

Dharma Centres and Climate Change: We All Need to Act

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Introduction

- ▶ Global warming needs to be limited to $\approx 1.5^\circ\text{C}$ to prevent severe long-term consequences
- ▶ For that end, CO₂-equivalent (henceforth just CO₂) emissions need to be reduced by 50 % until 2030 (“50x30” formula)—within only 9 yrs—hurry up!
- ▶ Governments, businesses, NPOs, individuals all share responsibility for the required transformation
- ▶ Buddhist organisations and individuals have special responsibility, considering
 - their knowledge of interconnectedness,
 - their striving for happiness of all,
 - their commitment to right livelihood,
 - their CO₂-footprint being likely above average.¹

¹Even though I do not have data, the following observations support this expectation: 1. Overrepresentation of higher-income people, known to have higher CO₂-footprints.

2. Often intense travel activities (to retreats, Asian monasteries, etc.).

3. Extra emissions from operation of retreat centres.

This contribution aims at pointing out:

- ▶ Options for the reduction of CO₂-footprint by major Buddhist organisations (mitigation).
- ▶ Climate-change adaptations which might be advisable for Dharma centres.

Note: This is written mostly with major Buddhist organisations, having teachers and followers in a wide geographic region, in mind. Even though some aspects may vary for different regions of the world and the various organisations, I consider them to be globally relevant.

Two Key References: (more therein)

IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C (SR15), 2018.

<https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

50x30 coalition website. <https://www.50x30.net/>

Reducing the Carbon Footprint (Mitigation)

Mobility Priority #1

- ▶ On-line activities (nowadays, no need to say a lot here)
- ▶ Better one long event than several shorter events
- ▶ Distributed rather than central activities
 - ▶ to reduce overall travel distance
 - ▶ to eliminate long-distance travel
 - ▶ might cause extra burden to teachers
 - ▶ easier with teachers available regionally
 - ▶ useful also as hybrid events: (head) teacher on-line
- ▶ Facilitate use of public (ground) transport, car sharing
 - ▶ Provide full information about local public transport
 - ▶ Provide cheap or free shuttle
 - ▶ Offer on-site / near-by accommodation if possible
 - ▶ Offer on-site storage of personal items (easier to come w/out car)
- ▶ Pilgrimage and monastery visits
 - ▶ Consider as special occasion, not every (other) year
 - ▶ Compensate by reducing other emissions
 - ▶ Compensation with reliable CO₂-compensation provider (not a long-term solution)

Buildings & other meeting places Priority #2

- ▶ Share between sanghas (better efficiency, sharing of mitigation- & adaptation-related investments)
- ▶ Standard measures, related to heating / cooling systems, thermal quality, outside shutters, ..., and for new constructions: local, low-CO₂-footprint materials.

Food Priority #3. Just as a reminder:

- ▶ Food offered in centres should be as much as possible **vegetarian (maybe vegan), local / regional, organic.**
- ▶ Consider teaching about diet style in terms of practice.

Adapting to Climate Change

Here we consider how Dharma centres might prepare for and adapt to consequences of climate change in the near to medium future (mostly already committed).

What to expect? (Just in a nutshell!)

- ▶ Places and seasons that are dry to become more dry
- ▶ More sunshine, stronger and longer hot spells
- ▶ Places and seasons that are wet: more and heavier rain
- ▶ Depending on location, increase of all kinds of weather-related hazards (frequency and intensity)
- ▶ Spread of invasive species including disease vectors

What to do? (Just headings, select as applicable)

- ▶ Consider attractiveness of rural places vs. (hot) cities
- ▶ Make buildings fit for those conditions
- ▶ Adapt outdoor environment (suitable plants, shade, ...)
- ▶ Ensure water supply (cisterns for garden water, ...)
- ▶ In natural hazards zones, be prepared for worsening.
- ▶ Inform visitors about recommended vaccinations (FSME), personal protection, install insect screens, ...

Conclusions and Recommendations

- ▶ Buddhist organisations have their share of responsibility and need to act, especially if operating retreat centres.
- ▶ Larger organisations should systematically address relevant issues, develop and carry out plans for:
 1. Reducing CO₂-footprint in line with 50x30 reqs.
 2. Adapting their real-estate property, keeping in mind the long-term nature of both many adaptation measures and the development of climate.
 3. Be an exemplary part of societal transformation!