

## **A new approach to supporter engagement**

We urgently need for a new approach to communicating issues such as climate change to the public, as current methods are not proving as effective as they could be. In addition, various circumstances have led to the general public becoming more sceptical about the existence of man-made global warming – for example, Peter Preston wrote recently in The Guardian that the proportion of UK adults who believe that global warming is "definitely" a reality has plummeted from 44% to 31% in the last 12 months. Whilst this stalling is taking place, the clock is ticking and urgency for action on this issue mounting ever further.

We – environmental and development groups, as well as the people who care about these issues – clearly need to be doing something differently.

I suggest that there are a number of broad strategic steps that these organisations could take in their communications to the public (and indeed to decision makers) that would help them to regain momentum in both this debate and in gaining behaviour change. I've outlined some of them very briefly below.

Overall, I believe we need to take a 'whole person' approach to seeking change and influencing the public. We need to recognise that caring about the environment is just one aspect of an individual's worldviews and motivations – both within their ethical values and more broadly within their lives. To motivate people on issues such as climate change and protecting the environment we therefore not only need to tackle these issues themselves, but also offer a vision of a more just and sustainable world generally, including one in which everyone has better lives and greater well-being.

To do this, I believe our integrated communications, campaigning and fundraising strategies need to include the following areas:

- Educate people on global issues – we need to educate the public and supporters alike in an accessible way about the world around them and global issues. We need to give them perspective on the world around them and how they affect the world. This can be done in quite a simple way, and could be an effective way of moving people towards more sustainable thinking and behaviour, as demonstrated in a new report by the DEA - <http://www.dea.org.uk/resources/item.asp?d=2076>.
- Help people to develop 'values awareness' – we need to equip people with the tools and information they need to identify their own values and work out how they can live in a way that is consistent with them. By doing this, we can help people get better at making their own ethical decisions and take greater responsibility for how they live. We can also ensure that pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours become more deeply engrained, as people will be making these choices for themselves.

- Integration with other values – we need to show how environmental issues fit with other values that people might have, such as those for social justice.
- Well-being – we need to show people that a more sustainable and just world also brings better lives for everyone – both at a global scale and for them, in their own day-to-day lives. Global issues and well-being are two sides of the same coin. This idea is reinforced by the work of Life<sup>2</sup> ([www.lifesquared.org.uk](http://www.lifesquared.org.uk)) and the research and output being conducted by Tom Crompton at WWF. We therefore need to provide people with some clear guidance as to how they can gain greater happiness and meaning in their own lives through better living.

Overall, I suggest campaigning organisations need to talk to people about much more than just the environment – it is about their lives, worldviews, aspirations and well-being. If we do this, people are likely to be more receptive to environmental messages and more willing and able to make (and accept) changes to their lives and society.

To do this, these organisations need to set up a communications strategy that gives something back to people – the supporter relationship in the coming years will need to be 2-way rather than the 1-way relationship that most environmental charities currently have with their supporters. In other words, rather than the traditional 1-way relationship of gaining donations or campaigning or voluntary time from individuals, the organisation will need to give things back to them too that can make their lives better. This might include providing them with accessible education and perspective on the world, as well as resources, courses and guidance on how they can improve their own well-being whilst seeking a better future for the planet. This could really help to build supporter numbers, as well as their potential as donors, campaigners and activists.

**If you would like to speak to us in more detail about these ideas and how we could help your organisation, email me at [richard@changestar.co.uk](mailto:richard@changestar.co.uk).**