



## Peace-building in the era of climate change

by Tonya Graham, Monday, November 18th 2019

Helping communities develop climate resilience is my day job. It's an interesting one, but it is fraught with loss and grief.

Our team has yet to stand before a community and share local climate projections that are beneficial. Instead, we pass along information that makes it clear that the climate crisis threatens their infrastructure, economy, and the health and safety of their residents. It threatens the natural systems they rely on for clean water, fresh air, recreation and food. In many places, it threatens their local culture and way of life.

With the threat looming nearer, friends often tell me they are doing what they can in their personal lives, but they feel like it doesn't matter because the global climate crisis is so large and they are so small. Anyone who has stared down the threat of the climate crisis understands that feeling of despair and helplessness.

But there is good news. What I know from working with community leaders around the country is that people are taking action everywhere. Their efforts are often unseen, but meaningful work is being done not just by one side of the political aisle, or just in America's large cities, or just in certain regions. Leadership is springing up in unlikely places, and America is on the move.

But in this time of rapid change, we must understand that the work to secure a safe climate future is not just about reducing greenhouse gases and adapting to the changes that are underway, although both are critically important. It is also about building social resilience.

The climate crisis is increasingly adding strain to our social fabric, and it's only going to get worse. When that fabric holds during a crisis, we get stronger. When it tears, we become weaker, and our ability to handle the next crisis is diminished.

The climate crisis is global, and addressing it requires that we redesign practically everything in our modern world, including our relationship with energy, how we manage the land, how our communities function, and how we interact with each other in times of stress. As our world becomes more difficult, we will need to bank hard toward cooperation, compassion and care.

To do that, we must build the relationships and skills necessary to navigate climate change-driven crises peacefully rather than through violence. Along with the direct work needed to address the crisis, we should understand that peace building is also climate work. Repairing our democratic systems is climate work. Building relationships across cultures is climate work. Closing the gap between the wealthy and poor so that people can be more personally resilient is climate work. This need for peace building and social resilience is why the work of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission is so important.

Social transformation, like what is needed to address the climate crisis, seems to come very quickly after decades of hard work. Advocates push and push, often not seeing much progress until suddenly the system tips and the issue is transformed, seemingly overnight. We see the tipping point only when it's in the rearview mirror.

We have a big wall to tip if we are to secure a safe climate future for our children.

One of the things we do at the Geos Institute is help people get their hands on that wall. We recently launched Climate Ready Communities, an “assisted do-it-yourself” program to help leaders in small to mid-sized communities build climate resilience. These communities want to get to work, but don't have the money to hire help. Over 200 communities have downloaded our guide, and communities will soon begin implementing the climate resilience plans developed through this program in California, Montana and Texas. More hands are arriving at the wall daily.

When we push on the parts of the climate crisis we can see, whether by conserving energy, installing solar panels, preparing for emergencies, calling for climate leadership from our elected officials, or supporting organizations that align with our values, we are arm in arm with millions of other people who are pushing on what they can see in their own lives.

So push on whatever you can see that addresses the climate crisis in your own life. You never know if your hands will be the last ones needed to tip the system.

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