

Green philanthropy Q & A



What is the evidence for environmental problems such as climate change?

Scientists agree that issues like climate change, population growth and over-consumption of natural resources pose a serious threat to the planet's environment. The evidence points to this and can be found in respected reports such as the 2001 and 2007 *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) reports; the *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change* (2006); and the *UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* (2005). *Green philanthropy* draws information from these and other authoritative sources. In total, over four hundred reports and articles are referenced. *Green philanthropy* also draws on 130 consultations with experts, charities and funders in the UK, US and Europe.

Who is to blame for environment problems?

We are all to blame for these problems—the evidence points to unsustainable living around the globe as the cause, particularly in wealthy nations. But these problems can be tackled, and we all have a role to play in this too. *Green philanthropy* guides donors and funders on charities solutions to environmental problems, as charities are leading the charge to tackle these threats—and they are achieving remarkable successes.

Do you think that by focusing on climate change we're focusing on the wrong thing?

Climate change is a major problem—its growing profile is a great step forward. We need to act now to tackle greenhouse gas emissions that emanate from urban and industrial sources. But an informed debate is needed on the whole spectrum of environment problems. This must recognise that we need to also act to protect natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity.

Are you saying people shouldn't offset their carbon?

Efforts to reduce emissions are valuable and should be encouraged. Some efforts have a greater impact on carbon emissions than others, but at the moment we know too little about the various solutions. *Green philanthropy* calls for more investment into research and analysis so that it is clearer which charitable approaches work best at combating environment problems.

Isn't protecting the environment government's responsibility?

Governments and the international community have an important role to play in tackling environmental problems. *Green Philanthropy* explores this role, concluding that international action by governments is vitally important, for example in agreeing a successor to the Kyoto Protocol. Past efforts have also yielded significant results (e.g. the Montreal Protocol on CFCs that threaten the ozone layer).

But governments and the international community can not, and should not be expected to solve these problems alone. *Green philanthropy* found that charities play a key role in tackling environment problems. They work alongside governments to identify and implement solutions. They are also watchdogs, monitoring and highlighting where governmental and international action is insufficient or non-existent.

Isn't the market already delivering solutions to these problems—like carbon trading and hybrids?

There is huge potential for market-based solutions—current initiatives in the business and financial sectors show this. But *Green philanthropy* found that in many cases environment charities play a role in these solutions. An example is the rise of certification schemes in which producers, retailers and consumers come together to grow markets for sustainably grown, caught or produced goods (eg, fish, coffee, tea and bananas). These schemes are usually coordinated by charities (e.g. Marine Stewardship Council, Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade). This is because charities are uniquely qualified by virtue of their independence, focus on environmental and social goals and credibility and integrity as organisations. *Green philanthropy* found that the potential for more certification schemes, for both goods and services is very great, but progress is constrained by too little funding.

Why is environment funding so low?

Given the scale of the problems, too few donors prioritise the environment when they are giving their money away. In large part this is a function of history—we've only recently become aware of the need to take action on environment issues.

One of the reasons that donors don't give more is a lack of information. Good information about the nature of environmental problems is now easily accessible. But donors and funders lack information about what, how and who to fund. This includes analyses of the potential impact of different approaches, and guidance on how to support charities most effectively. With this information donors can make informed decisions about their giving and invest their money confidently. *Green philanthropy* provides some of this information, although more is needed.

What are you recommending that donors do?

Donors should read *Green philanthropy*—it is relevant both to experienced green philanthropists and those who have never considered giving to environmental charities. The report—the first of its kind—provides practical information and advice to philanthropists on supporting environment charities.

An increase in the number of funders is the environment sector's most pressing need. *Green philanthropy* encourages more donors to support charities that are tackling the range of environmental issues so that these charities can make a greater difference. Funding is most needed to support innovative approaches.

Green philanthropy also encourages donors to get together and share experiences of what works. This has been shown in other areas to boost funding. Through learning from others and working together, more can be achieved.

Finally, *Green philanthropy* recommends that donors: fund organisations that can provide practical information to help donors make informed decisions; fund environment charities for longer periods of time—in some cases, for example, a decade's funding is required; and fund charities that can demonstrate the effectiveness of their approach.

What kind of 'social returns' can donors who invest in this area get?

Donors can expect to achieve remarkable returns through supporting environmental charities. To demonstrate this NPC has calculated the return achieved by a donation to Global Witness, the UK-based charity that works to combat human rights and natural resources abuses. A £5 donation to Global Witness will stop 2 trees being cut down, protecting them indefinitely. Another £5 the following year will stop 2 more trees being cut down—meaning in 5 years time you will have saved 10 trees from being cut down.

This is twice the return achieved by a carbon offsetting scheme in the first year alone—and ten times the return after the five years.

Environmental problems are huge and complex—how can charities possibly make a difference?

All the major social problems that charities are tackling are huge and complex, from alleviating poverty to overcoming HIV/AIDS—the extent of these problems does not stop us from working to solve them. Environment problems are no different. And all the evidence shows that charities are making a significant impact. With more funding, they could do much more.

Why did you produce an environment report when NPC's focus is on human welfare?

Green philanthropy shows that environment problems are inter-connected with human welfare. This is nowhere more evident than in developing countries, where poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation. It is important to stop treating human welfare and environment challenges as distinct and separate. They are not. *Green philanthropy* demonstrates that environmental problems are as much a threat to people as they are to the planet.