

'Our message to adults and global leaders: stop talking, start planting'

Anna Scott



We are trying to persuade governments to support the planting of 1 trillion trees by 2020. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

You were nine when you set up [Plant for the Planet](#). How did it all begin?

It started as a small school project in my class seven years ago, when I had to give a speech about the environment. Inspired by [Wangari Maathai](#), who planted 30m trees in Africa, I proposed that children could plant one million trees in each country of the world to create a CO2 balance.

It slowly grew from there. We planted the first tree in my school, and then some other schools joined in, planting trees as well. Children in other countries also found out about it and got active as well, doing similar things.

How does [Plant for the Planet](#) work now?

We have a worldwide network of 23,000 climate justice ambassadors, who work from regional clubs and [academies](#) to campaign for tree planting in their schools and among families and friends. We have a [global board](#) which is made up of one adult and 14 children, representing all the [Plant for the Planet](#) regions.

The board is re-elected each year, and votes on campaign matters, supervises and supports our regional clubs. We aim to plant 1 trillion trees around the world by the year 2020. To achieve this, we will need some help from adults, but we feel that children are central to success.

What are the messages you want to communicate to adult leaders?

To help us to propose policy changes to government leaders, we decided to discuss firstly what we would do in their position. In the last few years, we've had many consultations with children and youth in more than 100 countries to discuss this. We came up with a [three-point plan](#).

First, to make sure a trillion trees are planted by 2020, governments should commit to support their citizens to plant 150 trees each in that time. Second, governments should invest in renewable energy and plan to reach zero emissions by 2050. Finally, in order to restrict future global warming to 2°C, as [promised by heads of governments in Copenhagen](#), we must give the world's population equal allowances of one and a half tonnes of CO2 per person per year.

You've presented your ideas and spoken to international leaders in places like the UN and the European Parliament. Do you feel you've been listened to?

Yes, I think so. There are many people that support us, and many governments that are trying to implement our goals – at least that's what they're promising. I feel confident that they are listening to us.

What is your vision for Plant for the Planet?

I hope that we will be able to grow internationally, and convince more organisations and governments to be active and help manage planting more trees as a first step. The climate crisis we face is a new global challenge that we didn't have many years ago. I think if we actually manage to plant these trees we will learn to work as a global family to solve these global problems. That's the only way we can solve them.

What do you think makes a good leader?

As a leader, I think it's crucial to be able to look beyond your own organisation and work with other leaders and groups to reach shared goals. In order to do that, we need to agree on and communicate goals that benefit everyone. Often, I see politicians or corporations clearly expressing their own aims at international conferences, and they often succeed because they are only focused on themselves. It's a lot more difficult for civil society, where we all have our own separate goals but little support from governments.

Leaders from all development groups should focus on working together to find common goals, which we can communicate on global platforms and reach together.