

Climate Change, Smoke and Mirrors

May 10, 2017

A civil society briefing on Geoengineering

Climate change, smoke and mirrors

In the past decade, a small but growing group of governments and scientists, the majority from the most powerful and most climate-polluting countries in the world, has been pushing for political consideration of geoengineering, the deliberate large-scale technological manipulation of the climate.

Geoengineering is inherently high-risk and its negative effects will likely be unequally distributed. Because of this, geoengineering has often been presented as a “Plan B” to confront the climate crisis. But after the Paris Agreement, which set the ambitious goal of keeping the temperature to well below 2°C and possibly even 1.5°C, the discourse has changed. Now, geoengineering is increasingly being advanced as an “essential” means to reach this goal, through a mix of risky technologies that would take carbon out of the atmosphere to create so-called “negative emissions” or take control of the global thermostat to directly lower the climate’s temperature.

It should be to expect that geoengineering is getting advanced more rapidly than it should be. The Paris Agreement requires a global temperature rise of 1.5°C to 2°C, but the world is on track to rise 2.7°C to 4.8°C by 2100. The world is on track to rise 2.7°C to 4.8°C by 2100. The world is on track to rise 2.7°C to 4.8°C by 2100. The world is on track to rise 2.7°C to 4.8°C by 2100.

What is geoengineering?

The term of geoengineering the climate has been around for well over a century. That usually it is used to describe a proposed carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. With the onset of the climate change crisis, the term of geoengineering projects has increased, and today public debate about geoengineering options includes a range of other climate change related technologies.

Geoengineering or climate geoengineering refers to a set of proposed techniques and technologies to deliberately intervene in the climate system to counteract or partially offset climate change. It is increasingly regarded as going to “the next step” in the climate change response, in the sense that it is an insurance policy for our planet should the going on the difficult tracks to the next generation.

Geoengineering may include a range of technologies, such as solar radiation management (SRM), or so-called “cooling” technologies, or carbon dioxide removal (CDR), or so-called “warming” technologies. These are all different proposals, and although some CDR technologies may be shown to be viable according to their potential, the climate change technologies would be difficult to deliver, even if they are not based on proven technology.

Significantly, most of the geoengineering technologies are not based on proven technology. They are based on a range of unproven technologies, and their potential to deliver the intended benefits is highly uncertain. They are based on a range of unproven technologies, and their potential to deliver the intended benefits is highly uncertain.

We consider this work to progress and plan to publish more information on geoengineering in the future.

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A new [briefing paper](#) by ETC Group and Heinrich Böll Foundation in advance of the UNFCCC intersessional meetings in Bonn, May 2017, gives an overview of what geoengineering is and why it is dangerous, as well as up-to-date information on proposed geoengineering technologies and governance.

A crucial read for anyone engaged in the fight against climate change.

[Download the briefing here.](#)

(A German version of this briefing in pdf format is also available.)