

Top Ten

**Things NGOs
Must Do After
The Paris
Climate
Agreement**

*By John Sayer
Director
Carbon Care Asia*

Top Ten Things NGOs Must Do After The Paris Climate Agreement

The governments that met and signed the Paris Agreement on climate change have acknowledged the importance of efforts to hold planetary warming close to 1.5 degrees. Yet the agreement contains no firm commitments necessary to achieve even a two-degree goal. Studies show that high-ambition but non-binding agreements have the potential to succeed when civil society and other social institutions actively engage governments to ensure ambitious words are turned into actions. Climate change has impact on the mission of all types of NGOs. If not checked, the economic and social fallout from extreme weather events will sweep away any social gains NGOs have made in past decades.

For both these reasons, which are expanded in the second part of this paper, we offer ten actions NGOs should be taking to play their part in ensuring the Paris Agreement achieves what it must.

- 1. Push leaders for full and speedy ratification of the Paris Agreement**
- 2. Lobby for ambitious targets, real timetables and effective financing**
- 3. Make sure vulnerable people don't bear the cost of change**
- 4. Foster broad stakeholder engagement in implementing the Paris Agreement**
- 5. Play an active role in the climate justice movement**
- 6. Don't become a token**
- 7. Make sure technical innovation serves ordinary people and doesn't lead to further marginalization**
- 8. Keep up the pressure to end the fossil fuel era**
- 9. Embed climate change mitigation and adaptation in core programmes**
- 10. Walk the talk inside your organization**

01

Push leaders for full and speedy ratification of the Paris Agreement

First, non-government groups have to ensure that their governments sign up to the agreement they brought home from Paris. The agreement will open for signature in April 2016. NGOs should join together with scientific and academic groups to ensure that the Paris Agreement passes through the necessary political processes in each nation in a form which ensures implementation in letter and spirit. Earlier international climate agreements were weakened by the failure of several governments to fully endorse at home what they had signed up to in the international meetings.

02

Lobby for ambitious targets, real timetables and effective financing

The Paris Agreement is strong on process and intention, but weak on binding targets. It is vital that governments receive the reinforcement they need from a broad range of constituent groups so that they set targets which represent their fair share in holding global temperatures at 1.5 degrees.

The leaders in Paris wisely accepted that all nations must now take action, but also agreed that developed nations and historic polluters can and must do the most. NGOs in every country must insist their governments create a clear and consistent regulatory framework and a roadmap for change that is fair to all players: helping the public to make wise and informed choices about consumption and enabling business small and large to make the necessary transitions and prosper.

Public investment is essential. Financing the Paris Agreement cannot be left largely to the private sector. Public finance must be applied in ways that overcome narrow and short-term criteria that control market forces and govern commercial returns. This can avoid externalizing the costs of cleanups, public health and social division. Importantly, climate finance must not diminish other essential social budgets. For wealthy countries this means protecting the overseas development budget as new money is applied to climate change mitigation. For developing countries this means continued spending on health, education and other aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals.

03

Make sure vulnerable people don't bear the cost of change

Many schemes to reduce carbon emissions involve raising the price of energy, food, transport and other essential items in order to reduce demand and lessen greenhouse gas production. An important role for NGOs is to ensure that people vulnerable to poverty can continue to achieve basic living standards in the face of mitigation policies.

If energy or food prices go up, the government must create ways to protect those who can least afford these changes through pricing schemes and social protection programmes. Carbon pricing, cap & trade and sequestration schemes must have robust social impact assessments so that they don't enable the wealthy to continue carbon-intensive lives while people vulnerable to poverty lose what little they have.

NGOs should work to prevent a situation where those with private jets or car fleets pay the same additional price for fuel as those struggling to light their homes or pay the bus fare to work.

NGOs must also continue to identify and give voice to the existing victims of climate change in cases where governments fail to take sufficient action on climate change adaptation or mitigation.

04

Foster broad stakeholder engagement in implementing the Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement encourages governments to work with other parties at home and internationally to catalyse efforts to strengthen action on mitigation and adaptation. Stakeholder engagement is vital in planning, monitoring, evaluation, verification, technical development and capacity-building for the green transition.

Big business and international business have the resources and skills to exert great influence in the post-Paris decision-making. The most important group still to gain admittance to the process are those people most vulnerable to climate change and often those with the least voice in public affairs. NGOs can assist people vulnerable to poverty, minority groups, consumers and small local businesses to participate in the implementation of the Paris Agreement. NGOs can help ensure monitoring, reporting and verification of climate change action are, as the Paris Agreement proposes: "comprehensive, accurate, complete and comparable."

05

Play an active role in the climate justice movement

It is the responsibility of NGOs to combine strength with national and international coalitions and alliances to add weight to united action for change, increase influence and share the best ideas on ways forward.

In light of the importance of achieving no more than a 1.5 degree rise in global temperatures, it is the responsibility of all socially-minded organizations to keep up with the best sources of facts, trends and news on climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to ensure these permeate the entire organization. NGOs should be familiar with the arguments of the climate change deniers, those who believe technology alone can solve the problem and other opinions in this most important debate. Ideas should be shared with colleagues and supporters.

Communications with NGOs' supporters should contain a good dose of information on commitment to greenhouse gas reduction in programme, organizational and advocacy work, and how supporters can contribute and participate.

06

Don't become a token

NGOs must be sure they are not used to legitimize tokenistic, disjointed or isolated environmental programmes organized by either government or business. Many rogues seek legitimacy through public association with ethically-sound NGOs.

The goals of the Paris Agreement require systemic change. We must make sure that climate action is structural, policy based, joined up, and leading towards comprehensive transition to a low-carbon economy and zero emissions. NGOs are often coopted to partner well-publicised corporate environmental programmes, whether or not the majority of that same company's activities continue as high-carbon operations with catastrophic impact on climate change.

NGOs should ensure they are fully informed of the totality of any corporate or government relationships involving climate mitigation or adaptation before they partner, endorse, co-brand, give funds, receive funds or co-publicise any such initiatives. If NGOs get up on any stage, they should look carefully at who they are standing with.

07

Make sure technical innovation serves ordinary people and doesn't lead to further marginalization

A significant role for NGOs is to ensure that scientific research and technical fixes don't serve only the wealthy, or make life harder for poorer and more marginalized groups, especially where pricing and access are concerned. NGOs are the best watchdogs of the social impact of technical innovation and change; including that which is intended to address climate change.

NGOs should advocate for a good dose of non-profit, state sponsored research in government and university laboratories to ensure research is not just serving the priorities and pockets of an elite. NGOs can also be vigilant over claims that the market is the only source of innovation, and ensure that the arguments and the evidence in favour of publicly-funded research and intellectual commons are not pushed into the shadows by corporate personality cults. Strong bonds between government research and entrepreneurs can unlock more social value than innovation left purely to the market. Using their frontline experience, NGOs themselves have a role to play in developing and popularizing low cost technology that addresses climate change alongside the needs of people vulnerable to poverty.

08

Keep up the pressure to end the fossil fuel era

"Perhaps the most significant effect of the Paris agreement in the next few years will be the signal it sends to investors: the united governments of the world say that the age of fossil fuels has started drawing to a close" says The Economist magazine. NGOs must play a role to ensure that this transition happens in a prompt and just way.

Fossil fuel companies and oil-producing nations will use all their financial and political muscle to hold back history, representing perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to meaningful action on climate change. Despite their comparably minute budgets, NGOs can counter this resistance using their credibility and their communications skills, and be among the key accelerants in the transition to green energy. Support for the fossil fuel divestment movement is an important signifier. NGOs should also support campaigns against fossil fuel sponsorship of sports, the arts and other public events. Financial institutions and pension funds should be asked to offer fossil-fuel-free investment options. It should go without saying that NGOs should end any sponsorship or brand association with fossil fuel companies.

09

Embed climate change mitigation and adaptation in core programmes

NGOs must address climate change issues as an essential part of their own core programmes. Tackling this issue must be a strategic aim of any organization; climate change work cannot be a piecemeal, box-ticking or a bolt-on activity. The form and substance of NGO work also needs a green transition. To achieve this, carbon emission reduction must run through all programme design, value chains, partner relationships and internal and external capacity building.

Development agencies must climate-proof any investments they promote among their constituencies. They must be the first to identify and avoid 'lock-in' to carbon-intensive activities and assets involving, for example, intensive transport, reliance on fossil or finite biomass fuels or degradation of the natural environment. They must also plan to protect programmes from the risks of the disruptive impacts of climate change.

NGOs addressing workers' rights and livelihoods must fight for a just transition to green jobs, rather than the protection of employment in polluting industries. The best thing NGOs can do for vulnerable communities and marginalized groups is to help them adapt and protect their lives and livelihoods from impending impact of climate change and ensure rights are protected and voices heard during the essential process of change.

All NGOs must advocate climate justice, turning the challenges of the green transition into opportunities for new livelihoods, stronger social organization and reductions in inequality.

10

Walk the talk inside your organization

NGOs should have transparent carbon measurement and reduction plans that, at the very least, match those of the progressive parts of the private sector. No NGO should argue that they are excused from setting the best example because of the greater good and the importance of their work. Owners of private jets say that! Corrupt officials argue that! NGOs should ensure they are prominent in the most authentic carbon labelling and award schemes, demonstrating best practice and encouraging others to engage.

Travel is a major challenge for international and some national NGOs. More travel must be replaced with other methods of interaction. Private and air travel should be replaced with public transport and land and sea travel wherever possible. The purposes for travel can be accumulated so that single visits serve multiple purposes. Work responsibilities and skill levels should be organized so that colleagues on site can represent one another at meetings and events and reduce travel.

Studies show that action can lead to awareness, just as awareness can lead to action. NGOs should create a work atmosphere and environment which encourages individual actions and personal pledges. This can cover energy conservation (cycling, walking, taking the stairs), diet (slower, local food), waste reduction (repairing, reusing).

On matters of energy, waste, buildings and equipment, NGOs should mirror and exceed the initiatives advanced by the private and government sectors. That includes engaging suppliers and partners in their value chains to discuss their contribution to climate change, working with them on their emissions, and finding better suppliers and partners if there is no improvement.

NGO should ensure none of their reserves are invested in fossil fuel extraction, or carbon-intensive power and transport companies. Beyond doing less harm, NGOs should seek to do more good by investing any reserves in businesses that have positive environmental impact and promote green technologies.

Climate Change

Climate change means you

Whether you are an environmental, poverty reduction, human rights, gender, labour or animal rights organization, holding the signatories of the Paris Climate to account is essential for the achievement of your own mission. If the targets set out in the Paris Agreement are not met, the catastrophic effects will sweep away any gains social organizations may achieve in any other aspect of social progress.

Development and conservation NGOs already know how essential action on climate change is to their agenda. The President of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, has noted: “Even at 2 degrees, we’ve shown that some 40% of the land in sub-Saharan Africa that’s growing maize will no longer be able to do so, fights over water will be extreme, coral reefs will be wiped out, the fisheries will be fundamentally changed.” Scarcity of resources will mean less money is available for education, housing, health and welfare.

Human and minority rights groups know well that accelerating climate change will not only knock back economic rights. Social, civil and political rights will degrade on a mass scale as resources and jobs become scarcer, inequalities grow, and we face more conflict, displacement and migration – and as these events are answered with new levels of social control and fresh security measures.

“Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind”, the Paris Agreement says, “Parties [governments] should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity . . .”

Protection of workers’ rights and equality is mentioned as the imperative to ensure a “just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs” as part of climate action. As the document also mentions biodiversity, ecosystems, mother earth, and the concept climate justice I doubt there are many NGOs which find that the Paris Agreement does not provide a basis for action within their own area of concern.

The entire Paris Agreement is framed within the Sustainable Development Goals. This links national commitments on climate change to commitments on development, rights and equality.

Civil Society

Civil Society and International Agreements

It is well accepted that NGOs – whether international or community-based – can play an important role by holding governments to account for the international agreements they have signed.

Research suggests that non-binding, high-ambition agreements can achieve a great deal provided civil society and other stakeholders can be actively engaged.

May Miller-Dawkins for the Overseas Development Institute analysed the MDGs and other international agreements, prior to the finalization of the SDGs. She concluded:

- “Practicality” should not blunt ambition. High ambition and non-binding nature could increase, rather than diminish, an agreement’s overall and long-term impact. . . In a variety of cases, higher ambition, lower enforcement agreements have allowed domestic groups to use international norms and frameworks for leverage to generate change.’
- National platforms need to include diverse stakeholders and have time for genuine dialogue: The effects of international agreements are “highly contingent” on the dynamics of domestic social mobilisation and existing institutions.
- Knowledge and monitoring can drive progress, not just measure it: At the national level, dialogue by diverse stakeholders that creates a more consensual definition of the problem can create a platform for successful problem solving.
- Agreements can reinforce existing international norms, and can strengthen their existing monitoring platforms: goals are underpinned by international human rights and environmental law.

John Sayer 2016/1/28

Copyright © 2016. All Rights Reserved.



John Sayer is a Director of Carbon Care Asia.

He was a member of the Hong Kong NGO delegation to COP21, a program of the Jockey Club CarbonCare Open Innovation Lab (JC COIL) funded by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.

Contact Email : john.sayer@carboncareasia.com

CCA Website : www.carboncareasia.com

JC COIL Website : www.coil.hk