

Economic growth makes it possible to protect the environment, and can be ecologically sustainable

The growing production of goods consumes more and more resources, and leads to increasing emissions of the greenhouse gas CO₂. This is particularly problematic in the rapidly growing emerging countries such as India, China or Brazil, where no environmentally-friendly technology is used.

Meanwhile, in Germany greenhouse gas emissions are relatively low, and barely increasing despite economic growth (a process known as decoupling). This difference illustrates how countries cannot afford to invest in green technology until they have reached a certain level of prosperity. This prosperity can only be achieved by means of economic growth.

However, it is important that growth occurs in the right **sectors of the economy**: sustainable mobility, energy-efficient construction, renewable energies and other forms of environmentally friendly technology. **The technological progress and ecological innovations** promoted by this **green growth** make it possible for the economy to continue growing and jobs for to be created, without contributing to climate change.

Sources:

Brot für die Welt, BUND, EED: Wegmarken für einen Kurswechsel, 2009; N. Paech: Wirtschaftliches Wachstum und nachhaltige Entwicklung schließen sich aus, in: Brot für die Welt, EED: Darf's ein bisschen mehr sein? Von der Wachstumsgesellschaft und der Frage nach ihrer Überwindung, 2011; M. Schmelzer, A. Passadakis: Postwachstum, Hamburg 2011.

Growth and sustainability are mutually exclusive

Green growth is on everyone's lips, and is being widely touted as the solution to our ecological problems. The assumption is that technological progress will one day make it possible for the economy to grow while resource consumption declines. This theory is known as **decoupling**.

In Germany, a tendency towards "**relative decoupling**" can be observed: GDP is growing, while resource consumption remains roughly the same. This means that each year, fewer resources are consumed per item produced, but there is no overall reduction in resource consumption. "**Absolute decoupling**", or increased growth accompanied by a fall in resource consumption, is not yet technologically feasible.

Since 1970, global CO₂ emissions have risen by 80% in spite of all the innovations and the transition to a services-based high-tech society. This is because increased efficiency is often accompanied by a rise in overall consumption – we have more economical cars, but we also use them more and more. This is known as the **rebound effect**.

Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that growth is the cause of, and not the solution to our environmental problems. It was the acceleration of economic growth that brought about climate change. To continue to rely on growth as a solution strategy seems therefore to be not just naive, but dangerous. In the words of Albert Einstein: "Problems can never be solved with the same mindset that created them." Instead of efficiency, we should be pursuing **sufficiency** – consuming less, and thereby reducing our impact on the environment.