

SAVING THE SHIP

TREETALKS | Hans van der Loo on Climate Change, Urgency and Action

- By Kees Rottinghuis -



Hans van der Loo

Hans van der Loo visited us to provide guidance and advice. Hans is an energy and sustainability expert and former Vice President at Royal Dutch Shell, where he initiated Shell V-power. He frequently speaks for world and business leaders, for example at the Paris Climate Agreement (COP21) and the World Economic Forum. We would like to share some of his sobering insights with you.

“There are three fields in play with climate change. First of all, it is very hard physics and chemistry. The second it is economics but the most important field is the social science. Climate change is the result of our behaviour and choices.

Stopping climate change used to be something we should do for our children, but we are past that stage now. It's not something for the next generation. We need to become more aware of our ecosystem. Not just because of guilt but also a sense of survival. It's not about doing this for our children anymore. No, we should do this for ourselves.

The difficulty is that climate change is a long-term problem and people tend to favour the

short term. I think we will go through a course of collateral damage before we really take action. That is rather sorry, but sometimes we need to burn our fingers to know something is hot. You then learn not to make that same mistake again. Unfortunately, getting hurt helps. This summer, for instance, was really hot but it hasn't caused real collateral damage. Most people have forgotten it already. It has to infiltrate our behaviour. You won't forget the year your house collapsed.

“We will go through a course of collateral damage before we really take action.”

WEALTH WEIGHS

Living in the wealthy part of the world, we are not feeling

the pain at the moment. Others are, like the people in the Marshall Islands and Vanuatu. They will see their countries completely disappear below sea level and it's not their fault. With their lifestyle, their footprint is nowhere near the world's average and even further from ours. Your lifestyle determines the size of your footprint. Wealthy nations have a disproportionate big impact on climate change.

If everyone lives like an American we would need 5 planets. If everyone would live like a European we would need 2.5 planets. Only because a huge proportion of the world lives below the average we now need 1.7 planets to live on. Still not enough; we only have one. Make no mistake, the planet is not on the line. Earth

will continue for billions of years. But whether the ecosystem - which we as a species need - will survive, is a very big question mark.

AND ACTION

Ensuring our survival is a simple calculation. If we don't spend now, we will have to spend a lot more later on. We will need to be conscious about it and then convert that consciousness into lifestyle choices. This will come in three steps. The first is living your life as you are now but with a smaller carbon footprint. That is already great. These are small changes you barely even notice. The next step has to do with behaviour. Consuming more consciously and knowingly. Changing our lifestyle, but still not a real material change. Those are the easy parts. But the third step will be about parts of personal consumption that will really change our lives. It will start hurting, like

infringements on our consumption patterns that we do not desire. Our planet provides enough for everyone's need. But not for everyone's greed.

The quicker we can take the first two steps, the further we can push away the last step. That last step will be inevitable this century. When exactly, depends on what we will do now.

"We are all on the same ship. It doesn't matter who you are, your destiny is linked to that ship."

The most difficult is to reduce CO₂. Offsetting emissions is already a good step but it is not enough. Best is to over-offset emissions, reducing CO₂. So I am taking out more CO₂ and leaving a margin for people, who cannot afford that.

Corekees' trees, Pongamia, are a way of CO₂ mitigation. Our

current economic system requires high-density energy in the form of hydrocarbon molecules. Pongamia also produces hydrocarbon molecules but made in a very nice way. And of course we can never believe that Pongamia will be the solution to all our energy problems but it is a non-regret route. That is to say, come hell or high water I will not regret it. Non-regret options are the best options you can make in your life.

The opposite is a sure-regret option, whatever the future will be we will regret it. It is surprising how many of those we make. We lack this proper foresight and realistic discounting. Not taking action against climate change is one of those. The longer we wait, the costlier it will be - and not just financially. We know that! And yet we are completely paralysed.

We are waiting for others to start first, like the prisoner's dilemma. We are all on the

same ship. It doesn't matter who you are - the captain, the bellboy or a first-class passenger - your destiny is linked to that ship. More people should get this awareness.

Now is the best and cheapest time to take action. Ten years ago was even better but unfortunately, we cannot go back. The task ahead is making sure we do the right things in order to reach the end of this century in a civilised and peaceful manner. That is a huge task that requires all hands-on deck!"

