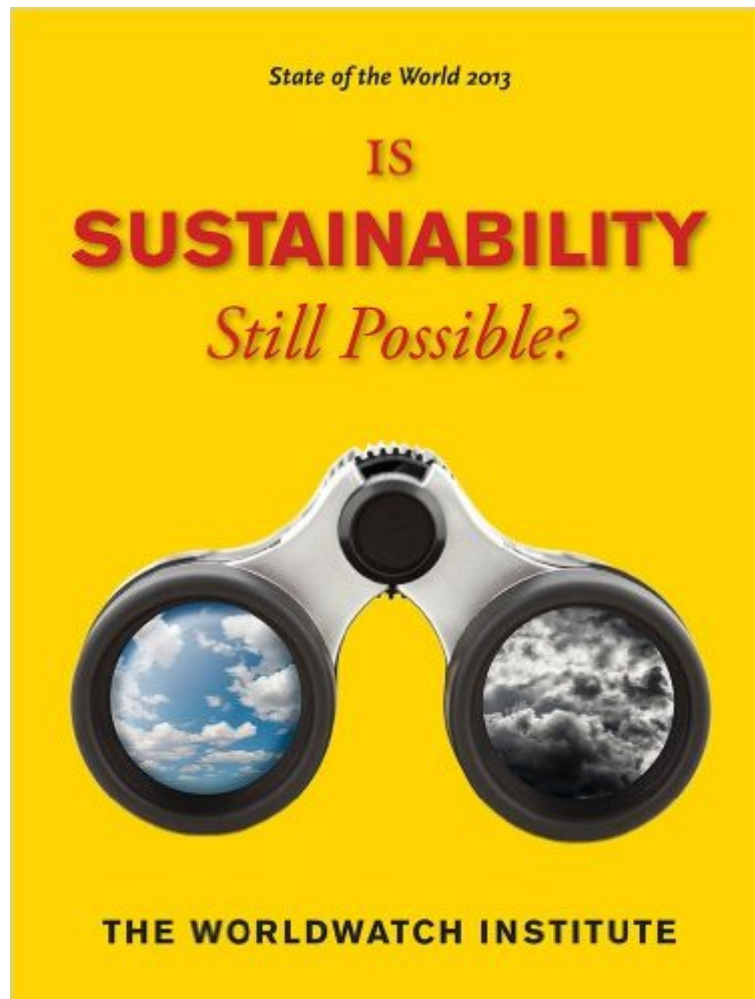


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State Of The World 2013: Is Sustainability Still Possible?



Synopsis

Every day, we are presented with a range of "sustainable" products and activities "from green cleaning supplies to carbon offsets" but with so much labeled as "sustainable," the term has become essentially sustainababble, at best indicating a practice or product slightly less damaging than the conventional alternative. Is it time to abandon the concept altogether, or can we find an accurate way to measure sustainability? If so, how can we achieve it? And if not, how can we best prepare for the coming ecological decline? In the latest edition of Worldwatch Institute's State of the World series, scientists, policy experts, and thought leaders tackle these questions, attempting to restore meaning to sustainability as more than just a marketing tool. In State of the World 2013: Is Sustainability Still Possible?, experts define clear sustainability metrics and examine various policies and perspectives, including geoengineering, corporate transformation, and changes in agricultural policy, that could put us on the path to prosperity without diminishing the well-being of future generations. If these approaches fall short, the final chapters explore ways to prepare for drastic environmental change and resource depletion, such as strengthening democracy and societal resilience, protecting cultural heritage, and dealing with increased conflict and migration flows. State of the World 2013 cuts through the rhetoric surrounding sustainability, offering a broad and realistic look at how close we are to fulfilling it today and which practices and policies will steer us in the right direction. This book will be especially useful for policymakers, environmental nonprofits, and students of environmental studies, sustainability, or economics.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are a couple of ways that the title of this collection of 34 articles misses the mark. First, most articles focus less on the "state of the world" as it is in 2013, than about how it might be in the future. And (spoiler alert) the overwhelming majority of articles answer the title question in the affirmative. Unfortunately, I'm not sure a reader will wind up with a better idea of what "sustainability" is after reading this book than she or he had beforehand; at least, I didn't. Nonetheless, even though I've been researching and writing in a this general field for a while myself, there were maybe 10 or so articles I found that made very good points new to me, or made their points unusually well. Most of these articles had a narrower focus than talking about how to change the whole world at once. Roughly an equal number of chapters had me madly scribbling critical comments in the margins. The remaining, slightly biggest chunk were at least pretty good overall. My star score reflects this average. (DISCLOSURE: Before you read further I should mention that the publisher contacted me and offered to send me a copy of the book if I would agree to write an honest review. Based on my impression of other books from this publisher, I accepted. This is my first invited review out of more than 200 reviews I've posted on to date. Should there be a recurrence, I will highlight the fact again.) While I'll have more specific remarks below about the contents of some of the chapters, the absence of some important topics was also notable. First, none of the chapters engaged seriously with *finance.

UPDATE 20 April 2013: I am struggling to get through this book. Small print, dense pages, 34 chapters. Further impressions: Positive: this is an extraordinary cast of characters and a superb "architecture" for addressing the core issue of sustainability. Negative: the endeavor lacks a whole systems (holistic) analytic model and even though Herman Daly is represented, "true cost" is not a concept ably brought forth here. On balance, so far, this is absolutely a 5 star book, but it needs a companion "executive" version, much much shorter, with more pictures, and the three colors average people can understand (red, yellow, m green). It needs a scorecard approach that can be very specific about what policies we need to adopt across each domain (agriculture to water), right now all that is buried in the fine print and too time consuming to dig out. - - - - - This is a preliminary review. I got this book today in Washington DC and at first glance consider it quite extraordinary. Although the Worldwatch Institute (not to be confused with its founder Lester Brown who left them in 2001 to establish a separate Earth Policy Institute) is in my view one of the most

prolific and consistent publisher in the field of whole systems sustainability studies, this book does not quite make the leap to six stars (my top ten percent) because it lacks a comprehensive architecture and a related cost picture for "the whole enchilada." This is a MAGNIFICENT work with 34 chapters by different individuals, each clearly a masterpiece within its domain.

I've devoted perhaps as many as a couple hundred hours to reading (closely), underlining, making notations, and writing synopses of about half the chapters in the book. Simply put, I think it's very important, and anything I can do to encourage people to read it, will be worth the time I've invested. We've all heard the words "sustainable" and "sustainability" scores if not hundreds of times in recent years. The book itself speaks of "sustainable". But despite the effort by people and organizations to promote sustainability as a path down which we must, and hopefully are, turning, it is becoming more apparent with each passing year that the way of life of the advanced nations of the world is not sustainable in its present form. We continue to burn fossil fuels as (a) the climate continues to change, and (b) as the fossil fuels themselves continue to require more effort, expense, and pollution to discover and recover. Of course they are not inexhaustible. The fossil fuel age is drawing to a close, the only question being whether we will stop burning them in time to avert climate catastrophe, or whether we will continue burning them until there are no more left or until civilization collapses – whichever occurs first. The developed nations of the world continue happily on their journey of mega-capitalism, with its mandate of continual economic (and profit) growth, ultimately promoted by the fostering of a consumer lifestyle. On a finite planet, with finite resources but an expanding population, this is unsustainable.

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