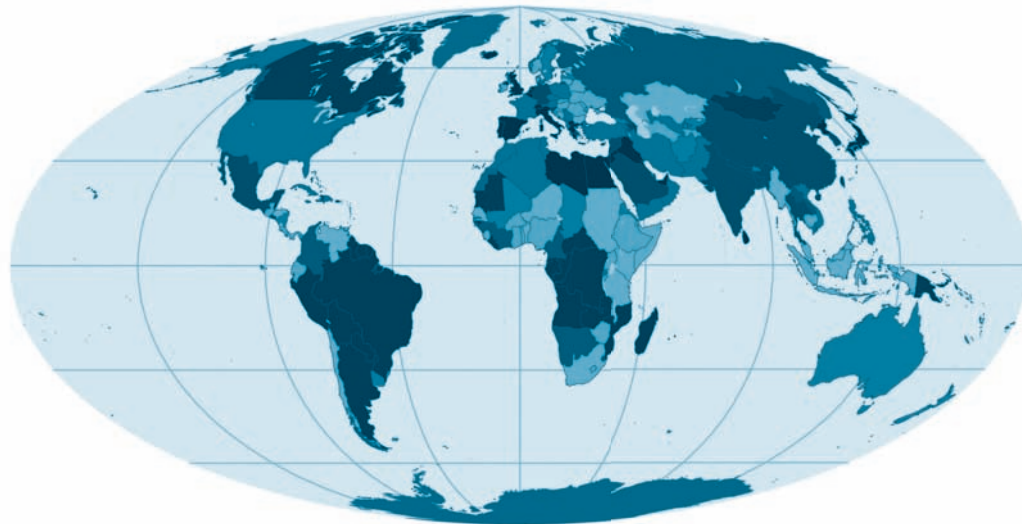
Yet the situation is not intractable. Alternatives exist, and the path to a successful future will depend largely on countries like Chile, which have more biocapacity (capacity of their ecosystems to provide resources) than they use.

THE ECOLOGICAL CREDITOR INITIATIVE

The wealth of nations will be redefined in an age of new resource scarcity. Countries banking on business-as-usual – depending extensively upon ecological resources from abroad – will become extremely vulnerable. Meanwhile countries and states with ecological remainders, like Chile, will be able to benefit from their competitive advantage (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Ecological Creditor and Debtor Countries (2005 data): Illustrates national Ecological Footprint relative to nationally available biocapacity. Global Footprint Network. 2008. *The Ecological Footprint Atlas 2008*. Oakland, California: Global Footprint Network. www.footprintnetwork.org/atlas (accessed November 2008)



ECOLOGICAL CREDITORS

- Biocapacity 0-50% larger than Footprint
- Biocapacity 50-100% larger than Footprint
- Biocapacity 100-150% larger than Footprint
- Biocapacity more than 150% larger than Footprint
- Insufficient data

ECOLOGICAL DEBTORS

- Footprint more than 150% larger than Biocapacity
- Footprint 100-150% larger than Biocapacity
- Footprint 50-100% larger than Biocapacity
- Footprint 0-50% larger than Biocapacity

In an ecologically-constrained world, nations will start to recognize the advantage of aligning their priorities with their natural wealth in order to ensure human health and well-being, secure lasting economic success, and avoid resource calamities. For this reason, Global Footprint Network, in partnership with the Community of Andean Nations, is convening a dialogue among ecological creditor nations, whose residents consume less than what the country's ecosystems can renew, ecological debtor nations, nations whose Ecological Footprint exceeds their biocapacity.

In an increasingly resource-constrained world, ecological creditor countries can strengthen their strategic positions in trade through careful ecological asset management and biodiversity preservation. In contrast, countries with ecological deficits depend on net imports of such ecological services or on liquidating their ecological assets to maintain their level of consumption.

As ecological creditor countries become increasingly rare, it will become crucial for debtor nations to forge collaborative relationships with these creditor countries to maintain stable economies. The Ecological Creditor Initiative will help explore and define these possibilities, first with creditor countries, which may more easily recognize the advantage of rethinking their development strategies, and then expanding to debtor countries, which will also begin to see the strategic advantage in becoming more resource-efficient.

In the long-term, these discussions can change the way we negotiate and value resources in the 21st century, creating an environment in which all countries, ecological creditors and debtors alike, have the incentive to manage their resources and bolster their ecological reserves.

