

Countries Without Borders

How the War Against Climate Change will
be Won

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INTRODUCTION

→ The world has changed on us. It is no longer our national governments that are in control of the affairs of the world. If we didn't believe that before, the financial crisis of 2008 made it abundantly clear. Everywhere, countries wrestled with a problem that respected no borders. Here was humbling evidence, if we still needed it, of the limits of national governments to solve problems that have a global scale.

The economy is just one of the big problems we face that is global. Terrorism, poverty, water stress, climate change – these are all major challenges that involve the whole planet.

Climate change is an enormous challenge, not only because we have a world governance structure that makes it very difficult to act decisively, but also because it is inherently difficult for the people who caused this problem to solve it. The term 'global warming' tells you that the impact is happening everywhere, even though it is the industrialized nations that are the primary cause. For the developed world to solve it, we would have to suddenly develop a completely new way of living and looking at the world—one that requires us to sacrifice today so that future generations will be spared the consequences of our shortsightedness. We might actually get there, but it will surely take many decades, under the best of scenarios, before a way of behaving that is currently foreign to the developed world takes hold.

Reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere to levels that avoid runaway climate change means getting developed and developing nations to cooperate in a way that the world has never seen. Sure this may happen, but unless this relationship evolves pretty much overnight, it will be too late. As China and India develop their economies, they will understandably continue to strive for the living standards we already enjoy in the developed world.

Barring a phenomenal scientific breakthrough and its commercialization on a wide scale at an impossibly fast pace, China's and India's consumption of fossil fuels, particularly coal, will increase carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to dangerously high levels – even if developed nations cut their reliance on fossil fuels dramatically. Renewable energy, as it stands today, is only a tiny fraction of the total world energy supply. The gap between where we are and where we need to be is dauntingly large, particularly given the difficulties of achieving even the relatively modest measures of Kyoto I, and the wrangling both between and within countries about the proposals for Kyoto II. Change seems suicidally slow.

THINKING OF COUNTRIES DIFFERENTLY

→ So what can be done? Well, we could just give up and party while the ship sinks. Or we could recognize that we need a whole new way of looking at things, and that the way to attack climate change, and perhaps other world problems, is to think of countries differently.

Traditionally, countries, and hence their citizens, have been defined by their geography. I am Canadian not because of my color, heritage, religion, political views, or tastes in food, clothes or cars, but because I am identified with a group defined by the borders of a piece of land. You might be Indian, share the same political views, drive the same car, wear the same clothes, and like the same food as I do, but you are identified with another geographical entity. In short, we may have a lot in common even when our countries and our national governments do not. We may care about global warming in the same way, and want to solve it using the same means, but our countries might not.

In fact, the odds are they do not. The odds are our countries will fight for things that we may not care about. And as they scramble to protect their narrow interests, they might cause us all to sink. It's a classic game theory problem, where we would all be better off if we cooperated, but we are not set up to do so. Cooperation would involve each country giving up now things our geographically based leaders hold dearly so that people in three generations' time will benefit. How can we expect this when our elected geographical leaders have a term of only five years? The incentives are all wrong.

BEYOND NATIONAL BORDERS

→ This does not mean that the problems are impossible to solve. It means that we need to look beyond our national borders to solve them. I'm not suggesting that we have to abandon the idea of a country; just that we have to redefine it, so that people can come together differently, and act cooperatively beyond their frontiers. What we need is *countries without borders*.

The fact is these borderless countries already exist, and we need them to take the reins. We call them companies, organizations, associations, etc. They straddle borders, they control fortunes, they employ millions, and they are not bound by the narrow geographically based interests and incentives that characterize nation states. These countries without borders wield enormous power and control staggering budgets. When they make decisions, they change the world.

These borderless countries use trucks and planes and ships, producing millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide. They use paper and packaging—that's millions of

trees. They use electricity—that's vast amounts of water and fuel. Whenever they choose to do this or that, there are consequences for the planet. But there is no reason why the consequences shouldn't be good.

The scale of some of these countries without borders is huge. The Young Presidents' Organization is an international group of about 17,000 leaders of companies, men and women under 55 years old. Together they employ over 4 million people and have combined revenues of over \$3 trillion. This is approximately equal to India and China's revenues combined, so that gives you a sense of what kind of power the YPO has to affect climate change. And that's just one organization.

Wal-Mart has over 2 million employees – it is a country without borders. Exxon has 107,000. IBM has 386,000. They are all countries without borders—rich countries. Imagine the scope they have to reduce carbon emissions. Also, it's not hard to believe that they could move faster and more effectively than the traditional countries we know. Just the commitment of the CEO will create change.

CITIES OF THE WORLD UNITE

→ There is one country without borders that is forming that could have a profound effect on the battle against global warming. I am thinking of the coalition of 40 of our largest cities worldwide. The mayors of these cities, which include Athens, Bangkok, Beijing, Berlin, Chicago, Melbourne and Mumbai, believe they need to do something about climate change, in many cases far beyond what their countries' governments are doing. The C40, as the group calls itself, comprise over 180 million people and have a gross national product of trillions of dollars. If it were a country, it would be one of the most powerful in the world.

The cities of the C40 have more in common with each other on the issue of climate change than they do with their governments. These cities are coming together to share ideas and initiatives, and are now working with the Clinton Climate Initiative on carbon reduction programs. The potential for expanding this country without borders is enormous.

Around half of the world's 6 billion people now live in urban environments. Compared with the great cities of history - Athens (population 250-300,000), Heian-kyo (now Kyoto: 100-200,000) or Imperial Rome (1 million) – our modern conurbations are monstrous. Following the decline of Rome, it was not until 1800 that a city, London, reached a population of 1 million again. Now, Tokyo

has a population of 35 million, Greater Mexico City 19.2 million, and Mumbai, São Paulo and New York City each have over 18 million. Meanwhile, over the past 25 years many once modest and obscure cities have seen their populations treble or more. Since 1980, Lagos has grown from 2.6 to 11.1 million and Kabul from one to three million, while the string of small mining towns that sprang up to the east of Johannesburg along the gold reef has coagulated into an urban area now known as Ekurhuleni that houses over 3 million people.

Today, nearly 430 cities have populations of over 1 million. But while countries, with their historical borders and legacy notions of nationality, continue to compete and indulge in confrontation, cities all over the world, with their ever expanding reach and flood of new citizens, know they have much in common. One of the reasons people travel so readily nowadays is that, while appreciating each city's unique characteristics, they know more or less what to expect from one city to another. Cities work in much the same way, and face common issues and challenges.

GLOBAL COOPERATION

→ National governments often become bogged down with foreign policy, security and ideological agendas, whereas city governments are forced to focus on more practical issues. Their citizens elect them to provide services, with planning and development for the future. In recent years, cities have seized the initiative in a number of areas, developing solutions to problems that have stymied national administrations. The community policing approach of New York City, traffic congestion charging in London, public transport in Curitiba (Brazil), tourism development in Barcelona, and electronic government in Taipei have all become models of how to manage modern challenges.

Cities know that they share the common danger of global warming, with its risks of rising sea levels, extreme weather, and water and food shortages. Of the 33 cities that are projected to have populations of over 8 million by 2015, 21 are coastal settlements that could be devastated by higher waters.

At the same time, cities know they are part of the problem. Urban areas are responsible for approximately 75 percent of all energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, with buildings accounting for nearly 40 percent. In London, buildings account for 60 percent of carbon emissions, while in New York it is nearly 80 percent.

Cities have already begun to take cooperative action, often to fill the vacuum of national policy. In May 2006, with the then US Federal Government continuing

to reject Kyoto, the mayors of over 300 American cities signed a climate protection agreement committing themselves to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to seven per cent below 1990 levels by 2012. By April 2009, a further 600 cities had signed up, covering every state in the nation. Among the measures the mayors have agreed to pursue are improved public transport, better pedestrian and cycling facilities, curbs on urban sprawl, and a switch to renewable energy sources. Chicago, for example, plans to increase its renewable energy use to 20 percent by 2010, while Seattle's green commitments amount to a reduction of 638,000 tons of emissions a year. The C40 is adding a global dimension to this urban movement against climate change.

THE CONNECTED PLANET

→ One thing that many city dwellers share is the Internet. While total Internet access is still restricted to a minority of the global population – around 24 percent – it nevertheless amounts to a huge number of people, nearly 1.6 billion in March 2009 and growing fast. These users are heavily concentrated in cities. Furthermore, access is growing fastest where cities are expanding most rapidly. Since 2000, internet usage has grown over 1,100 percent in Africa, over 860 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 475 percent in Asia - which has the most users: 114 million in March 2009. Because of Internet cafés and other forms of access sharing, usage can grow much faster than the actual number of new computers and connections. At present, North America has the greatest number of users – 75 percent of its population has Internet access – followed by Australia and New Zealand (60 percent) and Europe (50 percent).

Exploiting this connectedness, and giving people the tools to communicate and collaborate, can engage the collective intelligence of the world's cities, creating a massive new country without borders whose citizens can bypass national government gridlock, and start to take real and immediate action for themselves on climate change. Web applications are now available to enable people of the world's cities to calculate their environmental footprint, and to report on their success in reducing this footprint, sharing ideas, and encouraging and challenging one another to do more.

The power of the world's city dwellers to affect change is enormous. Let's be conservative and say that only three quarters of Internet users live in cities – in other words, 1.2 billion people, or 40 percent of the global city population. And let's say these 1.2 billion people agree to reduce their carbon emissions by 10 percent. And let's be conservative again and say that individual citizens have control of only one third of the emissions produced by a city. That would still

amount to nearly 1.3 percent of annual global emissions, or 650 million tonnes of carbon.

If you apply the same figures to water use, recycling or buying of locally produced foods you quickly see the difference that the citizens of the global city could have on our environmental impact. We now have the connections and the tools to link this community together to take direct action on their own behalf, and on behalf of the generations to come.

But it is not just city governments that are taking initiatives. All over the world, communities and individuals within cities, as well as towns and villages, are taking action to reduce their carbon emissions. From cultivating communal vegetable gardens and orchards and promoting local food networks, to improving walking and cycling facilities, to building local renewable energy generators, people are taking matters into their own hands. While each action may be small, collectively they count. Encouraging such initiatives can build the momentum and increase the aggregate impact of millions of individual actions.

Transition Towns is a new movement that began in Totnes, a town in rural Devon, England, that aims to address both climate change and the decline of cheap oil ('peak oil'). Totnes has created a model of community action on sustainability that has since been adopted by thousands of towns across Britain, Europe, Australia, Japan and elsewhere. Meanwhile, the village of Ashton Hayes, in Cheshire, England, has created a project focused on achieving carbon neutrality, and this model too is being adopted by communities far and wide.

Across the planet, people are realizing that global warming is a common threat that affects us all, and that it is time to transcend geographical boundaries and find common solutions.

CONCLUSION → Reviewing the aftermath of the financial crisis, economist Sir Nicholas Stern argues that we will never have the unbiased risk assessor that the global economy needs if national governments are given any say in its reports. National governments will always intervene to protect their own interests at the expense of forthright, disinterested assessment, he says. Similarly on climate change, we need forthright, disinterested assessment – and action – independent of national interests. Countries Without Borders offers a way of overcoming our geographical barriers to change.

I see hope for the fast and massive kind of action that we may need to combat global warming in these countries without borders. They will get together. They will take decisive action. And collectively they will make great strides towards solving our climate challenge. Best of all, they will get there long before their governments do.

ABOUT ZEROFOOTPRINT

→ Zerofootprint is a socially responsible enterprise whose mission is to apply technology, design and risk management to the massive reduction of our environmental footprint. We operate both in the for-profit and charitable domains through two entities, Zerofootprint Software and Zerofootprint Foundation using shared technology.