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CIEEM

Climate Action and Green Recovery

In this issue

Seize This Moment – New Approaches for Fresh Momentum

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Figure 1. Youth Strike and supporters taking a rest in the heart of Canterbury, 20th September 2019. Photo credit Diana Pound.

The climate emergency and nature crisis are part of the same thing – the overexploitation of the planet's capacity to handle our waste or provide the resources that humans depend on. Tackling either without the other is flawed thinking. But tackling both together in a technical way is also flawed! There is so much more to be considered. This article focuses on the ongoing and interlinked climate emergency and biodiversity crisis, our role as individuals, breaking down barriers, and building momentum.

Introduction

As we emerge from COVID-19 to a new world, we must ask ourselves what needs to come with us and what needs to be left behind? This is definitely not the time to restore environmental business as usual, dust off the office, and carry on. We must look for the best of what was going in the right direction and accelerate, amplify and scale it up. We must take an honest look at our own outdated practices; including where we created barriers to the very change we want to see.

In this article, I want to explore some of those barriers and what we can do differently to solve them. But motivation comes from hope, so that is where this starts.

Reasons to be hopeful

The pandemic represents a rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine, and reset our world.

- Klaus Schwab (World Economic Forum)

This year was meant to be the 2020 Environment Super Year. Instead it has been a year of biblical disasters: catastrophic bush fires, mega floods, pandemics, and a 38°C Arctic heatwave. But hope motivates and when you look you can see extraordinary reasons to hope.

The world has woken up

Last year, climate and nature activism grew from a few eager greenies to a global peaceful rebellion in a few weeks. A single teenager reframed climate change as a threat to children, galvanised over seven

million young people from across the world and called world leaders to account.

We are now in a societal tipping point. Tipping points happen when a little extra catalyses rapid nonlinear change. Recent evidence suggests a quarter of a group is enough to change social norms (Otto *et al*. 2020). So, what of attitudes to the environment? A recent Reuters survey showed that in most countries, 97% of people think climate change is serious, while 70% think it is a 'very serious problem'. In Chile, Kenya, South Africa and the Philippines, that figure is between 85-90% (Andı and Painter 2020).

Another survey of the US and UK found 88% of people firmly believe the lifestyle change needed to combat climate change will improve their quality of life or make no difference (Townsend 2020) - an astounding change from seeing green lifestyles as doing without. Extraordinarily the survey found four in five people would do as much for the climate as they have done for coronavirus. Since 'willingness' is a prerequisite to action, this is fantastic news. Brands and corporates will respond too and – honestly motivated or not – their messaging will strengthen the new norm.

Unexpected allies call for change

Finance and banking minds are changing. At a recent international seminar on 'responsible capitalism', run by the think tank Radix (Radix Think Tank 2020), you could have mistaken leading financial figures for a bunch of environmentalists. Talk focused on ESG (Environment, Society and Governance) and the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). Speakers believe COVID-19 will accelerate the shift to green and from shareholder to stakeholder capitalism.

Top UK business leaders are also calling for a green recovery (Ambrose 2020) and 54 national and international companies published a letter in the Financial Times, globally stating their commitment to a more diverse and inclusive circular economy on a basis of renewable materials and energy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2020). Of course, it is easy for organisations to sign a pre-written letter and get it published somewhere impressive – and what we really need is accountable, time-bound commitments – but it still helps solidify the new norm: that green is

good and not some irritating side show. UK arts leaders, even while in their own freefall, sent a letter to Boris saying: *"We urge that action to protect nature and biodiversity is given the attention it so urgently deserves"* and called for a *"rapid, just and green recovery"* (Harvey 2020).

Not to be outdone, 57 UK charities, representing 22 million people, also sent a letter urging the Prime Minister to a green recovery. Signatories include environmental NGOs and allies like the WI, Fairtrade, CAFOD, and the Islamic Relief Fund (The Climate Coalition 2020).

Religious leaders have already shown the way. In 2019, the Pope met leaders of the world's biggest multinationals and declared a global climate emergency, urging them to hear the *"increasing cries of the earth and its poor"*. He is leading the church to divest from fossil fuels. The Pope is not alone: Islamic leaders called for Muslims to play an active role in climate change and the Hindu Declaration on Climate Change asks its followers to live in harmony and balance with the natural world.

Political expediency and new economic paradigms

The growing international consensus is for a green recovery with the EU, US, China and India joining in formulating plans for a global green recovery (International Energy Agency 2020). For politicians, it is no longer a choice between helping people and helping the planet. And solving two major challenges with one set of actions is a very attractive political proposition.

The economic case is stacking up to support this. Leading economic experts found a green recovery will repair the global economy and create more jobs, a greater return on investment short term and increased long-term cost savings compared to conventional stimuli (Hepburn *et al*. 2020).

Markets are also speaking. With renewables, the speed of innovation, market share and cost is causing panic in the financial world. They see the potential for 100 trillion dollars of stranded fossil fuel assets. Pre-pandemic, the prediction was fossil fuel markets would collapse by 2028 - now it's sooner.

This is part of the cross-over to a whole new economic paradigm: *'the third industrial revolution'* (Rifkin 2019).

Crossing points happen when three key things converge:

- A change in communication technologies – from paper to the internet
- A change in energy – from fossil fuels to renewables and battery
- A change in mobility and logistics – the sharing economy, AI and Internet of Things

And this time it is not just convergence but integration in the digital revolution. The shift to the next industrial revolution was at the starting blocks. By accelerating the pace of change, COVID-19 has fired the gun.

Will there be resistance and blockages and steps back? Of course – powerful vested interests are under threat and mobilising. Will it all be in time – we have to make sure it is. What is certain is environmentalists are no longer out in the cold shouting at a deaf world: there are many new allies and opportunities to work with.

Overcoming barriers to motivating ourselves - from loss to 'stubborn optimism'

Our individual boundaries are porous - we infect each other with ills and joys - so let's infect each other with stubborn optimism and determined action.

A compelling vision is like a hook in the future. It connects you to pockets of possibility that are emerging and pulls them into the present. Hold on to that.

 - Christiana Figueres (UN Secretary for Climate Change 2010-2016)

We create the future we focus on, and narratives of despair bring about the future we dread. Humans are wired to scan for threat, danger and loss and environmentalists are particularly good at it. Research suggests environmentalists are in the minority; able to face terrifying truths, but as a result generally more depressed and less self-assured! (Andrews 2017).

Eco-grief is real and at least naming it means we can gently support each other when it overwhelms us. But we can't afford to dwell there. We can't be paralysed by grief and loss and let it erode our ability to act. With our expertise, if we

don't gather every jot of courage and show the way, who will?

Consider these statements (Figueres and Rivett-Carnac 2020). Which lifts your energy, gives hope, and motivates you?

"The year is 2050. The world is on fire. The air is suffocating and deadly. Entire countries are under water."

"The year is 2050. The world is breathing. The air is fresh. Nature is thriving. Entire populations have better quality of life".

Let's set our sights on this regenerative future where humans and nature flourish. This is not about wishful or naïve thinking. Whatever the future holds, and whatever losses and setbacks, the world's need for this future is undiminished.

It helps to tap into your own deep motivations –the reasons why you do this work. When describing her green vision for the EU, President Ursula von der Leyen spoke of the next generation and said *"we have to do this, we are going to do this"*. So why do you think this future is worth fighting for? Work it out and then determinedly encourage yourself and others with stories and signs of hope, and hold close a vision of a better future.

Suggestions for action:

- Accept your eco-grief but increase your resilience and hope: just 20 minutes in nature every day will do wonders
- Find your 'why': why is this future worth fighting for? Write it down and revisit it when times are tough
- Actively filter for signs of hope and share them with others - practice taking a 'cup half full' perspective

- Become a stubborn optimist. *The Future we Choose* by Christiana Figures and Tom Rivett-Carnac, and Jonathan Porritt's *Hope in Hell* are must reads
- Sign up to Global Optimism: https://globaloptimism.com/
- Check out and consider signing up to Ark2030 - the most ambitious project I have ever collaborated with.

Overcoming barriers to motivating others: understand some psychology

> *Green won't spread by guilt or fear, we need aspiration and desire.*
> - Carlotta Perez (Economist)
> *Creep subtly into people's hearts.*
> - Jane Goodall (Primatologist)
> *Knowledge is overrated as a way to change behaviour.*
> - Sabione Phal (Plymouth University)

Our sector has spent too many frustrating years trying to catalyse deep and genuine sustainability. What if our approach was part of the problem? It turns out it was!

Focusing on problems and telling people how to fix them, triggers deep psychological barriers. It also diverts resources from what is already working to fix what isn't. This is self-defeating and plays to weaknesses not strengths.

What happens if we do the opposite? If we focus on positives and how to amplify them? This sounds like idealistic twaddle but it is transformative - and grounded in research and experience of facilitating environmental dialogue.

Table 1 summarises the findings of Action Research about sustainable forest use by Indonesian forest communities (adapted from Yuliani *et al.* 2008). This approach seeks transformative change through simultaneously taking action and doing research, linking both by critical reflection. In one set of communities the researchers took a problem-solving approach; in the other, a constructive and appreciative approach. Look at the difference it makes (Table 1).

Understanding individual and group psychology, gives us a deeper insight into what is going on here and what to do differently.

Individual psychological drivers include:

- We have a natural bias to short-termism and localism. So, talking big scale and long-term doesn't work. The solution is to focus on a long-term vision and then short- to medium-term action to get there.
- We have a strong desire for autonomy and control. Making decisions and telling people what to do undermines that so, instead, generate solutions together as equals.
- We pursue happiness and avoid negative emotions. Endless talk of loss and disaster threatens that and our minds switch off to protect themselves. Instead, focus on what is already going well and share ideas about action to strengthen, accelerate and amplify that.
- We are driven to maintain self-esteem and self-worth. Telling people they contribute to the climate and nature crisis puts them in cognitive dissonance – either they are not good people or you are wrong – and guess which our brains choose! Instead build self-esteem by focused listening, and identifying and appreciating pro-environmental choices.

There are a bunch of group drivers too:

- We want to be part of groups with a good reputation – so instead of blaming and shaming, encourage and appreciate.
- We create and defend our own group's norms – so engage opinion leaders and opinion formers and create a norm of respect and action.
- We have a strong drive for justice and fairness – so work in ethical ways to find and get as close to genuine win-wins as possible.

Table 1. Summary of the difference between problem solving and appreciative dialogue.

Effect on people in a problem-solving and deficit-based approach	Effect on people when using constructive and appreciative dialogue and an asset-based approach
Frustration	Motivated
Efforts not valued	Efforts valued
Environment is complex and difficult = a problem	Looking after the environment has many benefits and is do-able
Feeling overwhelmed	Believe in own capacity and agency to make a difference
Risk averse	Fosters innovation
Disowning – it's not our problem	Willing to get involved and make a difference
No momentum or resistance	Momentum for delivery

With this understanding, environmentalists can avoid tramping around catalysing the very resistance, denial, reactance and barriers that so frustrate us. We can work with the grain of human nature.

You can apply these ideas to having 1:1 constructive climate and nature conversations with friends, family and colleagues. Try the following steps whilst listening attentively and being genuinely interested, curious and respectful:

1. Invite people to tell you what things they're already doing to help address the climate and nature crisis.

2. Affirm whatever they say however small, e.g. just saying *"that's great"*.

3. Ask if there is a way they could do more or take complementary actions (don't advise, suggest or instruct uninvited… let them think of the answers).

4. Ask what would make it easy for them to do more.

5. Ask which small step would help get that underway and when they might be able to take it.

6. Finish with encouragement e.g. *"that sounds really good"* and if appropriate *"that's got me thinking if I could do the same"*.

This approach is appreciative, encouraging, supportive and (based on the psychology) most likely to work. Of course, each individual act is small, but it adds up when millions do it. And you can amplify your impact many times over by sharing on social media - this strengthens the new norm and thereby the political pressure for change (Rose 2020). In summary, focus on finding what's working, strengthen and build on that, identify and acknowledge good work, uncover solutions and innovations, and foster a 'can do' attitude.

Suggestions for action:

- Let go of thinking doom and gloom motivates you or anyone else! For resources to help, check out 'Love. Not Loss' at https://www.iucn.org/commissions/commission-education-and-communication/resources/love-not-loss

- Try out constructive 1:1 climate and nature conversations

- Audit, recognise, celebrate and fanfare success to inspire and motivate others

- Find out more about collaborative, constructive decision-making

- Find out more about the science of effective communication and storytelling, including choice of language, framing, images and messaging.

Overcoming barriers in understanding: from reductionist linear thinking to collaborative systems thinking

Applying systems thinking principles and tools enables you to achieve better results with fewer resources in more lasting ways.

- David Stroh (International Systems Thinking Expert)

There are many examples of where conservation projects overlooked the human aspects of the system and provoked a furious blocking reaction, poverty, collapse of communities, or even caused the species they were trying to save to go extinct (Redpath *et al*. 2015). Solutions to poor drainage have led to catastrophic flooding downstream and solutions to the climate crisis such as biofuels or plantation forests have had catastrophic effects on biodiversity. These outcomes are inevitable if we fixate on parts of the system and think sorting them will sort the whole. It doesn't and can't. In trying we fail to comprehend the whole system and miss the interconnections that really matter. We overlook the intervention points that catalyse transformative rather than incremental change, prioritise short-term benefits at long-term costs, and find that solutions to one problem cause another problem with unintended results.

We must shift from narrow linear and reductionist approaches and adopt systems thinking; focusing on how the whole system works rather than the individual parts. All systems are webs of dynamic relationships with feedback loops, cumulative effects, and tipping points. Ecologists know this better than most but need to expand that thinking to encompass socio-ecological systems. Doing this collaboratively with other stakeholders helps to reveal the connections and linkages, possible consequences, and the interventions for social justice, sustainable livelihoods, nature, wildlife and climate.

In taking a holistic systems thinking approach, it is possible to discover the comparatively small things which have large effects – the crucial intervention points that catalyse virtuous systemic effects (Stroh 2015). Systems thinking tools and techniques span highly sophisticated modelling and picture-based diagramming (OpenLearn 2012). By using these methods, new possibilities emerge and can be cross-checked against holistic United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. For example, what is your project doing for gender equality, decent work, or peace and justice? Also, take a look at Kate Raworth's doughnut diagram to check that outcomes will be in the safe space for humans (Raworth 2017).

The 12 principles of the UN Ecosystem Approach (Convention on Biological Diversity n.d.) underpin the *'strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way'*. The UK signed up to these 20 years ago, but holistic projects that tick all the boxes are not yet business as usual. An updated version is due but the current 12 will still go further than most projects deliver.

Suggestions for action:

- Learn about and apply holistic systems thinking

- Experiment with systems pictures – causal diagrams and rich pictures to get the hang of it

- Apply the Ecosystem Approach via collaborative systems thinking dialogue

- Enjoy doughnuts - whilst considering with others, from other parts of the picture, if your work together delivers results in the socially just and environmental safe space

Overcoming barriers of power: from experts decide to co-production

Co-production is one of the most important ideas in the theory and practice of knowledge and governance for global sustainability, including ecology and biodiversity conservation.

- Miller and Wyborn (Arizona State University and University of Montana) 2018

At an IUCN Commission on Education and Communication meeting back in 2003, the uncomfortable conclusion was that the greatest threat to nature (outside of locked-in change) was the attitude of nature conservationists and environmental managers! Table 2 explains the shift that is still needed.

Shifting further to a full co-production ethos is long overdue. Co-production is an equitable endeavour which means everyone has responsibility to share in:

- Understanding the system and each other's interests
- Deliberating over solutions
- Making decisions
- Finding resources for delivery and commitment to action
- Enjoying the benefits.

This means going beyond involving people just to give them an opportunity to express their opinions, to relinquishing control and sharing power and responsibility for delivery. This doesn't mean empowering everyone all the time in every decision but rather being very thoughtful about when and how to work with others to share power. Table 3 illustrates the spectrum of empowerment and can be used to facilitate discussion.

To tackle the climate and nature crisis in this empowering and integrated way, requires shifts in attitudes to others so their knowledge and influence counts. Organisational procedures will need to be more flexible, adaptive, experimental and open. Evaluation will need to go beyond monitoring natural features to include social and citizen wellbeing. And an ethos of collaborative systems thinking, principled negotiation and co-production, will result in more holistic, integrated and sustainable outcomes and require new shared governance arrangements. Doing this will reap dividends for nature and climate and will overcome many of the barriers described above.

Suggestions for action:

- Check out our advice on empowerment and co-production for the Scottish Government (Pound *et al*. 2016)
- Be inspired at Dialogue Matters' and SocEnv's online 'Game Changers' event: 18-19 November https://dialoguematters.co.uk/events/ or through our training designed to catalyse fresh momentum.

Table 2. Summary of the change in stance needed by all environmental managers (Pound 2004).

From...	To...
Focus on scientific and technical knowledge	Many forms of knowledge are needed and used
Seeing other stakeholders as the problem	Realising we've all been part of the problem and are all part of the solution
Seeing other stakeholders as a distraction and drain on resources	Realising they are a resource – of information, ideas and endeavour
Telling others what to do	Listening with an open mind
Pushing others to change	Working with others to agree change
Behaving as experts	Behaving as partners
Formal approaches	Informal and interactive approaches
Our ideas and solutions	The best supported most workable ideas and solutions

Table 3. The Empowerment Framework showing different power relations in planning and implementing change with examples of what kind of activity could fit in which category.

		Responsibility for planning land or sea use and management		
		Environmental professionals design and plan	Shared design and planning	Other stakeholders and / or communities design and plan
Responsibility for delivery and implementation	Environmental professionals deliver	Traditional professional service - decide and implement (e.g. emergency pollution response)	Co-planning, professionals hold the resources and power to implement (e.g. design of new flood channel with construction led by professionals)	Self-organised planning, professionals deliver (e.g. a local community wanting expert help to eradicate invasive species from their nature space)
	Shared delivery	Professionals decide 'for' others then build capacity to share delivery (e.g. a citizen science monitoring program)	Co-planning and co-deliver (full co-production) (e.g. integrated management of an area of land or sea)	Self-organised plan, professionals hear what is wanted then share and support delivery (e.g. community-level flood resilience)
	Other stakeholders and / or communities deliver	Professionals design, other stakeholders and / or community deliver (e.g. an agri-environment scheme)	Co-design, users/ community deliver (e.g. deer management groups)	Self-organised plan and deliver (e.g. community woodland, energy, water or food projects)

If not us, who? If not now, when?

This is a once-in-a-lifetime moment to transform the way we live, travel and work - tackling the health, climate, nature and economic crises all at the same time - and creating a more equal and secure future for us all.

- Jonathan Bartley (Co-Leader, Green Party) June 2020

This year will probably be the hottest on record and one of the coldest for decades to come. This year will see a greater loss of biodiversity and yet be more diverse than in years to come. Whilst environmentalists will probably never get clapped on the streets, make no mistake: we are the ICU team for the planet. If we don't act with utter determination to save life on earth, the patient won't make it. This year we lost momentum – but we gained an extraordinary opportunity to pause, rethink and reset.

We are now at a very large fork in the road. Let's remove our own barriers to transformative change and do differently. Life on earth depends on us.

So, what part will you play?

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Figure 2. *"I do my utmost for this future: one where children thrive and are entranced by nature."* Diana Pound. Photo credit Breeze Bishop.

About the Author

Diana Pound set up Dialogue Matters (DM) in 2000 to design, facilitate, advise, train, and research multi-stakeholder dialogue. She's led over 100 projects at local, national and international levels, worked in 28 countries, and won multiple awards. Diana received IUCN's CEC Award for Excellence in West Europe (2019), Highly Commended in SocEnv's UK Environmental Professional of the Year 2019 and finalist 2020.

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