



A Clear Message to Governments from the UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen – Lead, Follow or Get Out of the Way

By: Shena Turlington

The overall intensity of the mood at COP15, the UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen, was not surprising. Climate change is an issue that inspires a range of emotions spanning from one end of the spectrum to the other. The underlying current of the mood, no matter at which point along the emotional spectrum you may lie, was that climate change is an increasingly imperative concern. Changes must be made.



COP15 participants were asked to write, in their native tongue, what their hands are doing to save the rainforest. To see more hands, go to www.h-anders.org.

The real surprise is not that sweeping changes are in motion; it's the direction from which these changes are finally coming.

Long seen as a governmental regulatory issue, the momentum building around climate change is shifting faster than governments can keep up. Governments approach the issue of climate change with characteristic lumbering slowness. Politics come in to play. They can't (or worse, won't) make binding agreements. To slow the process further, any agreement reached is contingent upon the commitment of every single member country. Frustration over the speed at which world governments are addressing this pressing issue was evident in the protests in Copenhagen. People are watching. People are clued in... and they are tired of waiting.

As a result, what seems to be happening is a decentralized movement.

Walking the Walk



Engineering Green Projects Builds Green Business

Founded in 1992, Kansas City-based engineering firm BHC RHODES has made sustainability part of their business model, striving to incorporate the latest sustainable engineering design practices into every project.

"BHC RHODES long ago recognized and addressed the need to embrace sustainability and we're continuously seeking innovative ways to achieve a higher level of sustainability," said Kevin Honomichl, president. "We're using the Hondo Green Assessment Tool to manage and reduce our own environmental footprint, and potentially offer to our clients."

25% of BHC RHODES' civil engineers have achieved LEED accreditation, which enables them the opportunity to help customers design and build or support redevelopment of environmentally sustainable buildings. "Adding the Hondo Green Assessment Tool to our service offering would allow us to offer a complete end-to-end sustainability package for customers," added Honomichl.

A movement of people: driven by consumer demand, supported by non-profit agendas and, most importantly for immediate impact, heeded by corporations. World governments sat either idle or in negotiations for too long and because of this, it appears the true changes in CO₂ reduction will be led by the commercial sector. While governments argue, corporations and individuals around the world are taking the lead in making substantive changes.

Every effort matters in climate protection. Even small efforts will have positive ripple effects, as long as these actions carry with them proof of positive intention. Known as “greenwashing,” consumers can no longer be placated by half-hearted greening efforts. Consumers and the general public are demanding concrete action along with quantifiable results. People want to see tangible action, tangible change and binding CO₂ reduction targets.

The only piece of the puzzle missing to couple consumer demand for a higher degree of Corporate Social Responsibility with corporate intention to deliver, is a reliable method for companies to qualify and quantify their commitment to bettering the environment. This has created an ever-increasing demand for management tools and solutions that help companies show tangible actions, concrete targets and actual change.

As more and more companies are scrambling to get a handle on their greening efforts, consultancies and software companies are also scurrying to develop the tools they need to measure, manage and monetize environmental impact. With all of these entities and individuals vying for a piece of the market, the competitive landscape gets very confusing, very quickly.

In Copenhagen, the latest greening tools and environmental software were on display. Products ranged from reasonably priced iPhone apps to track your personal carbon footprint to enterprise-level platforms geared toward manufacturing and utility companies, requiring millions of dollars of investment.

Considering the large portion of small-to-medium sized businesses at the forefront of the sustainability movement, a product tailored to their needs seemed obviously absent from the mix of solutions presented in Copenhagen.

By spotting this trend early and engaging in the greening process itself, The Hondo Group exposed a real gap in the marketplace and proceeded to fill it with a product developed specifically to address the environmental needs of small-to-medium sized businesses.

Tweet-sized Green Bites

Little things.
Big difference.

We've struck white gold: Recycling one ton of office paper saves 380 gallons of oil.

Does not compute: If just 10,000 more people turned off their computers overnight, 1800 metric tons of CO₂ could be saved.

The resulting product, The Hondo Green Assessment Tool (HGAT), is an incredibly powerful, surprisingly easy web-based information management system providing a simple-yet-comprehensive way for companies to measure, manage and monetize environmental impact. With HGAT, companies are able to reduce environmental impact while easily demonstrating the cost savings and increased profitability resulting from an efficiently managed sustainability program.

Normally considered a decision rooted in corporate responsibility, The Hondo Green Assessment Tool clearly shows how going green can also be a formidable strategic – and financial – decision for small-to-medium sized businesses.

But the question still remains: Why does it matter that smaller companies participate in greening efforts? Because it is empowering. Because it comes from each of us personally. When smaller companies band together, the collection of “small differences” add up to major impact. No longer is the commercial sector waiting for government intervention to determine what’s right, wise and smart in regards to environmental impact.

This is a reflection of what happened in Copenhagen. If one country bails out, the process begins to unravel. But when the private sector bands together and companies begin to participate and publicize real results, it is both empowering and powerful. It sends a signal to companies and clients across the sector: we are committed, and we trust you to be committed as well. It is where real change, the little changes made that make a big difference, will take root and grow.

About the Author:

Shena Turlington, a leading environmental consultant, attended the UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen representing both Hondo Green and Critical Beats (www.criticalbeats.org). As part of a delegation from the Tropical Forest Group, Turlington participated in a united effort among rainforest non-profits, indigenous groups and organizations aimed at preventing deforestation by including REDD-plus (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) into the Copenhagen Accord.

Obtaining agreement on REDD-plus in Copenhagen has been hailed as one of the few successful outcomes of the conference, with over \$3.5 billion in short-term funding pledged by nations including the United States, Britain, Norway, Australia, France, Japan and Spain.

