



# World Environment Day – how can it help us to change

World Environment Day celebrations raises for me the questions of are we doing enough and if not what else should we do? My personal opinion is we are not doing enough and for me my focus for additional actions is about six key themes which can be summarised as – *consistency; focus on holistic solutions; living in support of nature; dealing with the tragedy of the commons; 'valuing' the environment; engaging all human diversity*. More on these later.

Celebration of World Environment Day also reminds us of the progress we have made as well as the challenges ahead. In this brief article, I'll look at what we are already doing and asking what more we could and should do to ensure that World Environment Day makes a lasting difference.

## What we are doing already – building awareness

There are plenty of 'tools' that helps to improve the environment and our understanding of our impact. The following are some of my personal favourites:

- **'Doughnut economics'** by Kate Raworth, a new way of thinking about economics which moves us beyond Adam Smith, Keynesian or Marxist doctrines.
- **'Circular economics'** including achieving 100% renewable energy system and rebuilding capital – whether this is financial, manufactured, human, social or natural capital – by unlinking economic activity from consumption.
- **Science-based targets** to specify how much and how quickly we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **International, national and NGO standards**. These help organisations to manage, measure and improve their environmental impact. They include [ISO 14001](#) (environmental management system) which supports UN Sustainable Development Goals as well as ISO 14008 (monetary valuation of environmental impacts and associated aspects) and supporting standards, ISO 14040 series related to life cycle assessment and emerging work on [climate finance](#) and [green bonds](#).

## What we are doing already – taking action

There are also many examples of actions that are making a genuine difference. Again, here are some which I find most encouraging:

- **Planning and designing for climate adaptation**. This is critical. The Paris Agreement commits us to achieve a 1.5 or 2° Centigrade world, but what if we overshoot and end up in a 4° Centigrade world? We need to plan for several eventualities in terms of adaptation. So, focusing on infrastructure and logistic planning, heating and cooling needs of buildings, water resources and their availability, protection of biodiversity and so on.
- **Increasing availability of renewable energy**. This is happening everywhere in terms of scale, efficiency and reduction in levelized cost of energy (LCOE) as well as improved grid stability and battery technology. There are also promising early developments on the harnessing of wave energy.
- **Focusing on ocean health and management** beyond that mandated in UNCLOS and beyond plastics.
- **Innovating ways to feed the growing population** safely and within the ecosystem services available and with restricted water resources.

- **Committing to become carbon-neutral**, which many countries and cities are doing, such as Costa Rica, Bhutan, Sweden, New Zealand, Norway and France. Cities' commitments are exemplified by [C40](#) to which London has signed up. Many industries are also committing to 100% renewable energy, for example under the RE100 initiative.
- **UK developments include** the Climate Change Act of 2008 and its associated carbon budgets, the 25-year Environmental Plan; Clean Growth Plan, and new initiatives on battery storage.
- **Actions at local level** – reminding us that local action is just as important as global action. There are numerous examples ranging from maintaining local biodiversity to cleaning up canals, beaches, road verges, to taking action on plastic.

#### Why more is needed

We all know that the environment is important, but unfortunately these 'lovely' but incomplete lists of tools and actions are not enough to sustain the environment. We face massive environmental issues:

- **Biodiversity.** A report in [Science magazine](#) stated that biodiversity in 58% of the world's land surface falls below safe boundaries, and that the global average of biodiversity has dropped to 85% of that of unaffected ecosystems.
- **Ecosystem services** – the benefits we humans get from the environment. [Nature magazine](#) reports that there have been declines in around 30% of ecosystem services in the UK over the past 60 years.
- **Oceans.** The damage caused by climate change, plastics etc. was well documented in the fantastic BBC programme Blue Planet.
- **Global Warming** – increase in atmosphere temperature [Nasa](#) reports that seventeen of the eighteen warmest years since records began in the 1870s have occurred since 2001. And decrease in Sea ice, according to [NSIDC](#), the area of Arctic sea ice in April was almost a million square kilometres below the average from 1981 to 2010.

#### Why is it not enough?

There are two main reasons why what we are doing is not enough.

The first is that much of our thinking about the environment relate to an environmental area in isolation from other environmental areas and there is limited awareness of consequences across all environmental areas. That leads to a mistaken assumption that these problems can be broken down and solved individually, whereas in reality they are interconnected. Action in one area may affect other areas.

The second is that the ecosystem is out of balance, and we are consuming more of earth's resources than is commensurate with sustainable use of earth's resources.

#### What more can we do? My six-point wish list.

For what's it's worth, here are my thoughts on the things we need most:

1. Communication and stories to help us relate global imperatives to our personal actions and to local targets.
2. More tools to help us explore the balance we need to strike between human activity and the environment.
3. Tools from economics to help us 'value the environment' and from behavioural science to incentivise changes in behaviour.

4. Structures and behaviour tools to help us tackle the infamous 'tragedy of the commons', be that at local, regional, national or global level so that we can share environmental responsibilities and benefits at all levels.
5. Help countries to use the fourth industrial revolution to leapfrog the environmental damage associated with the first, second and third industrial revolutions.
6. Engage all human diversity in the search for solutions.

#### Conclusion

World Environment Day makes a difference. It helps us focus. It reminds us that the environment is worth protecting. It celebrates the work that is being done and inspires work yet to come. But is not a one-day celebration; it requires consistent focus and action.

#### Some basic facts about World Environment Day:

- Started in 1974 World Environment Day is the UN's most important day for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the protection of our environment.
- Each World Environment Day is organized around a theme that focuses attention on a particularly pressing environmental concern. The theme for 2018 is beating plastic pollution.
- Every World Environment Day has a different global host country, where the official celebrations take place. The focus on the host country helps highlight the environmental challenges it faces and supports the effort to address them. This year's host is India.
- Themes – 2017 "I'm with nature"; 2016 - #WildforLife; 2015 - "Seven Billion People"; 2014 - "Raise Your Voice Not the Sea Level!"; 2013 - Think.Eat.Save. 2012 - "Green Economy: Does it Include You?"

Find out more from <http://worldenvironmentday.global/en>

#### UN Sustainable Developments Goals and Environment

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which were agreed in 2015 sets out 17 goals and associated targets of which eight directly link to the environment, such as those related to clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; and life on land. Four out of 17 UN SDGs – while relating to human and social issues – are areas where environment by, among others, reducing harmful emissions reduces the impact on human health as exemplified by the goal on zero hunger and no poverty.

For more information on World Environment Day please visit [www.bsigroup.com](http://www.bsigroup.com)

#### Author

### Dr Anne-Marie Warris CEng, CEnv, FEI, FIMarEst, FRSA, FIEMA

Anne-Marie has over 25 years' experience in sustainable matters and is a director of ecoreflect ltd. She gave the Royal Academy of Engineering invited lecture on 'A low carbon world – is it realistic?' in April 2010. And was awarded BSI International Standards Maker Award in 2015 for her standard work. She is an experienced chair and facilitator. Her current activities includes chairing BSI committees related to

sustainable development standards as well as conformity assessment standards, chairing the project board for a novel approach to harnessing waves in support of coral regrowth, being an active board director of the Verified Carbon Standard, attending IMO Marine Environmental Protection Committee as well as being a BSI expert to ISO GHG standard committee.

