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Can Future Energy Needs be Met Sustainably?

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Abstract

Global energy consumption is increasing rapidly, driven by rising living standards in developing countries. The energy provided by burning fossil fuels is also increasing, albeit not quite as fast as total energy use. This is unsustainable. Decarbonisation is imperative -to reduce air pollution, rebalance relations between oil and producing and importing countries, and to moderate climate change. It will be very hard: indeed, probably impossible with today's technology at a price society will be willing to pay. After briefly reviewing trends in energy demand, supply and efficiency, I will focus on the potential and outlook for low carbon energy sources, and the technical, economic and political challenges that will have to be met in order to meet future needs sustainably.