



Environmental Best Practices, It Begins with Us: Business, Local Governments, and International Community Should Work Together

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Abstract. The paper provides some explanations and best practices for two questions: What factors influence the adoption of environmental policies and regulations as a strategic asset? How do local governments better manage their environmental policies on a global basis? The United Nations has raised international awareness and has made their best effort to implement such plans to resolve climate change and global warming concerns. There are various talks about the connection between business and geopolitics in regard to climate change and environmental responsibility. Through these talks, we find that national culture and political forces can substantially affect all policy functions and there are many ways the national culture and geopolitics can affect the adoption of environmental policies. Interestingly, the environmental policies seem to favor rather big companies and developed countries that have the financial resources to adopt the policies, while small companies and developing countries are seemingly left in the dust. Having a strong understanding and flexible solution to the problem is immensely required. Bringing all stakeholders into the environmental conversation can greatly benefit business, local governments, and international community as well. The findings of the study may help local governments formulate better effective environmental policies complying with the international standards.

Keywords. *environmental policies, climate change, international cooperation, environmental education, environmental best practices, environmental responsibility*

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Introduction

Most climate scientists agree that an overload of greenhouse gas emissions is causing global warming and climate change. The fossil fuels we burn for energy—coal, oil and gas—plus forest destruction are the main culprits. The danger lies in how human activity is rapidly increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. With the start of the industrial revolution, humans began to burn vast amounts of fossil fuels for power and heat. When burned, these carbon-containing fuels release carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. They build up in the atmosphere, ramping up the natural greenhouse effect. This traps more heat and raises the planet's surface temperature.

Who is responsible? Just 90 of the world's largest producers of crude oil, natural gas, coal, and cement account for almost two-thirds of the problem (Greenpeace International, 2017). That is, they produced 63% of global industrial emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane since the start of the industrial revolution (Greenpeace International, 2017). Today, many of these producers continue to profit from these polluting fuels that destroy our oceans and lands. In a great injustice, the people affected most by climate change are the most vulnerable. Now it is possible to name and challenge those who have contributed more to this problem. There are

many nongovernmental organizations and non-profit organizations who are working to hold these big polluters accountable for climate change, and stop them from polluting even more. Polluters must stop threatening the rights of vulnerable communities and undermining climate science and action, and instead pave the way to a brighter future powered by clean and safe renewable energy. There are already many good signs we are winning.

What can we do? Together, we must put an end to polluting energy systems and make the urgent leap to clean and safe renewable energy. We can still choose our future path and avoid a climate catastrophe. We should build up people-powered resistance, working to shift financing to renewable energy, and holding big polluters to account. We should also speed up the leap to clean, safe, and secure energy from the sun, wind, oceans, and earth. This paper aims to bring up further discussion about how to get the right climate message across nations and among stakeholders. This paper is written to request that people and stakeholders and polluters should join us on this exciting adventure to embrace our bright and healthy future.

Materials and Methods

Best Practices: International Cooperation and Treaties

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) appears to allude, rather clearly, where they believe the primary onus for global climate change should rest in the Principles of Article 3:

“The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country Parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse effects thereof” (UNFCCC, 1992).

Table 1 shows a chronicle of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and historical events on climate change. Under the UNFCCC and the subsequent Kyoto Protocol, the Copenhagen Accord,

and the Paris Agreement, international joint efforts to have common actions on climate change include the responsibility to monitor and report emissions; differentiated actions include the commitment to reduce emissions for designated developed nations, including the United States, listed on Annex I to the UNFCCC. This is what has led to the current concern of climate equity among policymakers of developed nations (Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2015).

We are of the opinion that what has been missing in this debate has been the orientation of the discussion toward social justice. No matter where one is in the world, climate change has a disproportional impact on poor and/or marginalized populations. This is particularly so on geographically vulnerable islands and areas near sea level, which bear the most catastrophic impacts of storm damage caused by strengthening hurricanes and typhoons (CMA Editorial, 2005). As such, climate equity demands that every nation take active measures, to include enforceable commitments, for climate stabilization for the benefit of those groups within their nation. Understanding that carbon taxes, the manner that carbon emissions are currently priced and reduced, have economic consequences, the question becomes who must bear these costs? Is it a burden that should be shared by all people or by corporations of every nation, which have or are benefiting most from atmospheric carbon dumping whether from developed or developing nations?

Having treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement helps the world as a whole know and understand that there is a concern and research is being conducted to find a better solution to deal with climate change and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While we should take care of our environment, ensuring that it is there for future generations, the research and actions also need to be conducted with an open mind, rather than expressing research findings to a specific result. As President Trump works to pull from the Paris Agreement, many businesses and organizations, as well as individual states, have spoken up saying they still want to follow through (Simon-Lewis, 2017).

Table 1**A Chronicle of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and Historical Events on Climate Change**

Session	Date	Event and Important Agreement
COP 23	Nov. 2017	COP 23 took place from 6 to 17 November 2017 in Bonn, Germany and was presided over by the Government of Fiji.
COP 22	Nov. 2016	COP 22 took place from 7 to 18 November 2016 in Marrakech, Morocco.
COP 21	Nov. 2015	COP 21 took place from 30 November to 11 December 2015 in Paris, France. <u>The Paris Agreement</u> The Paris Agreement requires all Parties to put forward their best efforts through “ <i>nationally determined contributions</i> ” (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead. This includes requirements that all Parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts.
COP 20	Dec. 2014	COP 20 took place from 1 to 12 December 2014 in Lima, Peru.
COP 19	Nov. 2013	COP 19 took place from 11 to 22 November 2013 in Warsaw, Poland.
COP 18	Nov. 2012	COP 18 took place from Monday, 26 November to Friday, 7 December 2012 in Doha, Qatar.
COP 17	Nov. 2011	COP 17 took place from 28 November to 9 December 2011 in Durban, South Africa.
COP 16	Nov. 2010	COP 16 took place from 29 November to 10 December 2010 in Cancun, Mexico.
COP 15	Dec. 2009	COP 15 took place from 7 to 18 December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark. <u>The Copenhagen Accord</u> The Copenhagen Accord raised climate change policy to the highest political level. Close to 115 world leaders attended the high-level segment, making it one of the largest gatherings of world leaders ever outside UN headquarters in New York.
COP 14	Dec. 2008	COP 14 took place from 1 to 12 December 2008 in Poznan, Poland.
COP 13	Dec. 2007	COP 13 took place from 3 to 14 December 2007 in Bali, Indonesia.
COP 12	Nov. 2006	COP 12 took place from 6 to 17 November 2006 in Nairobi, Kenya.
COP 11	Nov. 2005	COP 11 took place from 28 November to 9 December 2005 in Montreal, Canada.
COP 10	Dec. 2004	COP 10 took place from 6 to 17 December 2004 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
COP 9	Dec. 2003	COP 9 took place from 1 to 12 December 2003 in Milan, Italy.
COP 8	Oct. 2002	COP 8 took place from 23 October to 1 November 2002 in New Delhi, India.
COP 7	Oct. 2001	COP 7 took place from 29 October to 10 November 2001 in Marrakech, Morocco.
COP 6	Nov. 2000	COP 6 took place from 13 to 25 November 2000 in Hague, the Netherlands.
COP 5	Oct. 1999	COP 5 took place from 25 October to 5 November 1999 in Bonn, Germany.
COP 4	Nov. 1998	COP 4 took place from 2 to 13 November 1998 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
COP 3	Dec. 1997	COP 3 took place from 1 to 10 December 1997 in Kyoto, Japan. <u>The Kyoto Protocol</u> The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement linked to the UNFCCC, which commits its Parties by setting internationally binding emission reduction targets. Recognizing that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity, the Protocol places a heavier burden on developed nations under the principle of “ <i>common but differentiated responsibilities</i> .”
COP 2	Jul. 1996	COP 2 took place from 9 to 16 July 1996 in Geneva, Switzerland.
COP 1	Mar. 1995	COP 1 took place from 28 March to 7 April 1995 in Berlin, Germany.
UNFCCC	Mar. 1994	<u>The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)</u> entered into force on 21 March 1994. The 197 countries that have ratified the Convention are called Parties to the Convention. The objective of the Convention is to “ <i>stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human induced) interference with the climate system.</i> ” It states that “such a level should be achieved within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened, and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.”

Table 1 (*cont'd*)

Session	Date	Event and Important Agreement
UNCED	Jun. 1992	<u>The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)</u> , also known as the “Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit” and the “Earth Summit,” was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 3 to 14 June 1992. <u>The Earth Summit</u> The Earth Summit influenced all subsequent UN conferences, which have examined the relationship between human rights, population, social development, women and human settlements—and the need for environmentally sustainable development. The UN sought to help Governments rethink economic development and find ways to halt the destruction of irreplaceable natural resources and pollution of the planet.
Montreal Protocol	Sep. 1987	<u>The Montreal Protocol</u> The Montreal Protocol was agreed on 16 September 1987 in Montreal, Canada. The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is an international treaty designed to protect the ozone layer by phasing out the production of numerous substances that are responsible for ozone depletion.
Brundtland Commission	Dec. 1983	<u>The Brundtland Commission</u> The UN General Assembly realized that there was a heavy deterioration of the human environment and natural resources. To rally countries to work and pursue sustainable development together, the UN decided to establish the Brundtland Commission, formally known as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) to unite countries to pursue sustainable development together. The Brundtland Commission officially dissolved in December 1987 after releasing <i>Our Common Future</i> , also known as the Brundtland Report, in October 1987, a document which coined, and defined the meaning of the term “ <i>sustainable development</i> .”
World Conservation Strategy	Dec. 1980	<u>The World Conservation Strategy</u> was launched in 35 countries simultaneously on 5 March 1980. It set out fundamental principles and objectives for conservation worldwide, and identified priorities for national and international action. The World Conservation Strategy was the first report that included a very brief chapter on a concept called “ <i>sustainable development</i> .”
UN Conference on the Human Environment	Dec. 1972	<u>The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment</u> was held in Stockholm, Sweden from June 5 to 16 in 1972. Sweden first suggested to the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1968 the idea of having a UN conference to focus on human interactions with the environment. The UN decided to convene a conference in 1972 and mandated a set of reports suggesting that the conference focus on stimulating and providing guidelines for action by national government and international organizations facing “ <i>environmental issues</i> .”

Source: The author's work, based on information from the United Nations (UN).

We agree on both aspects depicted that the treaties can help create a better global environment, while at the same time they can limit the activities governments and/or corporations can conduct hindering growth and development (Simon-Lewis, 2017). Another consideration is: why the push for climate treaties? While taking care of the environment for our generation and those that follow is important, funding and policy developed on the research can be skewed as it may have been over the last several decades (Leber and Schulman, 2017; O'Sullivan, 2017).

Long term, however, this may appear to work well, as performance in markets and investments develop to secure a stronger environmental protection.

Best Practices: Nations and Local Governments

Figure 1 displays the global map of greenhouse gas inventory data of aggregate greenhouse gas emissions of all Annex I Parties. Table 2 indicates a ranking of nations of what the nation has achieved to reduce CO₂ (kt) emissions.



Figure 1: Emissions of Aggregate GHGs with LULUCF - All Annex I Parties (% change from Base Year to 2015). Source: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2017)

Sweden has a greater understanding in its markets and investments as well as efficiency sectors (Tamanini, 2016). While there is a wide separation between perception of the environment and reality, the other three categories continue to perceive and perform highly. This can be attributed to Sweden's carbon-tax and attack on pollution via making it costlier while redirecting to more energy-efficient solutions (Fouché, 2008). Norway practices what it preaches, at home; however, it invests and supports hypocritical standards according to many by pushing green at home and abroad, while simultaneously investing in production of oil and coal as a large export (Milne, 2016). This is a smart move, as they are expressing that there is still a need for the fossil fuels, but only long enough to establish a foothold in greener investments and facilities. Since 2000, the Norwegian oil production has halved, therefore, we can see investing in maintaining the current production while Norway appears to be pushing for an overall greener world through external investments (Milne, 2016; Rimmer, 2016). According to the 2016 Global Green Economy Index, Norway's perception and reality

are successful but continues to be capable of improvement (Tamanini, 2016). As we see, Sweden and Norway present a relatively well-balanced focus of social and economic costs; resulting in their higher ranking. While the United States (US) may have a higher quality of technology advancements, more resources capable of research and development, the size of the US and differences in State and Federal Government regulations, makes it difficult to have a harmonious movement into a greener nation as a whole (Tamanini, 2016).

China, while still a leader in coal consumption, is now aggressively turning toward the renewable energy sector. China is making the cost of solar energy comparable to that of energy created from pollution generating fossil fuels. This investment in clean energy amounts to the installation of one wind turbine and a soccer field's worth of solar panels every hour (Gardiner, 2017). India provides sales tax exemption and low interest loans for the purchase of new vehicles to replace older, more polluting vehicles.

Table 2Total Emissions of CO₂ with LULUCF (% change from Base Year to 2015)

1	New Zealand	-340.67%	16	Denmark	-32.19%	31	Switzerland	-13.72%
2	Sweden	-147.76%	17	United Kingdom	-32.03%	32	Greece	-11.50%
3	Lithuania	-81.20%	18	Monaco	-27.37%	33	Australia	-9.12%
4	Romania	-69.64%	19	Latvia	-25.50%	34	Portugal	-6.95%
5	Ukraine	-68.21%	20	Italy	-25.44%	35	Kazakhstan	-4.45%
6	Belarus	-62.91%	21	Luxembourg	-24.93%	36	Netherlands	2.01%
7	Estonia	-61.74%	22	European Union	-24.52%	37	Japan	6.46%
8	Finland	-60.92%	23	European Union(KP)	-24.41%	38	United States	7.92%
9	Russia	-59.01%	24	Germany	-23.89%	39	Ireland	9.87%
10	Hungary	-51.98%	25	Croatia	-23.48%	40	Spain	13.09%
11	Slovakia	-48.27%	26	Norway	-20.13%	41	Iceland	14.81%
12	Bulgaria	-44.09%	27	Malta	-19.04%	42	Austria	23.52%
13	Poland	-38.16%	28	France	-18.48%	43	Canada	47.11%
14	Czech Republic	-37.41%	29	Liechtenstein	-17.33%	44	Cyprus	48.60%
15	Slovenia	-32.76%	30	Belgium	-16.36%	45	Turkey	170.76%

Source: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2017)

Emission standards for vehicles have been set and a rail transport is being constructed, which will be non-polluting, efficient, and affordable (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2017). The World Bank is providing technical assistance financing and knowledge to assist such countries as Brazil, Peru, Lebanon, Mexico, and Bangladesh with pollution management (World Bank, 2017). In addition to helping saving many lives by reducing environmental health risks, reducing pollution helps promote economic growth and elevate poverty and inequality. Each nation as an individual may have a vast knowledge of greener methods, variances of technology, and capability to support other nations; developed and developing. A key factor is determining the value of their knowledge and experience, and how to trade worldwide in effort to protect the environment for generations to come.

Best Practices: Businesses

Unlike a person, a business or corporation has the potential to continue to thrive for an undetermined amount of time. With longevity comes not only a need for strategies on how to sustain their business models more efficiently but a responsibility to curb their environmental impact. Going green can fulfil both of these actions. Finding

new ways to produce energy is a win-win proposition.

We found the following quote by Jeffrey Immelt, CEO of General Electric, that pertains to this conversion “It’s up to us to use our platform to be a good citizen. Because not only is it a nice thing to do, it’s a business imperative....If this wasn’t good for business, we probably wouldn’t do it.” Finding the balance or sustainability sweet spot is described as “the place where the pursuit of profit blends seamlessly with the pursuit of the common good, including the creation of both environmental and social benefits for all the company’s stakeholders” (Savitz, 2013, p. 34). Google has also taken steps to reduce their carbon footprint for their global operations. Over the last decade, Google has worked out deals with large scale renewable producers, guaranteeing to buy the energy they produce with their wind turbines and solar cells. This guarantees that the renewable energy producers could obtain bank financing to expand their operation. The power created by the renewables is plugged into the utility grid, so that Google’s usage presents no net consumption of fossil fuels and the pool of electricity gets a relatively larger share of renewable sources (Hardy, 2016).

Is a step like this enough to pressure other operations of similar size to move to renewable energies? A larger market for renewable energy would allow for economies of scale leading to price reduction. How can smaller business be enticed? Solar power has presented some challenges to smaller business through cost and complication of contracts. Recently, the nonprofit Renewable Energy Buyers Alliance was formed to share the expertise of big green power buyers such as Wal-Mart, Facebook, and GM in an effort to assist smaller companies jump some of the hurdles the going green process can generate (Baskin, 2017). We wondered if going green would have a large negative impact on smaller business. But there are very simple and inexpensive steps that smaller business can take: Switch to post-consumer waste; Use compact-fluorescent or LED lights; Recycle (Harrison, 2013). On a positive note, there are also immediate financial benefits and incentives that promote renewable energy. For example, 10 US States are offering tax credits for solar panel installation. For small businesses, there are also grants that can be applied for and go toward paying for energy efficient updates (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2017).

So yes, going green benefits the business and the environment. It can be challenging to go green but the long-term benefits are worth it. When it seems like the trade-off is too much, then, hopefully, the business can turn to benefits such as incentives, tax breaks, and grants to help make the transition.

Discussion and Recommendations

To All Nations, It is Our Responsibility to Save the Earth

"We are the earth" appropriately encapsulates the urgent need to protect the earth and all life in it. Everything in the planet, including life, shares a common origin-matter simply evolved in many ways, and this fact should encourage all capable entities to decrease the pace of global warming, as we, interconnected entities maintained in an enclosed sphere, are all affected by it. The earth operates within an enclosed sphere. Since the natural and unnatural products that are released

in the sphere impacts everything including the air, water, and land, steps must be taken to protect the environment that include recycling and renewables. Both developed and developing countries must be working together to responsibly succeed in business and reduce worldwide carbon emissions. Each nation, developed, developing, or undeveloped can take accountability for the earth and its natural resources through efforts to recycle, maintain forestry, prevent pollution, and educate its people on the importance of saving the earth.

The Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement are definitely good steps toward saving our environment, but as we dig them deeper, there are certain weaknesses. For example, there is no reward for the countries who will follow the environment protection suggestions and cut back the carbon emission. Second, there is no solid mechanism to hold those countries accountable who are destroying the environment. We should worry about the promise between nations. Leaders of the world's major economies, 17 countries that account for nearly four-fifths of the world's greenhouse-gas production, reflects a tension between developed and developing countries that is hampering efforts to combat climate change. They agreed to the goal of reducing their carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. It seems that both developing and developed countries understand the long-term effects that their actions have on the environment but are prioritizing their development over the environment. As they continue to grow, they will have more resources that they can use to reduce carbon emissions. Developing countries should cooperate with developed countries whatever they can. However, the developed countries must play a larger role in leading the effort, for now.

To All Businesses, It is Our Responsibility to Take Right Actions

The Kyoto mechanisms encourage businesses in developed and developing nations to engage in activities like renewable energy production. Aichele and Felbermayr (2013) suggest that although some research shows positive reductions in CO₂ emissions with the Kyoto Protocol, it may not take into account relocation of production to non-Annex I Parties and re-export to Annex I

Parties countries. This would also generate the observed pattern of fewer emissions in Annex I Parties countries. Montford (2015) points out that in the European Union, business organizations and corporate strategies are now directed toward expanding production overseas and reducing manufacturing capacity in the Union due to its carbon constraints.

In other words, businesses in developed countries are moving environmentally damaging operations to developing nations. For far reaching emission reductions, however, the efforts need to be global rather than localized. The idea of countries buying and selling carbon units should be eliminated to keep industries focused on reduction efforts. Although the selling of carbon units may offset the cost of R&D and implementation of emission reduction, it does not drive the global changes that are required to make an impact. There is political pressure to establish clear market-based incentives for businesses to pursue green practices, which includes tax benefits for smaller companies (Schultz and Heitger, 2011). Today, there is more demand from people for cleaner energy options than ever before putting pressure on businesses and governments. If businesses globally adopt the life cycle assessment approach to their processes and implement cradle to cradle design, the world would have a brighter future.

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Conclusion: It Begins with Us

Climate justice and equity essentially focuses on what we owe each other as human beings. Developed countries should share the largest burden not only for historical reasons, but because they are wealthy enough to absorb the costs for the long-term well-being of themselves and developing nations. From the perspective of social justice and preserving the instant well-being of people and the earth, the debate over who should be held more or less culpable seems moot. With increasing technological advances in renewable energy production, as well as increased competition, products are more affordable for nations. With more and more countries understanding their contribution toward climate change, coupled with decreasing costs of renewable energy products, the ability of nations to reduce or maintain their current level of emissions is possible.

Climate change is a global problem, but there is a lot we can do about it in our daily life. Let's choose our own set of solutions to save energy and money, and make our life and home more healthy and comfortable. Together, we must put an end to polluting energy systems and make the urgent leap to clean and safe renewable energy. We can still choose better our future path and avoid a climate catastrophe. As the title of this paper states, "it begins with us." This statement must be ringing true across all nations and among all stakeholders of the earth, as nations, local governments, corporations, and localities commit to the Paris Agreement.

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