

Be the Right Change You Want to See in the World

No other article had shocked me more than the one titled “Climate change: 12 years to save the planet? Make that 18 months”¹. Starting January 2020, we will have 13 months to save our home before the impacts of climate change become irreversible. The fact that this figure can be quantified sends chills down my spine.

Tackling this vast issue of melting icebergs, altering weather patterns, inundating coastlines and increasing temperatures worldwide has to be a collective effort globally. Therefore, the United Nations has come up with Sustainable Development Goal 13, which urges nations to take climate action², not only to adapt to, but also loosen the grasp climate change already has on us.

It is well-known that Singapore has pledged to reduce our Emissions Intensity by 36% from 2005 levels by 2030. Therefore, our nation has worked hard on this mammoth task at hand, with government efforts to build 5 hectares of floating solar panels³ and even to bring the percentage of green buildings here to 80% by 2030⁴.

While these gargantuan efforts will very much decrease our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, we must not forget that 7.6% of projected 2020 business-as-usual GHG emissions are by households, and 14.5%, by transport⁵. Singaporeans also drive local industries as consumers, which contribute to over 60% of emissions.

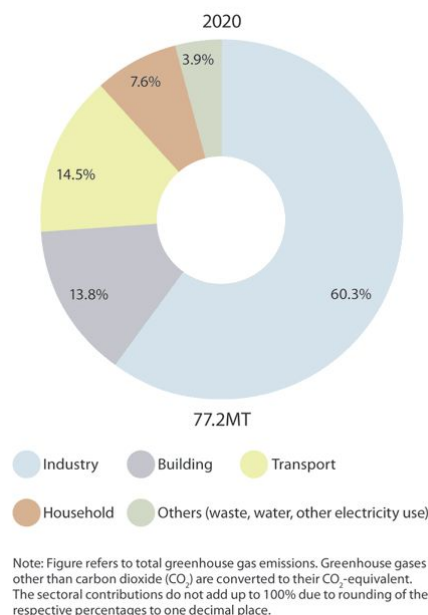


Figure 1: Singapore's Projected Business-As-Usual (BAU) Emissions

Taken from <https://www.nccs.gov.sg/docs/default-source/publications/national-climate-change-strategy.pdf>

¹ BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-48964736>

² United Nations: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg13>

³ The Straits Times: https://www.straitstimes.com/business/singapores-largest-offshore-floating-solar-panel-system-to-be-built-along-straits-of-johor?xtor=CS3-20&utm_source=STiPad&utm_medium=share&utm_term=2019-12-16%20%3A12%3A31

⁴ The Straits Times: https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/environment/building-a-green-singapore?xtor=CS3-20&utm_source=STiPad&utm_medium=share&utm_term=2019-12-16%20%3A12%3A26

⁵ National Climate Change Secretariat (NCCS): <https://www.nccs.gov.sg/docs/default-source/publications/national-climate-change-strategy.pdf>

Hence, I wanted to see how to get Singaporeans more actively involved in this quest to reduce their carbon footprint, and asked 20 of my family members and peers of different ages and schools for their take on this issue⁶.

Unsurprisingly, 80% of respondents believed that climate change would be pressing in 2020, to the point of irreversibility. However, only a quarter knew the figures to how dire the situation is. Nonetheless, 75% were, therefore, more encouraged to take climate action.

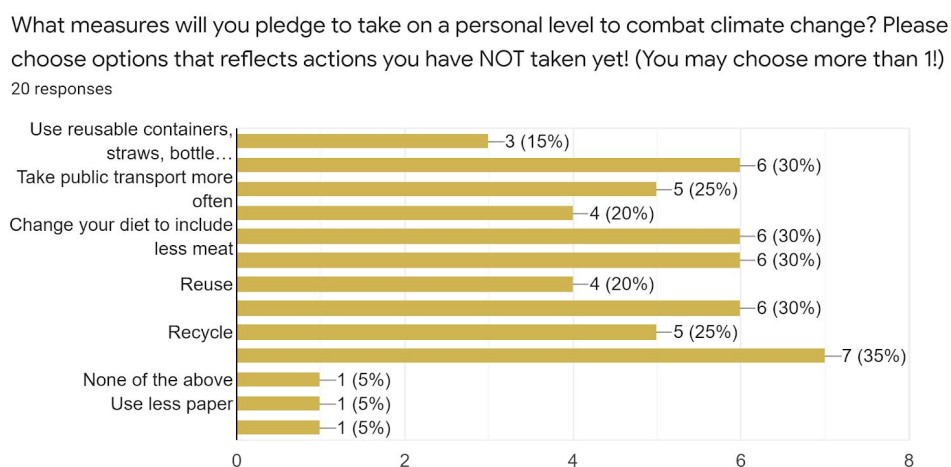


Figure 2: 19 of 20 respondents were willing to make at least one change to their current lifestyle

After learning about the limited time humans have to combat this issue and that animal agriculture exacerbates it, 35% of respondents pledged to plant greens at home, while 30% agreed to consume less electricity, eat less meat, buy minimal products, and upcycle.

In addition, the most recent biennial climate change perception survey⁷ showed that 78.2% of Singaporeans would reduce their carbon footprint, even if it brought them 'additional costs and inconveniences as consumers'. Despite this, only 48.3% knew how to address climate change, and just 79.7% attempted to reduce food wastage.

If it had been the start of 2019, I would have called climate change any kind of natural disaster. Now, given the true severity of the situation, given the knowledge that we have to act *now*, and given the depleting state of nature as you read this, I would call it a sinkhole. Time we waste away now is the time we waste away stopping the hole from getting deeper, the time we waste away rescuing ourselves from this eternal death pit, the time we waste away saving Earth's life from being dragged down with us in the sixth mass extinction event — the last recorded by humans.

The fuel to this fiery 'sinkhole' is no more than GHG, stored by the world's most valuable carbon sinks. While the government giving out houseplants will not absorb all the excess carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, there are numerous benefits I have felt myself. Spider plants, low-maintenance houseplants, reproduce effortlessly through stolons, which, when in contact with soil, will mature. Even better, having multiple at home can replace air-conditioning in our warm climate, allowing us to reduce our carbon footprint drastically. Although the truth seems to be sugar-coated, the spider plants in my home have been proving it to be far from a myth, with the usage of air conditioning dropping to barely biweekly.

⁶ Google Forms — Survey: <https://forms.gle/hhRBFX6PRpDVVV1M8>

⁷ The Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/environment/more-in-singapore-aware-of-climate-change-and-are-willing-to-bear-costs-and>



Figure 3: An offspring of the spider plant in the background, which concurrently holds a few other stolons

While it might not be an easy feat, pilot programmes, where the government gives out a free spider plant per household, can be held in some neighbourhoods. These houseplants can be first grown in the Singapore Botanic Gardens, where tourists and locals alike can observe them.

As for the stolons, an instruction sheet can show the steps to making simple pots from 1-litre plastic bottles and Used Beverage Cartons. Furthermore, in the spirit of upcycling, kindergarten and primary school children can learn to make upcycled products using their own waste as part of their art curriculum. While they may spread the word to their family, the younger generation will also understand that not all waste needs to be disposed of.

Furthermore, instructions on how to grow common herbs, spices and vegetables can be uploaded on government websites and advertised. To combat food wastage, the same may go for manuals on how to make Do-it-Yourself compost bins to throw food scraps and use as plant fertiliser at home. With enough funding, seeds and materials used to plant greens and create the bins could be ordered from the website of a relevant authority, much like the Water Saving Kit provided by the Public Utilities Board⁸.

While the above are all driven by the government, we have to take initiative as well. The government does not necessarily have to provide us with houseplants to tend to, nor are they obliged to spoon-feed us to “go green”. These days, with search engines like Ecosia, we can find instruction sheets, tutorials and online shopping sites to complete the above tasks independently. If we know the effects of irreversible climate change, why does the government need to incentivise us to do something to stop it?

2020 will be a vital year for climate action. We will be in a make-or-break situation — one that determines the future of our Earth, ourselves, and our next generation. The right change will assure us that we are steps closer to living in a home with a close-knit, balanced, and interdependent relationship between Man and Mother Nature. Let us take time from our days and learn more, do more to contribute to a goal shared internationally, and respond actively to our leaders, because only then, may we make our actions resound louder than mere words.

⁸ Public Utilities Board (PUB) — Water Saving Kit: <https://www.pub.gov.sg/savewater/requestforwatersavingkit>