
World on the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse

A book review by DIMANA LICHEVA

Author: Lester Russel Brown
Title: World on the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse
Year of publication: 2011
ISBN: 978-0-393-33949-9

Lester Brown is an environmental analyst and influential global thinker. Founder of the Worldwatch Institute in 1974 and of the Earth Policy Institute later in 2001, his broad educational background and many years of experience in the sphere of global issues enable him to create a bigger picture of the state of the world today and identify, from different perspectives, possible trends for the future and their consequences. During his time in Earth Policy Institute, he published many books dedicated to reaching sustainable economy and saving the planet. *World on the Edge* came into print in 2011 and tries to answer two main questions - if we continue with "business as usual" (or simply put if we continue doing what we are doing now) how much time will pass before we face our own demise and what can we do in order to avoid this collapse.

The book examines many of our current global issues, such as climate change,

global warming, resource depletion, failing states, increasing population and hunger, environmental refugees, unsustainable agricultural practices, etc. Unlike other similar works in this field, *World on the Edge* provides supporting evidence with concrete facts, numbers, countries and historical events. Data and endnotes used in the book and additional sources can be found on the official website of the Earth Policy Institute, so the reader has access to all relevant information and does not have to blindly believe the words of the author but can make conclusions of his/her own.

Even though at some point one may feel that he is reading a history schoolbook, all these summaries of facts, years and numbers are needed to get the opinion of the author across - although we may not know for sure what will happen in the future, we are heading towards a serious collapse in the global economy if we continue with "business as usual" (Brown, 2011: 12).

Nevertheless *World on the Edge* does not carry a negative tone. On the contrary, at the end the reader feels full of hope that it is not too late and we can still change the path we are going down, and what is more important, he feels personally engaged and responsible for that change. In most cases one may think he is too insignificant and that all it lies in the hands of the government, but the truth is we as individuals also have the power to make a difference by altering our lifestyles and habits and be the change we want to see.

Lester Brown carries out an impartial review of what was the past and what is the current state of our world and what needs to be done to reach sustainability and avoid crisis. Moreover he does not only propose vague directions we should follow, but gives specific guidelines for the necessary measures (the so called "Plan B") and even a rough estimation of the possible costs on a global scale (Brown, 2011: 199). Some suggestions include energy saving through technology, retrofitting, increased fuel efficiency and use of more renewable resources (Brown, 2011: 99 pp), investing in education, health and family planning as means of diminishing hunger, population growth and poverty (Brown, 2011: 164 pp), utilising the food production potential and shift in

food habits as ways of improving food security (Brown, 2011: 170 pp) and many more.

Some may argue that Brown is too optimistic and does not mention other important factors such as disease and corruption, thus failing to present a holistic view of the situation today, still my personal opinion is that since everything is connected and intertwining, the indirect result of these factors is taken into account in some form or another.

World on the Edge is an engaging book not only for those familiar with the topic, but also for those who are just being introduced to it. The author's main aim is to raise the awareness and provoke discussions and actions from the side of the common citizen, not only the authorities. In that sense Lester Brown manages impeccably to simplify the complicated notions and make them accessible to the unacquainted reader. His book is a wakeup call for all of us, encouraging us to take action and make a choice – to continue with an economy that keeps destroying its support systems until it crashes down or to move into a sustainable progress. As the author states it, the "choice will be made by our generation, but it will affect life on earth for all generations to come" (Brown, 2011: 202). It is all in our hands.

References:

Brown, L.R., 2011. *World on the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company

Author information:

Dimana Licheva is currently pursuing M.Sc. in International Food Business and Consumer Studies, Kassel University and Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany. She holds a B.Sc. in Biotechnology from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Bulgaria.