



Woodrow Wilson
International
Center
for Scholars

Environmental Change and Security Program

Future Shock: How Environmental Change and Human Impact Are Changing the Global Map

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Edited Transcript – David Smith

Thank you very much. I'd like to thank the Pell Center and particularly Mrs. Pell for inviting me here. And I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you all. I'm going to talk about poverty and environment links in Africa. I manage a joint UNDP unit, poverty and environment program in Africa. And what I want to talk about is how environment, defined in the broadest sense to mean natural resources like land, fisheries, water is linked to poverty and ultimately how it can contribute to instability and insecurity.

This is, what are poverty and environment links? What do they mean on the ground where people live? This is a canal in Bamako in Mali. It's grossly polluted. It stinks. There's clouds of mosquitoes so thick you can hardly walk through them. And these people live in a village next to that water. And that is their only source of water. They use it for cooking, cleaning, washing, clothes, their children. So their sickness rates from malaria waterborne diseases are really high. And they can't afford to do anything about it. They can't afford the medicine. They can't afford the hospital treatment, so their children get sick and die.

This is a hillside in Rwanda. Rwanda is an extremely steep country. If you look at that, the state farmland, there's no real terracing. Every time it rains, the soil just washes down the hill, gets washed down these rivers, lowers soil fertility, lowers agricultural production and fills up hydroelectric reservoirs with silt so they generate less electricity.

This is from the post-election violence in Kenya. And ultimately, conflict over environmental resources which are exacerbated by degradation and bad management, they don't necessarily spark violence, but it can be an underlying issue that provokes or prolongs. And this is what happened in Kenya because competition over the land is a big issue.

So what does unsustainable use of the environment cost? It costs in terms of health; waterborne diseases. It kills people. Waterborne diseases again. Soil erosion reduces

e c s p



Environmental Change and Security Program

e c s p





Woodrow Wilson
International
Center
for Scholars

Environmental Change and Security Program

I'm an economist, and economists always come up with dismal things. And there's a thing called the theory of the second best, which succinctly is that if you get one part of the big picture wrong, you can actually make the big picture worse. So you've got to get everything right. Thank you.

e c s p

