



# Preparing for Paris 2015

## Paper 2: The importance of grassroots action to influence international climate negotiations

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) seeks to promote multilateral cooperation for a fair and peaceful world. We have held consultative status through our world Quaker body since 1948, and have offices in Geneva, New York, and a meeting space in Bonn. Our areas of work include the Human Impacts of Climate Change, Peacebuilding and the Prevention of Violent Conflict, Food and Sustainability, and Human Rights and Refugees.

Our work is often done behind the scenes to help facilitate a constructive outcome to negotiations such as the development of the Human Rights Council (2000s) and the Landmine Ban Treaty (1990s). Our previous work in UN environmental processes includes support for negotiations on the Convention on Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the 1992 Earth Summit preparations. QUNO also chaired the NGO Committee for the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment.

The international climate negotiations are among the most complex and profound in human history. Countries with different economic, political, social and environmental circumstances seek an agreement that can address present concerns and protect future generations. It is an extraordinary, and necessary, agreement to achieve.

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*The following paper is from a series of four short briefing papers, "Preparing for Paris," which QUNO has developed for the upcoming climate change conference, or Conference of Parties (COP) 21, to be held in Paris in December 2015.*

*Paper Two proposes that the grassroots voice has an essential role in gaining progress at the international climate change negotiations, and with climate policy in general. This paper was co-written with Laurie Michaelis of Living Witness, a Quaker organisation supporting sustainable living.*

### A view from the international climate change negotiations:

Anthropogenic climate change can appear a complex and overwhelming challenge, but in many ways it is quite simple. We are aware of the human activities which are contributing to increased global mean surface temperatures, and science informs us that we must act urgently to avoid catastrophic climate change. We understand increasingly that climate change is but one of a number of planetary processes in crisis, and that all are symptoms of a greater challenge – how to live sustainably and justly on this Earth. If we humans are the problem, we can also be the solution.

At QUNO, we work on peace and justice issues at the multilateral level. One way we represent these concerns is as an observer at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations. We offer 'quiet diplomacy' spaces to engage a very diverse group of negotiators on sensitive issues, and support efforts to bring human rights language into the decision making. While a civil society presence at the UNFCCC negotiations is critical, in our experience the most persuasive voices come from the grassroots - individuals and communities demanding urgent and effective action to address the root causes of anthropogenic climate change.

We say this for two reasons. First, negotiators at the UNFCCC often express the worry that citizens will reject climate change policies which may entail short term costs or restrictions on choice. Grassroots action brings a clear message, if not confidence, to government leaders and their negotiators that fair and urgent action is wanted and would be accepted. Although political negotiations within the UNFCCC can be extremely tense and driven by concerns over economic competition, few if any negotiators deny climate science. As UNFCCC negotiators, they are regularly exposed to the latest climate science, and many struggle within their respective national capitals to convince Ministers that urgent action is of utmost priority.

Second, and most importantly, individuals and communities engaging in ways to address lifestyle causes of anthropogenic climate change are a living testimony that current generations can take, and want to take, responsibility for the consequences of their actions. This form of testimony, or personal witness, helps to build a wider confidence that change is not only possible and healthy, it can actively preserve a future for all our children.

The main aim of the upcoming COP 21 in Paris is to adopt a new, legally binding climate change agreement applicable to all countries. A fair, ambitious and transparent agreement could help save the most vulnerable communities now, and all future generations, from the consequences of global catastrophic climate change. A weak agreement could enable current generations to avoid responsibility and continue activities which warm the climate at great cost to the future of humanity. The stakes are therefore high, yet few people even have direct involvement in climate change policy decisions locally, let alone at the national and international level. This can feed a sense of disempowerment, despair and even numbness. If the grassroots voice is critical for progress in climate change policy, how can individuals and communities help to make their voice heard?

## Stop – Listen – Learn – Act

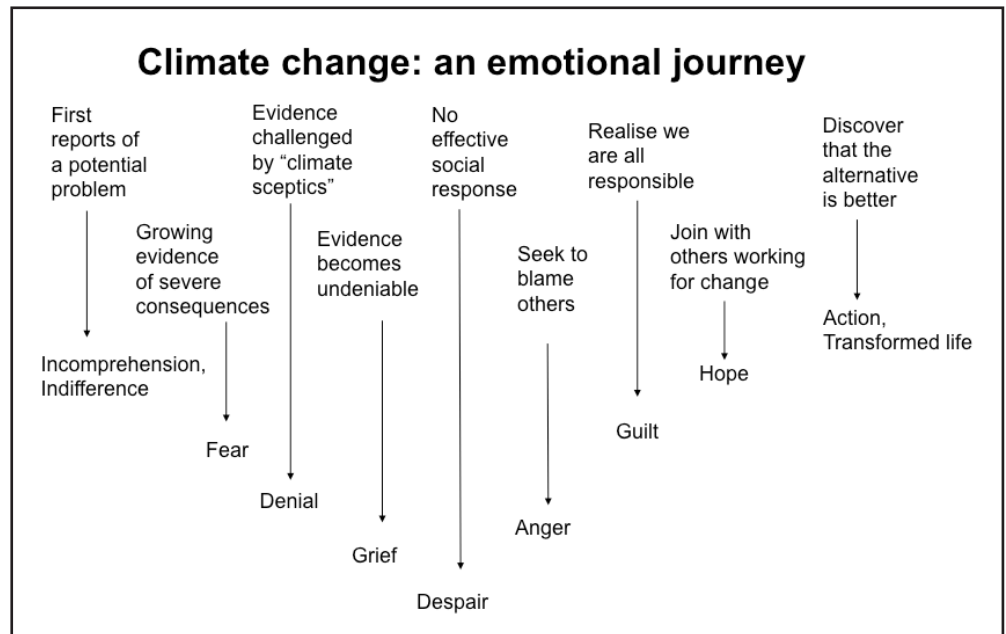
### 1. Stop

Many of us lead pressured lives, rushing to fulfil the expectations we place on lifestyles, in supporting families, and in fulfilling our concepts of success. Increasingly, people are disconnected with their communities and with the very Earth which supports our existence. We seek to create the 'best' for our children, when many of our actions threaten their long term ability to thrive on this planet. Recognition of the challenge of climate change, and the destruction of nature by our own hands, is often met first with grief, but empowerment begins with understanding how we can affect change.

### 2. Listen and Learn

What is happening, which human activities? While there is naturally some variation in climate, change since the 1950s is unprecedented over decades to millennia and is linked primarily to human activities.<sup>1</sup> These "activities" include the combustion of fossil fuels (including black carbon), and unsustainable deforestation and land use (including animal agriculture and together referred to as

<sup>1</sup> IPCC 5th Assessment Synthesis Report, p. 2 [http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/SYR\\_AR5\\_FINAL\\_full\\_wcover.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/SYR_AR5_FINAL_full_wcover.pdf)



AFOLU in the diagram).<sup>2</sup> Many of these activities are also responsible for greater levels of crisis in other planetary processes, including biodiversity, biochemical flows and land system change.<sup>3</sup>

While anthropogenic climate change is connected most obviously to unsustainable management of energy and land, attempts to solve anthropogenic climate change can create new problems because its causes are so enmeshed in the way society works. It results from processes and trends in many complex, interlinked systems – technology and ecosystems, human psychology and culture, fear of lifestyle change, markets, laws and politics. Success in science, technology, medicines and wealth creation can come at the expense of our connections with ourselves, with other people, with nature, and with past and future generations. How then to begin?

### 3. Act

#### *Personal Witness*

The oft quoted statement, “Be the change you want to see,” emphasizes the role of personal witness as a genuine foundation in facing wider concerns. This reflects an increasing understanding that climate change caused by human activity is a moral call to conscience, because the choices we make now affect the right to life of the most

<sup>2</sup> IPCC 5th Assessment Synthesis Report, p. 47 [http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/SYR\\_AR5\\_FINAL\\_full\\_wcover.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/SYR_AR5_FINAL_full_wcover.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> For more information, please refer to Paper 4, Preparing for Paris, as well as The Nine Planetary Boundaries: <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/21/research/research-programmes/planetary-boundaries.html>

vulnerable communities now, and all future generations. Facing this call, changing oneself can be the most effective way for an individual to reach others, since most people respond better to a positive example than to criticism or advice.

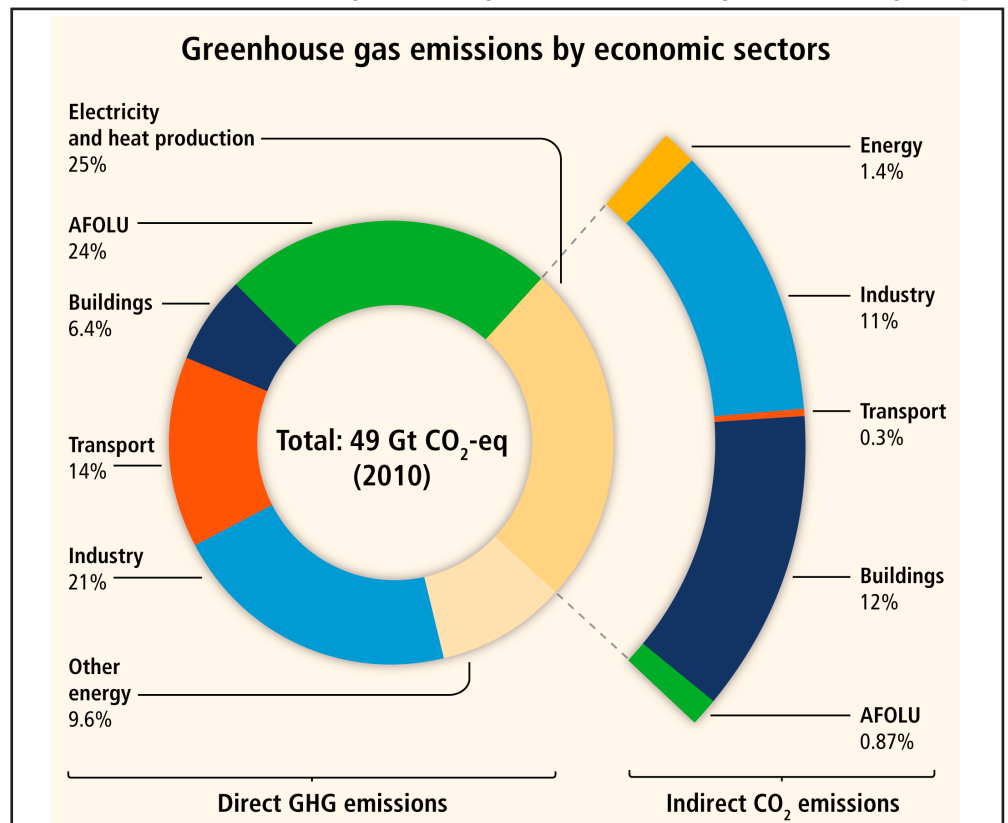
Personal witness is, and historically has been, a foundation for social, economic and political change. Action begins by naming what is wrong, then seeking transformation from within and without. This can take many forms:

- improving understanding – ours and other people’s
- changing lifestyles, including meat and dairy consumption (methane), transport (CO<sub>2</sub>), local purchasing
- using or promoting low carbon technology
- questioning economic processes, e.g. divesting from fossil fuels, questioning increasing inequality
- organizing vigils or non-violent marches to create a visual pressure
- organizing/participating in forms of protest or intervention, such as boycotts of unsustainable and unfair practices, occupations and other forms of intervention
- changing laws, e.g. to establish legal responsibilities for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and for compensating victims
- psychology and culture, enabling people to face up to climate change; valuing people, community and nature more, and money and consumption less.

*How wider change happens*

Efforts to stop climate change often start by assuming governments can make wider change happen through “top

Credit: Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change, IPCC Working Group III



down” and/or “bottom up” policy decisions. While a mix of these approaches is needed, both rely on people following instructions or incentives, rather than making ethical choices. They are also limited by what leaders want to achieve, and what they believe people will accept. Unfortunately, many governments and their citizens continue to prioritize short term economic gain over long term sustainability concerns.

For this reason, personal change alongside building relationships and communities, together help to develop a shared will to stop climate change. It does not need everyone to agree, but this approach does need a critical mass of people in all parts of society who are prepared to act and to support others’ action – including citizens, politicians, civil servants, the business community, the media, artists and faith leaders.

*Collective action*

Preventing catastrophic climate change requires a transformation of the cultures and actions of governments, corporations, fossil fuel companies, agro-industries and the media, as well as the general public. Other institutions can have an influence including universities, faith groups and campaigning organisations. Joining a political party that reflects personal values and priorities, where possible, is often an empowering experience. Campaigns also help organise widespread action, through petitions, donations, demonstrations, boycotts, sit-ins, lock-ins, and other forms of protest.

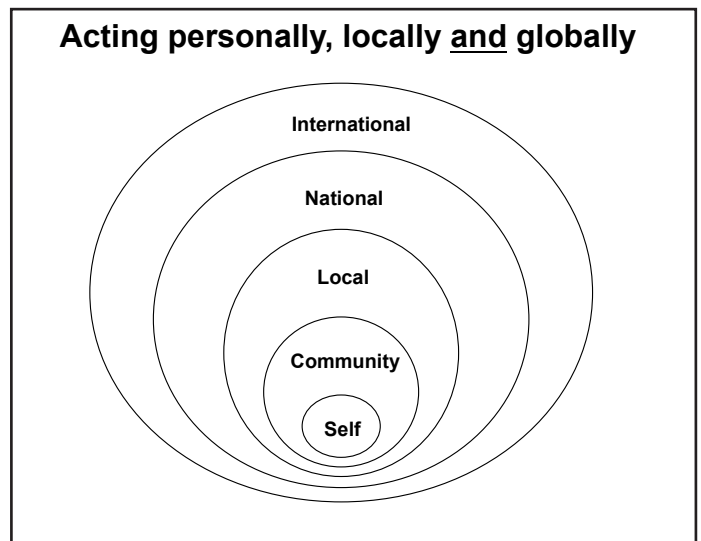
*Engaging powerful organisations and institutions*

Another effective way to engage decision makers is to build personal relationships with them. This includes direct connection with local, regional or national political representatives, board members of a company, or journalists in a newspaper or TV company. People can influence their political representatives and through them the intergovernmental process by asking questions and sharing personal experiences. They can help influence businesses and other organisations by asking questions about their activities, and asking for sustainable products and services. Policy makers often receive a lot of campaigning messages and may be accustomed to fending off anger and blame. They are more likely to be moved by hearing from someone who is acting with integrity and ready to seek common ground.

*Grassroots voices to the COP 21 in Paris*

In September 2014, the UN Climate Summit inspired over 2,800 events/rallies in 166 countries, including the non-violent climate march in New York City of over 400,000 people. Civil society presence at the international negotiations is essential for citizen voice and transparency, but it was the world-wide gathering of demonstrations that week which brought UNFCCC negotiators to publically state that their lack of progress was simply out of context with public opinion.

Civil society organizations with the capacity and desire to observe the UNFCCC negotiations, can seek official registration with the UNFCCC Secretariat. Registered organisations are grouped into categories, and include: Environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGO); Farmers non-governmental organizations (Farmers); Indigenous peoples organizations (IPO); Local government and municipal authorities (LGMA); Research and independent non-governmental organizations (RINGO); Trade unions non-governmental organizations (TUNGO); Women and gender non-governmental organizations (Women and Gender); Business and industry non-governmental organizations (BINGO); and Youth non-governmental organizations (YOUNGO).



**Attending the negotiations in Paris**

A list of organisations which currently have observer status can be found on:

[maindb.unfccc.int/public/ngo.pl?search=F](http://maindb.unfccc.int/public/ngo.pl?search=F)

There are specific requirements for organizations to achieve Observer status. More information can be found here:

[unfccc.int/parties\\_and\\_observers/ngo/items/3667.php](http://unfccc.int/parties_and_observers/ngo/items/3667.php)

However, observer status places for the COP 21 have been significantly reduced from numbers allowed at the COP 20 in Peru, while financial support for the UNFCCC Secretariat, the UN body which oversees the negotiations and implements many decisions, has been reduced, causing pressure on many areas of activity, including support to civil society organizations.

For those who wish to go to Paris, but do not have a UNFCCC registration place, the French government is creating a civil society area where events will be open to the public. For more information, please link with:

[cop21.gouv.fr/en/civil-society](http://cop21.gouv.fr/en/civil-society)

## Suggested Resources

### Personal Witness

- *Carbon Detox: Your step-by-step guide to getting real about climate change* by George Marshall.
- *How Bad Are Bananas: The carbon footprint of everything* by Mike Berners-Lee
- *Call to Conscience: Quaker experiences in facing the challenge of climate change*, QUNO
- *Sustainability Toolkit Becoming a low-carbon, sustainable community*, Living Witness and QPSW
- *The Power of Just Doing Stuff: How local action can change the world* by Rob Hopkins. Green Books.
- *Stories of the Great Turning*, edited by Peter Reason and Melanie Newman. Vala Publishing Cooperative
- [climatejust.org.uk](http://climatejust.org.uk)
- [carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx](http://carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx)
- [quaker.org.uk/sustainability](http://quaker.org.uk/sustainability)
- [livingwitness.org.uk](http://livingwitness.org.uk)

### Climate Science

- [stockholmresilience.org/21/research/research-programmes/planetary-boundaries.html](http://stockholmresilience.org/21/research/research-programmes/planetary-boundaries.html)
- [sei-international.org/reducing-climate-risk](http://sei-international.org/reducing-climate-risk)
- [ipcc.ch](http://ipcc.ch)
- [climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus](http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus)

### Climate News

- [RealClimate.org](http://RealClimate.org)
- [rtcc.org](http://rtcc.org)
- [climateark.org](http://climateark.org)

### Climate Justice

- [mrfcj.org](http://mrfcj.org)
- [ciel.org/issues/climate-2](http://ciel.org/issues/climate-2)
- [careclimatechange.org](http://careclimatechange.org)
- [oxfam.org/en/campaigns/food-and-climate-justice-open-letter-chefs-activists-musicians](http://oxfam.org/en/campaigns/food-and-climate-justice-open-letter-chefs-activists-musicians)
- [quno.org](http://quno.org)
- [osloprinciples.org](http://osloprinciples.org)

### Climate Advocacy and Campaigning Networks

- [350.org](http://350.org)
- [avaaz.org](http://avaaz.org)
- [climatenetwork.org](http://climatenetwork.org)
- [fcnل.org/issues/energy](http://fcnل.org/issues/energy)
- [eqat.org/blog](http://eqat.org/blog)

### Communicating climate change

- [climateaccess.org](http://climateaccess.org)
- [talkingclimate.org](http://talkingclimate.org)
- [climateoutreach.org.uk](http://climateoutreach.org.uk)

### Community networks

- [transitionnetwork.org](http://transitionnetwork.org)
- [slowmovement.com](http://slowmovement.com)
- [preventionweb.net/english/professional/networks/list.php/?cat\\_id=7&scat\\_id=33](http://preventionweb.net/english/professional/networks/list.php/?cat_id=7&scat_id=33)
- [greenfaith.org](http://greenfaith.org)