



The Daily Gleaner

February 28, 2009

One Million Acts of Green – Why Every Act Counts

A few weeks after the birth of our daughter in October 2001, I spent some time analyzing what the world would look like when she graduates from high school in 2019. I wasn't very happy with what I discovered.

I looked at metrics like the average global temperature, oil consumption, world population, health care costs as a percentage of GDP and a few others. Guess what? They are all headed the same way – up. Sadly, none of these indicators are sustainable. Needless to say, with a family and a seven year-old as my primary source of inspiration, I decided to do something about it – change a light bulb.

You may be wondering - what has a light bulb got to do with it? One light bulb doesn't make much of a difference. But millions or billions of light bulbs? Now we're talking.

Let's do some quick math. The United Nations estimates that the world population will be about 9 billion by the middle of this century (when my daughter is slightly older than I am now) – that's about 2.5 billion more people on the planet in only four decades. Most of that growth will come from developing countries, many of which will aspire to a lifestyle similar to what we now enjoy in Canada.

There are about 1 billion people on the planet that live similar lifestyles to us right now, and by mid-century that number could well be in the 2-3 billion range. That means a lot more cars, iPods and air conditioners than we have right now. Where is all of this stuff going to come from? And what waste will be left behind?

David Douglas, the Vice President for Eco-Sustainability at Sun Microsystems, as stated in Thomas Friedman's book, "Hot, Flat and Crowded" puts it this way. "What if the newest 1 billion people were each given a 60 watt incandescent light bulb, and they left them on for four hours per day? That would require about twenty or so new 500-megawatt power plants". The alternative is if they were given 15 watt compact fluorescent light bulbs, then only 5 more power plants would be needed.

Don't doubt that the power of energy efficiency when embraced by millions, or billions of people is incredibly significant. Which brings us to the CBC campaign, [One Million Acts of Green](http://green.cbc.ca) (green.cbc.ca). Since October 2008, over 170,000 people have recorded that they have installed compact fluorescent light bulbs. This is a far cry from 1 billion, but it is an impressive start. It would be great to see over a quarter of a million Canadians make the same pledge in the coming months.

Homeowners and businesses benefit every time they change a light bulb, seal a window draft, or walk to work instead of drive. Billions of people and businesses doing the same thing around the world will benefit not only themselves but also future generations.

Energy efficiency alone will not get us to where we need to be with respect to reducing greenhouse gas emissions over the next few decades, but it is an integral part of the solution. We still need renewable energy and other solutions that aren't even invented yet.

But one act at a time, we can work towards a healthy planet for future generations. Remember, those 2.5 billion new residents of Planet Earth in the next few decades all have parents and grandparents – and it is up to us to hand these new residents a 'home' that is beginning to heal itself because of the decisions we made and actions we took in our lifetimes.

Peter Corbyn is a co-founder of GreenNexus.com and a board member of The Climate Project – Canada.