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KICK THE HABIT

**THE ACTORS**

So there is a problem, it is urgent, and it affects almost every part of life. Something must be done. But what? And who should do it? Politicians? Absolutely. Business and industry? Certainly. Science and technology? Obviously. The United Nations? Of course. But if we really do want a changed world, it is useful to remember where to begin: be the change you want to see. It comes down to each one of us. No individual is going to make a scrap of difference. But millions of individuals together can make all the difference. The gulf yawns before us, but no one is going to try to cross it in a single leap. Doing the impossible involves starting from where we are, as a way to prompting action by those who can make a real difference, such as governments.

Speaking at the UN Bali climate conference in December 2007 the UNEP executive director, Achim Steiner, said: “The science, but also increasingly the day-to-day experience of millions of people, tells us climate change is a reality. Addressing it is an opportunity we cannot fail to take. So why not address it now? And if not here, where? If not now, when?”

There is plenty of advice available about how to become climate-neutral. What this book aims to do is point you to some of the sources and guides that will be most useful to you. It contains pointers for individuals; small and large organizations; cities; and countries. Obviously these are not separate, watertight categories.



## INDIVIDUALS

Individual commitment is critical. All social groups consist of individuals: we are responsible for the choices we make. But we also live in cities, belong to NGOs, may work for a small or a large organization, and are citizens of our countries, with more or less democratic power to influence national politics. Therefore we have to accept the fact of our responsibility in each of these different spheres and act to empower ourselves and others. It sounds a tall order in an age when for many personal satisfaction and fulfilment is all that counts. But is it so different from accepting the responsibility of looking after one's health?

As individuals, we are responsible for GHGs we emit directly through our daily actions – the way we live, the way we move around and what and how

we consume. But we also **indirectly** influence what is emitted by making

*Some might use the argument that whatever they do as individuals is too little to affect the planet, so they need not bother to make an effort. These people are maybe not aware that even if not directly emitting, their way of life has an indirect influence over GHG emissions, and that, albeit indirectly, with their influence things might change “out there”. If you break down for instance a typical western European’s GHG emissions to individual shares, less than 50 per cent are direct emissions (such as driving a car or using a heater) while the rest are indirect – and individuals have no direct control over them. 20 per cent are caused by the products we consume and the emissions that have arisen in producing and disposing of them, 25 per cent come from powering workplaces, and 10 per cent from maintaining public infrastructure. Financial institutions for example have relatively small GHG emissions in proportion to their size. Reducing their travel or building-related emissions is a good idea. But they could exert much greater influence over the projects they lend to, requiring them to be climate-friendly.*

choices that are more or less climate-relevant – what kind of products we buy, which politicians we support, what kind of stocks we invest in, to name just a few examples. We might not be as aware of our indirect responsibility as of our direct influence, but by giving it some thought we might be able to achieve just as much in reducing GHG emissions by influencing those indirect paths as by reducing our own, direct emissions.



## SMALL ORGANIZATIONS

Small and medium enterprises (**SMEs**) and non-governmental organiza-

*The Worldwatch Institute argues for GHG reduction strategies for companies: “... And there’s money in minimizing energy use. Research in one industrialized country shows that a lack of time and expertise to measure and reduce carbon emissions is preventing small and medium businesses from saving as much energy as they could. Many underestimate the savings they could achieve: nearly 23 per cent of those studied believed their business could save only between one per cent and four per cent on energy bills, although the average figure was ten per cent. Yet one in three of the businesses that did measure their emissions said it was to gain a competitive edge, the same number also said they wanted to adapt before legislation required them to.”*

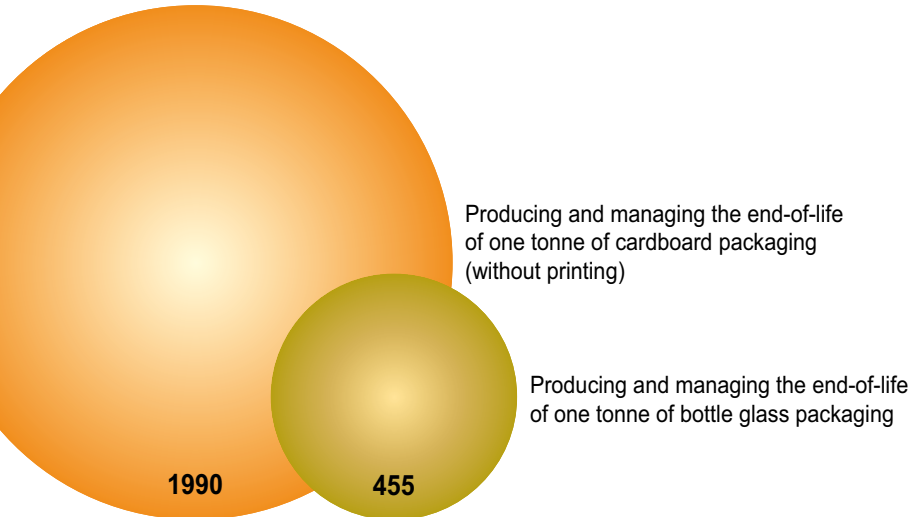
tions (NGOs) perform multiple roles. Just like individuals, they run their own households. They are consumers and producers; they provide goods or

services; they are responsible for the property and buildings they own. In addition to that, one of their most significant responsibilities is as examples to their employees or members.

SMEs are often characterized by a strong personal leader figure. They operate mainly in a regional context, rarely across national borders. Their products may well be intermediate inputs for the production of goods by bigger companies. At the same time, they depend on raw materials. They have little or no influence on the way these inputs are produced or exploited.

Suppose for instance that you are running a business that uses precious metals in its process, or its products. You will have to depend on the work of the people who mine the metals – and they may be obliged to destroy a forest to reach their goal and earn a living. Or again, palm oil is used in a huge range of products, from soap to margarine, and now increasingly in biofuels. Growing it can mean forest destruction and consequent releases of CO<sub>2</sub> and methane, and probably other GHGs.

But business can influence emissions through its policies. If your procurement policy, for example, depends on spare parts or raw materials reaching



your plant “just in time”, it saves you the cost of extra storage space. But it may mean more individual journeys to keep the production lines running. If you want to avoid the cost of designing buildings with “thinking” heating and ventilation systems, you may conclude that it will be best just to heat the building to a comfortable temperature and leave the workers to open the windows when they get too hot (this was the standard industrial model across much of the former Soviet bloc, and almost certainly persists in places there – and elsewhere).

NGOs working for the public interest, as many do, may think they are exempt from climate accountability. What matters is to think through the implications of everything you buy or do. And both NGOs and business set a significant example to their workers, customers and supporters. Humanitarian groups also need to include climate protection in their operations, and most already do so. Most of those who will be affected worst and soonest by climate change are among the poorest of the poor.



## LARGE ORGANIZATIONS

Corporations, multinationals and intergovernmental organizations are in most ways similar to SMEs and NGOs, except that their possibilities for damaging or protecting the climate are correspondingly greater. Their size means they have more influence, however they choose to wield it. Both categories can exert more pressure on their employees and members than public administrations and politicians, because most of them are organized in a hierarchical way. Despite this, they are part of political systems with which they have to comply. This is where governments can bring their influence to bear. There are clear differences between sectors. Heavy industry, for example, produces high direct emissions, which a bank will not do. But it might have the same degree of responsibility, because of the way it devises and implements its loans policy.

Companies that buy materials or products from suppliers who themselves are responsible for large emissions are missing a good opportunity to use their power and size for good. They can site their offices or factories in the countries where they want to have them – for profit, efficiency or any other reason. So they may be open to the temptation to suit their own convenience

without thinking of anything else. And, like small and medium enterprises, they want equal treatment: they do not want to be disadvantaged by a sterner regime than their competitors face. They demand a global emissions reduction regime, monitored and enforced locally.

The corporate responsibility message is now widely accepted by most leading companies, not only because they know they may be punished by their customers if they do not appear to be trying hard to be green but also because it is **profitable**. A green business outlook is more than simply

*For most corporate decision makers, the central question narrows to whether their decisions optimize share value. The evidence suggests that higher levels of corporate social responsibility are associated with higher share values. A report released in July 2007 by Goldman Sachs, one of the world's leading investment banks, showed that in the six sectors covered – energy, mining, steel, food, beverages, and media – companies that are considered leaders in implementing environmental, social and governance policies created have sustained competitive advantage and outperformed the general stock market by 25 per cent since August 2005. Moreover 72 per cent of these companies outperformed their peers in the same industries over the same period.*

cosmetic. A bank, for example, may be a model enterprise in terms of its procurement, premises and travel policies. But its lending policy may involve it in supporting customers who could make massive improvements in protecting the atmosphere. What is needed to persuade them to do so is a nudge and who better than a bank to deliver it?

For inter-governmental organizations there can be a temptation to think you are so important that you are above the law – even the physical law which says CO<sub>2</sub> levels are approaching danger level. Their close interchanges across the globe imply a lot of travelling – sometimes not necessarily linked to the result of the mission.



Cities are themselves sources of global warming: they are “heat islands”, significantly warmer than the surrounding countryside. The main reason for this is the way the land surface is modified by urban development; waste heat from energy use is a secondary cause.

If cities have an advantage in working towards climate neutrality it probably lies in their closeness to their citizens. Many people identify closely with the city where they were born or where they live, which is why local politics and local news media are often far more interesting to many people than what happens on the national stage. Local governments add to atmospheric damage when they design city centres to suit vehicles, not pedestrians, and when they design buildings to the cheapest and not the highest standards. They do so by ignoring their own environmental footprint, the huge swathe of surrounding countryside from which they absorb many resources, resources they could often find within their own limits, obviating the need for transport. They do so by giving low or no priority to recycling and waste disposal policies.



## COUNTRIES

National governments have a key role to play in working towards climate neutrality. They can apply various instruments that can change people's behaviour. Legislation and economic incentives, used in the right mix, will make a great difference. Twenty years ago many governments acted to reduce and then eliminate the use of ozone-destroying CFCs. There were protests, but it happened. Today, however, a few governments are markedly reluctant to give a similar lead to cutting damaging climate emissions. This leaves business and industry confused or unable to act, for fear of losing markets to less scrupulous competitors. It also leaves individual citizens unconvinced that climate change really is a problem at all: if it mattered, they argue, then surely the government would do something about it. And beyond the domestic agenda governments have the option to downplay, or not, the urgency of what is happening.

## Top 20 greenhouse gas emitters (including land use change and forestry)

