



Call for Action

**Project on sustainability
as part of the 75th anniversary celebrations
of the state of Lower Saxony**

Collaboration between the IGS Schaumburg, Stadthagen, and a delegation of schools from the Netherlands (De Nieuwe Veste, Coevorden; Twents Carmel College, Oldenzaal; Stellingwerf College, Oosterwolde; Rudolph Pabus Cleveringa Lyceum, Appingedam)
29.10. – 03.11.2021

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1. Introduction to our project

2021 is the year of the 75th birthday of Lower Saxony. The state government took this as a chance to plan a project in which international politicians meet for a symposium on the topic of sustainability, centered around the sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. Next to this, a school project was planned, in which students from partner regions of Hanover would have worked on their own call for action. Due to the CoViD pandemic most of the international festivities around the 75th birthday of Lower Saxony had to be cancelled. But that didn't stop the students from Germany and the Netherlands to start their own project on sustainability. Students from five different schools (four Dutch and one German school) visited different companies in their countries. When the Dutch students arrived in Germany, the German students showed them around their county, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of our region. We visited different sustainable projects in the area and started to think about sustainable actions. During the next days we attended different workshops and learned what companies, big and small ones, need to be more sustainable. We talked to small startups and global companies like *Continental* and found out that politicians are the ones that can actually change the world for the better! With the climate conference that is happening in Rome these days in mind, we started to work on our call for action. We decided on six different demands that are elaborated upon further in the upcoming pages.

2. Our demands

2.1. Take responsibility

Where do we stand now?¹

No one feels like they need to take responsibility. Countries are afraid to take responsibility because they don't want to be blamed, but actually they will get blamed if they do nothing. It is a dilemma or a never ending cycle. People always blame others. The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate action. It was adopted by 196 parties at COP 21 in Paris, 12th December 2015, and entered into force on 4th November 2016. Its goal is to limit global warming to preferably to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels. To achieve this long-term temperature goal, countries aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible to achieve a climate neutral world by 2050.

Also the government needs to listen to scientists. Many scientists have done research about climate change and know better how to act than businessmen who are being distracted by money. The researchers can advise on implementing green technologies. In the Night on Wednesday, the 14th of July to the 15th of July, there was a flood on the Rhine like no other in hundreds of years. 180 people died in the flood and damage to the transport routes alone was estimated on two Billion euros. Experts of the German Meteorological Service (DWD) already warned on Monday for the affected region, but the warning was not passed on to those affected.

What is our demand and what is the reason behind it?

It is as obvious as it can be: we'll all be victims of climate change. Every country will be hit or needs to take care of all the climate refugees! Take responsibility for the future and your (in-)actions now!

What is the effect that we want to achieve?

Everyone agrees that we need to do something but the world seems paralyzed. We hope that countries will start taking responsibility and try something, even if they fail. We want the countries not to tell others to work but do it themselves and show the other countries how it's done. Also we hope that the politicians will listen less to businessmen and more to scientists. In this way we can slow down climate change.

2.2. Make strict and clear rules

Where do we stand now?²

Internationally there are a lot of rules, but also a lot of different ones. In the last years we see more and more that rules are getting more flexible. Companies can trade in emissions, which sounds like

¹ Source: (<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>)

² Sources:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1119/oj>

<https://airqualitynews.com/2021/02/04/why-small-businesses-need-to-think-about-climate-change-too/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flexible_Mechanisms

<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/klimaschutz/klimaschutzgesetz-2021-1913672>

https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal/european-climate-law_en

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/klimaatverandering/klimaatbeleid>

a way to bring climate rules and marketing together. But the price of `buying` emission is low, so the system doesn't really work. The EU wants to reduce the use of all the fossil fuels and become climate-neutral in 2050.

Germany has set the goal to be climate-neutral in 2050. Also there are updates with publications of experts. There is an immediate program of 8 billion euros, for climate-neutral mobility, but also to strengthen certain groups and regions.

The current situation in The Netherlands is quite similar to the international and German ones. In The Netherlands especially it is very important to take action in the case of climate change, because of the fact that The Netherlands is for a big part below sea level. There are a couple of international agreements that the Netherlands must adhere to. The first is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change from 1992. This is the first set of agreements about the climate. Secondly there is the Kyoto-Protocol. This states that the emission reductions differ from country to country and can be traded among each other. And as last, the COP21. The Netherlands has agreed to a new UN climate agreement there.

Around the globe all companies know the rules of the government when they need to have zero emissions. But they are free to make their own plans, how to achieve the goals. If there would be more talks between governments and companies, of all sizes, we will have a clearer and stricter way of climate rules. Especially for the smaller businesses, which don't have enough knowledge and money to achieve a more climate-neutral company. For small companies it is good to have less bureaucracy, so they can take action easier.

What is our demand and what is the reason behind it?

Getting stricter, clearer rules that apply to everyone, because the companies have struggles to find their way. And also the loads of bureaucracy holds the companies back to take real action. (maybe they also use it as an excuse). And the support for smaller companies is important because, all the small companies together are also big. And if they achieve the climate goals it would be a big step.

What is the effect that we want to achieve?

If all the small companies and the big companies have straight and clear rules, they don't have an excuse anymore, they just have to achieve the climate goals. And if the small companies also make steps, we will get way further in achieving climate goals. And if big companies join the discussion with the government, we will have more and better state-of-the-art products to achieve the climate goals. Also, the companies know what to do.

When the rules apply to both small and large companies there will be a fairer competition between the companies.

<https://www.defensie.nl>

<https://www.wwf.de/themen-projekte/klima-energie/klimaschutz-und-energiewende-in-deutschland/klimaschutz-in-der-industrie>

2.3. Stop greenwashing

Where do we stand now?³

Companies are greenwashing by just buying green certificates without changing anything or just very little in their corporations. They invest in the certificate to earn more money for a product. Companies buy certificates to plant trees to reduce the CO2 in the air, but they do not change anything within the company itself, so it does not help much. Companies pay other companies for certificates as well.

What is our demand and what is the reason behind it?

There needs to be a law to stop companies from buying each other's certificates, because it is basically a fraud. The government should make sure that bigger companies lose their power to greenwash, by introducing fines. The supply chain law should be enforced by controls from experts every several years in order to maintain their green certificates. This way, companies are forced to keep producing the way they need to, so they will not lose their green certificate. There must be only one universal green certificate in the European Union with unified rules overall on what to do before they get the certificate (CO2 reduction, emissions, etc). Every company must tell and show where the products and resources that they use come from, follow a supply chain law, in order to earn a REAL green certificate. We think that this will help, because they have to be really honest and open about the way they got it. If they lie about it, there must be consequences. This needs to be checked every few years by experts in order to maintain their certificate. The costs for the checks will be for the companies themselves, but the green certificate should be cheaper to compromise. The green certificate will expire after several years so the companies must pay for a check.

What is the effect that we want to achieve?

We want companies to be honest about the production of their products. This way, they will be able to earn a green certificate. We are not stupid and do not want corporations to cheat!! This will make sure that greenwashing will be stopped. CO2 reduction, less usage of fossil fuels, more energy from the wind, etc.

2.4. Support sustainability

Where do we stand now?

The government supports the companies who are not interested in climate change. They are giving them subsidies to develop new technologies to be more sustainable. In our opinion the money goes to other/wrong things, not to develop new techniques to be more sustainable to improve the climate. Also, the rules are too flexible and they are not strict and clear enough. The companies can make of it what they want. Another problem what needs to be solved, is that the government gives the money to unmotivated companies, that don't bother to meet the demands they have promised. Another thing is that a lot of small countries without big companies are not able to be more sustainable.

³ Sources:

Greenwashing: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenwashing>

Supply chain law: <https://www.aeb.com/intl-en/magazine/articles/eu-supply-chain-law.php>

Workshops

What is our demand and what is the reason behind it?

The government needs to support sustainable companies. It needs to find ways to improve their current system of support and need to reduce the obstacles for being more sustainable. We need stricter rules meaning that if a company does not do as told, they will have to give the money back.

What is the effect that we want to achieve?

When we create a system with punishment and rewarding, more companies will be able to be more sustainable. All the companies should get subsidies and the right information (support) so they can start getting (more) sustainable. If they don't meet the statement of the created rule(s), they have to pay the money back. For that it's really important that the rules or climate targets won't be too long or too far away. When the targets are timed in five years, they will be easier to control.

Our final thing is that we find it important that countries and companies cooperate with each other, because in this way, all the companies and countries will have the right information to get (more) sustainable.

2.5. Involve young people

Where do we stand now?⁴

Right now younger people are not being taken seriously enough by older people. Only older people have an impact on big decisions about politics and other important stuff about our world. In a few years they will retire and we will have to live with the consequences of their choices.

For example, the climate change. It is one world, and we will have to live with all these things that politicians change right now.

We want to be a part of the decisions that are made about the future world. We, as teenagers, feel left out and not important. Also in our educational system, we don't get enough information about politics and the possibilities that come with political engagement. So we don't really know what is happening in the world. And we do want to know more, so we can play a bigger part in it. Then we are also afraid of our future, we don't really know anything about life as an adult, so we should get more educated.

What is our demand and what is the reason behind it?

As we said we are the future and we must deal with the climate change, so we need to make a difference. So, if we got more involved, it would mean that we could actually help with decisions made about world. As younger people we have a different perception about things. So, if we voted, then we would get a lot more different opinions and the final decision would be better for everyone.

We as teenagers would also grow up in a better way than we do now. We would think more about life like money, jobs, living place and everything in that way. And we would be educating ourselves. Also, when we could help with the decisions, we would be prepared for life.

What is the effect that we want to achieve?

We want to make our own decisions about our own future so we can live in peace.

⁴ Source: <https://www.pbs.org/education/blog/engaging-young-people-in-politics>

We cannot let other people decide on our future anymore. We just hope we would be more included in the future. It's not only important for us but it's also important for the older generation to hear our opinion.

2.6. Act now!

Where do we stand now?

The current situation, there is some cooperation, but not enough. The countries don't listen to each other, like the USA, China and Russia. Also, in the European Union the countries don't come to a solution, because always one country doesn't agree with the new rules. So, we need to do something about this. We need to make rules within the European Union that if the majority agrees with the rule, the rule is formed. No member of the UN acts according to the rules they set by themselves. Also, between Germany and the Netherlands there is little cooperation but not much, like for example the cooperation between Delfzijl (Groningen seaports) and the Emsland, because there is no cooperation between them. It is more beneficial to work together, because then we can work faster to find solutions for climate change. And there is not a lot of cooperation between the African and European continent. To give an example, Europe sends its trash to Africa to burn it there, only to shut their eye when being confronted with it. At present we just missed the deadline of climate change, this is not good at all. We need to undertake action now, because otherwise we will all face the consequences. Hence, we all need to contribute to the solutions.

What is our demand and what is the reason behind it?

We need to start acting now because climate change doesn't stop if you don't do anything about it. The deadline has already been passed because the temperature already rose up to 1.5 degrees more. You can see this because there are now already a lot of natural catastrophes. So we need to start more international cooperation to prevent these disaster and to prevent climate refugees like the Dutch if you don't do anything about climate change.

Also, we need to work together on the way to a reliable world, and we need to work together to get enough green energy for all the countries in the world. Climate doesn't stop at the borders. That's the reason why we have to work together internationally. If the Netherland floods, the Dutch will flee to Germany, so this is also very important to Germany. This idea isn't that weird, Aimée Slangen from the Koninklijk Nederlands Instituut voor Onderzoek der Zee (Nioz) compares the Netherlands to a drained bathtub. There is so much information, why not share it with people who can make a change. Make international decisions, so there will be unity. But borders have to remain borders, otherwise parts of the economy will collapse.

What is the effect that we want to achieve?

We hope that our demand increases international conversation. We need this international exchange on a political level and between companies. If they shared innovative ideas and laws, there is a good chance that those ideas and laws would be introduced to a wider audience. Also it would be easier to fix exploitation issues such as tax evasion.

We need to start acting now! If the whole world doesn't work together, the Netherlands will flood. Dutch people will become climate-refugees and invade Germany.

Climate doesn't stop at the borders. That's the reason why we have to cooperate internationally.

3. Conclusion

The last five days showed that all of us, German and Dutch, face the same problems when it comes to stopping climate change. To create a sustainable world, we – as in every student, every politician, everyone around the world – have to act now. Our thinking must change towards a more sustainable way of living. Using bureaucracy or money as an excuse to not change our lives, is not an option anymore. Climate is changing right now. We as students from Northern Germany and the Netherlands are already living in fear of the sea level rising if the temperature keeps going up. We would be some of the first climate refugees that will lose their home due to climate change. That means, you need to act now. You are the politicians that can have an impact on climate change. You need to change laws, pave ways for sustainable companies and make money out of the companies that are not working on being sustainable. You have to trust scientists and their studies to learn from them and to use their knowledge to teach others. You need to include us, as young people, into the decisions being made now, which are concerning our future. You have to take responsibility in your job as a politician, you were voted because people believed in you to be able to change things. Stand up for them! Stand up for us!

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