



Building Momentum

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During the COP18 Climate Change negotiations in Doha recently, Yeb Saño, a member of the Philippines Climate Change Commission, broke down while calling on negotiators to do more. With 500 people dead and 250,000 homeless from Typhoon Bopha, Saño implored: “If not us, then who? If not now, then when?”

Three days later, Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), tweeted “All #COP18 decisions adopted by acclamation. We have a Second Commitment Period of the Kyoto Protocol!!!” Once again, saving the process came at the expense of actually achieving substantive results.

As WWF’s head of delegation, Tasneem Essop, said: “These talks have failed the climate and they have failed developing nations. The Doha decision has delivered no real cuts in emissions, it has delivered no concrete finance, and it has not delivered on equity.”

I spoke to representatives from a range of business groups, all of whom said that the effect of this wide spread disengagement from the multilateral process was bad for business; that it creates uncertainty and would ultimately become a trade barrier as countries increasingly isolate themselves to protect their economies from outside influences.

The world has only recently become one big market place, and business has only recently had the luxury of multilateral agreements to reduce red tape. Will this trend towards nationalisation pervade as economies continue to adjust to our resource-constrained world? Can business use this as an excuse not to act on climate change? Or is it simply that the loudest voices are those incumbent industries whose business models rely on using fossil fuels?

It’s generally agreed that the path forward is clear: we have the technology and know-how to reduce dangerous carbon pollution, protect vulnerable communities, and grow sustainable, resilient, economies.

But what we need now is people in all regions of the world to demand leadership from their governments on climate change so that, together, we may shift to a more sustainable pathway to prosperity.

By 2015, the 194 nations of the world must agree to a new globally binding agreement on climate change, which will ultimately be effective by 2020. The run-up to 2015 is our chance to build strong national momentum for climate action.

The announcement by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon that he would convene a world leaders’ summit on climate change in 2014 will be a key step in building such momentum. “These decisions are not within the powers of environment ministers, and they will not happen of their own accord,” he has said. “They require the direct engagement of heads of government, under the full glare of a summit spotlight. And that summit requires the kind of pressure that only the coordinated mobilisation of global civil society — including the scientific community, businesses, non-governmental organisations and youth movements — can achieve.”

This momentum will be built by a new wave of motivated citizens, local governments, NGOs, business leaders and academia working together in new ways and with new energy.

I was inspired by this new wave of green leaders while I was in Doha, as representatives from nine countries gathered for the WorldGBC’s second Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Network meeting on Sunday 2 December, led by Jordan’s Mohammad Asfour and the UAE’s Saeed Alabbar.

In many of these oil-producing countries, up to 80% of their national energy supply is used in cooling buildings. There is a growing group of leaders who see that burning their liquid gold to pay for the country’s energy habit does not add

up to the smartest economic outcome. Depending on the country, energy is subsidised by as much as 100% - resulting in zero incentive to be energy efficient.

However, with demand predicted to exceed supply in many of these nations, efficiency within the built environment is the smart solution.


As the world's largest organisations focused on sustainability in our built environment, the WorldGBC has a central role to play in building the momentum for change over the next two years, while negotiations for this 'climate pact' are underway.

So, let's build stronger relationships with local governments to develop practical solutions that improve the efficiency and livability of our cities, create jobs and build capacity on the ground. In the leadership vacuum that exists at the national level, city governments are identifying opportunities for climate change action that can create cities that are better for people, places and the planet.


Let's also focus on building bridges between sector silos. It's time to work directly with banks and financial institutions to provide them with the language and data they need to invest in a sustainable built environment.

In developing countries, let's actively promote buildings as a leading strategy for energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emission reduction programs in the building sector under [Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions](#) (NAMAs).

And let's engage our communities. Let's leverage the 25,000 companies who are members of GBCs around the world to tell the positive stories about how green building can be an integral part of our future - an efficient, healthy future in which we all can flourish.



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Member employees

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