

What's Required to Achieve a Greener Future?

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In the context of the annual United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties, COP26, currently taking place in Glasgow until a week on Friday, there's much discussion about what is required to ensure every country is fully committed to achieving the objective of COP21 which took place in 2015 in Paris.

Though annual COP meetings have been taking place since 1995, the first being held in Berlin, when many thought climate change was not attracting the urgent attention required, COP21 is viewed as significant. Countries attending agreed that radical action was needed to ensure that any increase in average global temperature should be below 2°C and, in order to avoid problems already apparent, collective action should result in a maximum increase of 1.5°C.

This declaration, contained in what's now referred to as the Paris Agreement, is integral to another objective we've heard repeated frequently in recent months, that every country should aim to achieve 'net zero' emissions by the middle of the century. As COP itself states in *COP26 Explained*, achieving this commitment was "momentous" (2021).

Climate change will, unless checked, create conditions radically altering life on earth. According to COP, were a 2°C average increase in the earth's temperature to occur, "there would be widespread and severe impacts on people and nature. A third of the world's population would be regularly exposed to severe heat, leading to health problems and more heat-related deaths" (*ibid*).

In the run-up to COP26, Bernard, Clark and Joiner (2021), writing in the Financial Times, present a comprehensive, though apocalyptic, examination of the impact of the average temperature of the earth continuing to rise incessantly. As they describe, "Up to 3bn out of the projected world population of about 9bn could be exposed to temperatures on a par with the hottest parts of the Sahara by 2070, according to research by scientists from China, US and Europe."

The research referred to was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) and posits that for every degree (Celsius) the average temperature of the earth increases, roughly one billion people fall "outside of 'climate niche'", that climate conditions "that have served humanity well over the past 6,000 y[ears]" Kohler *et al* (2020).

That there's an impending crisis becomes clear which is why COP21 in Paris made the momentous decision taken on radical action. However, cynics claim, pronouncements by world leaders at COP though welcome, must be followed by actions. As soon as they get home, it's argued, and faced with pressing domestic agendas, too many find ways to put off implementation of policies that will cause some disruption and potentially be unpopular among citizens.

Little wonder that, as Hook, also writing in the FT suggests, COP26 is regarded as 'A moment of truth' (2021). Indeed, despite mounting empirical evidence of the effects of climate change, many believe that merely maintaining commitment to the Paris target will be seen as success.

Naturally, a major event involving almost every head of state, China, Russia and Turkey being exceptions, creates publicity. However, though heads of state only attend until Tuesday, the conference will continue to discuss how the disaster of climate change can be averted. Though it's Decisions taken by COP26, as well as directives produced, will, in coming years, influence our behaviour and, it must be hoped, positively contribute to massive reduction in emissions and pollution (BBC, 2021).

As I explained in the first two chapters of *Exploring the Green Economy* (2021), ‘Crisis, what crisis and why developing a green economy is critical to collective survival?’ and ‘What do we think about developing a more circular economy? Rubbish!’, there is a great deal we can do individually to play our part in collectively ensuring the transition to a greener future.

Crucially, the way we consume is key to success.

Everything we buy should be decided in a way that is more sympathetic to the environment. The clothes we wear should be produced ethically and not in a way that uses harmful processes or chemicals. Ideally, clothes we purchase should be produced using natural fibres that will allow recycling rather than being thrown away which is all too typical at present.

The way we live at home should be altered and energy consumed is used in a way that consciously considers impact. Similar to the early 1970s, when the price of energy rose rapidly, increased cost will assist in influencing new forms of behaviour. It’s also incumbent on us to dedicate greater attention to the efficiency of appliances we purchase and in how we use them.

It’s to be hoped producers become even more discerning in what we’re offered and in ensuring that should they fail, it’s simple, and cost effective, to replace components rather than simply throwing away and purchasing a new appliance, as is commonplace currently.

The amount of waste we produce, as shown in data, demonstrates the negative side of consumption is the amount thrown away that, ideally, could be reduced by a combination of judicious purchasing and availability of cheap replacement components.

As reflected on an article for *The Conversation* last week, ‘Inspiration from the 1970s for today’s young environmentalists’ there’s much to be learned from the time I grew up and from the example of the fictional Goods, Tom and Barbara, whose experiences of living a simpler life based on self-sufficiency was the subject of sitcom *The Good Life* (McCabe, 2021).

Perhaps the most significant thought I’ve developed in recent years is that the 1970s were, as well as being a decade characterised by political and economic upheaval, was an abiding sense among those who’d experienced the war and its immediate aftermath, that everything we owned and used was precious. Scarcity during the conflict with the Nazis followed by the ‘austerity years’, emphasised the value of the government slogan of ‘make do and mend’.

Scarcity was acutely felt in relation to food during the Second World War. Consumption of food has become now something taken for granted. A walk down any high street attests to the variety of food available which, though positive, ensured contributed to a number of consequences including health.

Take, for instance, chicken. It is now, certainly compared to the post-war years, extremely cheap. However, as we discover as we learn how chickens are reared, there are inevitable costs in terms of our health (Vidal, 2021). As critics of some aspects of ‘factory farming’ ask, is it right that animals suffer merely to ensure we have cheap food?

Clearly, the food we purchase and the way we consume it must be an integral part of changing our behaviour to ensure a future that’s greener. Reduction of meat and dairy products should be replaced by vegetable-based alternatives that are affordable to everyone, especially those on low income whose choices are currently dictated by what’s cheapest.

Our homes, as we’ve been advised recently, will need to be heated by forms of energy using fuel or methods that don’t produce emissions of carbon and methane. As to how this will be achieved is the

challenge confronting the government. There can be little doubt that the level of investment needed will be high. However, as pointed out by many who contributed to *Exploring the Green Economy*, this will lead to opportunities of job creation and provide the added incentive for innovation and new technology associated with any 'revolution'.

Water, something taken for granted in the UK, should be used more sparingly. Like all other products we use, it should be recycled through sanitation. Recent headlines palpably demonstrate that for too long capital expenditure on water and sewage treatment has been woefully inadequate. That we are the lack of such investment is causing potential health issues we believe had been consigned to history should come as no surprise (Thompson, 2021).

The way we use transport and the journeys made should alter. Going on long-haul holidays by jet may be something we pay far more to enjoy. As the pandemic proved, we do not have to make as many trips in our cars.

Should we need to travel, doing so by cars powered by electricity will be preferred. More importantly as far as our health is concerned, we should ideally travel by foot, bicycle (assuming it becomes safer by, perhaps, fewer vehicles) and public transport that is vastly better.

Those claiming change to deal with the impact of climate change will be easy and not without some, perhaps considerable, disruption and expense, are mistaken (or wilfully blind). However, even commentators in parts of media traditionally reluctant in accepting the need for action seem to have undergone something of a change with respect to averting a continuation in the earth's temperature (Evans-Pritchard, 2021).

Though in the past he's been critical of those arguing for the need to deal with climate change, particularly in his career as a journalist, Boris Johnson, has admitted to undergoing his own 'road to Damascus' moment with regards to this climate change (Smith and Bloom, 2021). Critically, of course, once COP26 ends it will be the actions of his government which will be judged. Failure by the UK, as well as all other governments, is something that could lead to profound dreadful consequences.

In the meantime, individually, we can all do more to achieve a green future explicitly dedicated to protecting the planet for future generations.

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