

Understanding Sudan

A Teaching and Learning Resource



Notes for Teachers: Lesson One. The Global Oil Economy.

Fact Sheet One:

This fact sheet is designed to introduce the students to some of the details of what oil is, how it is produced, and how it is traded. It should be distributed along with the annotated photograph of a commodity trader's computer screen.

During this section of the lesson, students should be encouraged to think critically about the relationship between the physical properties of oil and its implications in the world. The final discussion is intended as a preparation so the students can link the chemistry and production of oil to the type of political and social questions we will encounter in relation to Sudanese oil.

The questionnaire should be read aloud by the students, and when a question is indicated, it should be posed to the class, who then have an opportunity to debate and talk about what they have just read, as well as discuss the question in hand.

The first question posed should be an opportunity for the teacher to evaluate pupil's current knowledge about the oil industry, and evaluate the weight given to the sections ahead.

Given prior organization, this part of the course could be combined with work in Chemistry, looking at the composition of petroleum, however, because it is especially hard to evaluate the level of students in this regard when designing a module related to another subject (oil in the Sudan), such correspondences have been left to the discretion of the teacher.

Fact Sheet Two:

This fact sheet is designed to begin to make the students think about the inter-relation of politics and oil. The material should be read through as a class, and then the discussion should force the students to think pragmatically about oil. Given its necessity to the world economy, can it be used as a political instrument? This discussion should incorporate both its efficacy as such an instrument, and the consequences for the world as a whole, given the inter-connected nature of the oil market.

Fact Sheet Three: Maps and Graphs

This fact sheet is composed of a series of maps, graphs and tables of the global oil economy. The sheets should be distributed in class and then each one discussed. General Questions:

What do you notice about the world's top consumers and producers? Do the lists contain any of the same countries? How would you characterize the difference between the two lists? In terms of geography? Income? How does this relate to the regional distribution of oil production we see on the next graph?

Points to be emphasized include the rising demand of China, and equally of India, and the drop-off in production, caused by an OPEC production cut.

If the students have access to computers, then they should be shown the BP website, and, depending on the time available, be asked to make some graphs of their own. For instance, The students could be asked to make graphs of the percentage change in the increase in demand for oil over the last ten years, and how that correlates with the percentage change in oil production.

Fact Sheet Four:

This fact sheet should be read through by the class together, and then the students should look back to the statistics already given to them on the global oil economy, rates of discovery, and production and consumption statistics, and then the class should debate whether they find Peak Oil a convincing hypothesis. Following this, the types of pressures that Peak Oil may exert on both the oil producing and consuming nations should be discussed: does the class think, for instance, that one of the reasons for secrecy on the part of producing governments (and thus a lack of public accountability) is due to fear of broadcasting the fact that their oil is running out? Does the increasing demand for oil caused by an approaching (or already passed) oil peak mean oil-consuming governments are less interested in human rights?

Fact Sheets Five to Nine:

These five facts sheets are designed to prepare the way for the evaluation of the resource curse hypothesis at the end of class. The class should be divided up into five groups, each should be given a country, and then, after a period of study time, asked to make a presentation of the country they have been given.

After each group has made a presentation, and each person has a copy of all the fact sheets, a class discussion can begin. Given what the students have already understood about oil's physical properties, and the discussion we have had about both oil as a political weapon and the international oil market, the students will be asked to compare the countries: are there things in common between all the countries? If so, what? Why do these countries share certain phenomena in common? Why do you think so many countries establish large national companies in order to organize their oil industry?

Fact Sheet Ten:

This fact sheet is designed to combine some of the issues we have been thinking about more generally in terms of oil producing countries. Students should read out the fact sheet aloud, stopping at the points indicated by questions for discussion. They should be encouraged to link these discussions back to the maps and statistics that we have looked at earlier in class, as well as a consideration of oil's physical properties. The teacher should emphasize the relationship between oil and the degree of organization required to extract it, and ask the students what they think this means for the different aspects of the resource curse. The last question is designed to bridge the first class with the second, by getting the students to think pragmatically about what they would do if they were an oil company or oil consuming nation.

Homework

To consolidate everything learned in this class, students will be asked to prepare a short assignment comparing the five countries given on the facts sheets according to a couple of selected aspects of their oil economy (e.g. export rates and human rights issues). They should be encouraged to do further research using the sources given in the course, and to think critically about the data given in the course in terms of the ideas of resource curse and peak oil.