

## MY SAY: Time to go green

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Everyone likes to be associated with something "sustainable" or, more fashionably, being "green". They do this without really understanding what this entails or working it out systematically on a wide platform. The risk then is that these are clichés used in a business-as-usual fashion without any change in mindset, whereas the urgent task today is to quickly move away from the unsustainable way of life and habits that have taken the worst socio-economic toll on the world since the Second World War.

Going green, however, will not be easy. Britain's so-called green energy plan, as outlined by its White Paper that was released last week, would, reportedly, increase the average household energy bill fourfold within 10 years. The plan includes 7,000 wind farms on land and sea by 2020 and the building of more tidal turbines and nuclear stations (how this option is green is another issue). The UK government has pledged to cut the country's harmful emissions by a third by 2020.



Electric fences surround a nuclear power station near Bristol, UK. Britain's green energy plan includes the building of more nuclear stations

But this is not the only reason why Britain is going green. It plans to reduce its carbon footprint by a fifth and be more sustainable by 2012 when London hosts the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Thus, it is not surprising that many Olympic gold medalists were present to back the first Green Britain Day early this month.

By then, almost 500,000 people had signed up for the UK's green initiatives: Team Energy, whose aim is to cut energy use; Teams A and B, whose concern is greener journeys; Team Swap, an initiative not to waste, among others. There is also an Eco Team and a Capital Community Scheme aimed at creating 2,012 community food growing spaces by the time the Olympics start (visit <http://www.teamgreen-britain.org> for more green ideas as a platform for change at a communal level).

The so-called 2012 Challenge Launch took place simultaneously with the meeting of G8 leaders in L'Aquila, Italy, where they agreed to cut carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. They also agreed, for the first time, to set a limit of 2 degrees Celsius on rises in global temperature, creating what is dubbed now as an "historic agreement". All along, the US has consistently refused to sign on a firm emissions target.

Still, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the G8 could have gone further by setting interim targets for 2020. He also criticised the lack of effort to help finance developing countries to embrace low carbon technology, saying that: "The leaders of G8 must be aware of their historical responsibility for the future of humanity."

Indeed, the plight of many developing countries is invariably tied to the intervention of their former colonial masters, who are to blame for where these countries are now. Their lands were deforested for decades if not centuries, producing more emissions than the natives were capable of.

And yet today, they are blamed for doing little when the G8 countries themselves have failed to lead by reducing their own emissions — at least by 40% by 2020 as demanded by developing countries like China, Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa as well as several NGOs. But then again, the G8 is not entirely reliable.

Their backsliding on promises made at the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, four years ago comes to mind.

Consequently, the tension worsened. This was perhaps best summed up by the Prince of Wales recently when he delivered the annual Richard Dimbleby Lecture: "We face the dual challenges of a world view and an economic system that seem to have enormous shortcomings, together with an environmental crisis — including that of climate change — which threaten to engulf us all."

It is apt, at this point, to underline that "us" here refers to everyone, not a particular group or sector. Many, including successful business community leaders, continue to live in their comfort zones, or remain complacent with what has been achieved thus far, To quote the Prince again: "But for all its achievements, our consumerist society comes at an enormous cost to the Earth and we must face up to the fact that the Earth cannot afford to support it. Just as our banking sector is struggling with its debts — and paradoxically also facing calls for a return to so-called 'old fashioned', traditional banking — so are Nature's life support systems failing to cope with the debts we have built up there too."

According to him, the "age of convenience" is over. "If we don't face up to this, then Nature, the biggest bank of all, could go bust [if not already]. And no amount of quantitative easing will revive it."

We are now into the Age of Sustainability and it is time to be "green" in a meaningful manner.

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