# Going global -- is the future bright?

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The global economy is entering a dramatic, virtual phase of development claims a new book, Going Global, published today (Jan. 18) following a collaboration between the independent charity the Tomorrow Project and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Dr Michael Moynagh and Richard Worsley, directors of The Tomorrow Project, argue that, in the future, more and more people will work in virtual worlds like Second Life.

A growing number of companies like IBM are already establishing a presence in Second Life. Earnings in Second Life can be converted into US dollars and some people are even giving a Second Life address on their business cards.

In the future it is likely that the distinction between work and leisure will blur as virtual games provide individuals with a second income in their spare time. Already, over 100,000 Chinese are thought to earn their living from online games. Going Global predicts that more and more people are likely to work full time in virtual worlds in the years ahead.

'In August 2007 several hundred thousand dollars of virtual currency exchanged hands every day in Second Life', said Michael Moynagh. 'The site has already produced its first real-world millionaire – a Chinese property developer who now employs 60 people full time to manage her portfolio in Second Life. Imagine if employees were as addicted to their work as players are to their games!'

Virtual worlds are just one example of a vast range of activities and products that will increasingly be developed and marketed online, creating a new virtual economy that could eventually supersede manufacturing and services. 'Within 10 years of the internet opening for business, online sales accounted for nearly 25% of manufacturing revenue in the US and 10% of retailing and some services', Moynagh added.

Going Global examines emerging trends and the potential future of business, global poverty, communications and the world food supply. Conclusions include:

-- The threat from al-Qaeda may not last long as the organisation is faced with clashes from within which could divert attacks on the West. In the short term, al-Qaeda-based terrorism is likely to continue to be fuelled by the desire for respect, a reaction to Muslims' deep-seated feeling of distrust in the West. But in the longer term, internal conflicts may rip the organization apart. A strong possibility is that al-Qaeda will disintegrate. Cells that already gain strength from local conflicts, as in the Philippines, might increasingly focus on these local struggles leading to the decline of Al-Qaeda as an overarching threat to the West.

--Increases in global migration will make populations more diverse, and benefit both "sending" and "receiving" nations. Migrants from developing countries sent over $167 billion to their families back home in 2005, more than twice the level of international aid.

-- Global crime will expand, including credit card fraud, insurance fraud and other consumer-based crimes, and new types of crime will emerge as technology develops. As youth unemployment increases, the number of potential criminals will rise.

-- Dangerous climate change is almost inevitable because consumers will

resist sharp cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. However, the authors suggest that technology could "save us from the worst effects of climate change, confounding the gloomy projections widespread today"

-- There will be enough oil to meet the world's needs till at least 2030. Technology will increase the amount produced by known reserves and enable inaccessible reserves to come on stream. When oil does start to run out, the process will be gradual, giving the world time to adjust. The big challenge in the short term will be to invest enough in oil production to keep the price steady.

The authors offer a forward-looking approach to globalisation, asking whether governments and societies will rise to the challenge of a changing world.

Source: Economic & Social Research Council

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