**The Climate Innovation Train Has Arrived, and Israel Need Only Hop On**

Once the world has finished grappling with coronavirus, its attention will move towards mobilising and preparing for a different kind of crisis, much bigger in scope. Israel can, and should, situate itself as a leader in innovating solutions.

During times of crisis and great difficulty, of the kind that coronavirus is presenting us with, it’s hard to see the blue skies waiting for us beneath the storm clouds. The unemployment rate is only increasing, and the self-employed, as well as small and large businesses alike, have descended into a deep crisis. Nevertheless, past experience teaches us that after great crises comes great growth. Therefore, I believe that there is a rare, hidden opportunity within this coronavirus crisis that we must not miss. We must prepare ourselves, and the Israeli economy, for the reality that will follow.

The coronavirus crisis, as difficult as it is, is small in scope when compared to the crisis that climate change has been predicted to inflict upon us. The opportunities waiting for us after the virus are just a drop in an ocean of many more economic opportunities that the climate change crisis will bring us. I believe that there will be a great movement towards an environmentally friendly economy, such as a “circular economy”, as well as other economic projects that both strengthen and exist in peace with the natural ecosystem. Today, it’s become increasingly clear that the utterly uninhibited exploitation and depletion of planet earth’s resources must stop.

There are times when special circumstances bestow upon countries and nations an unprecedented opportunity to influence the future of millions, and to contribute to the betterment of the lives of many peoples. The climate crisis is one of those times, as is the opportunity that faces Israel to aim high, beyond the storm clouds of coronavirus, and look towards the horizon; to identify opportunities and contribute to a solution to the greatest problem humanity has ever faced.

The public discourse is awash with calls to action, protests, long-term targets, and exhausting discussions in climate action committees, but paradoxically, practical solutions remain conspicuously absent. What can a small farmer in Nigeria, who lost his crop yields twice, really do? The first time the rain didn’t arrive; the second time, after he planted his crops again, while simultaneously taking out a major loan, a flood rotted his crops. How can the millions of poor, who live in seaside neighbourhoods across the world, cope with rising sea levels? Where will they go? What will they do? How will they make a living?

Don’t be fooled: the climate crisis will harm, with all its might, the wealthy too, as well as those living in developed countries. Significant parts of Europe are already experiencing first-hand the processes of rainfall and water shortages. In the highly developed Netherlands, for example, a reduction in rainwater led to a decrease in the levels of aquifers, simultaneously threatening the foundational stability of thousands of homes. Practical solutions to the rainfall shortage and to mitigating greenhouse gas emissions are desperately needed, as are solutions for adapting to the climate crisis and all its implications. Establishing economic, financial, nutritional, agricultural, communal, urban and national resilience will also be essential. This could be Israel’s greatest moment.

Israel’s location on the edge of the desert, the circumstances surrounding its establishment and continued existence, as well as its great level of innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity, have combined to see the country develop an unlimited number of solutions in the environmental field; solutions which Israel can share with the entire world. That same farmer from Nigeria, who I mentioned earlier, could have preserved his crop yield if he had instead used drip irrigation, or to the contrary, if other, more resistant crop-growing opportunities had been made accessible to him. Israeli agriculture, a household name the world over, can provide a significant part of the solutions needed to feed the world, whose population is, on the one hand, growing consistently, and on the other, facing an increasingly threatened food supply due to the climate crisis, water shortages, and desertification processes. Precision agriculture, the development of disease-resistant, fortified strains, the usage of salt-water, and many more, are excellent examples of Israeli innovation.

A few years ago, I accompanied a group of senior staff from various agriculture ministries across Africa who came to Israel for a study visit, on behalf of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). During a tour of the Agricultural Research Organization, Volcani Centre, the guests learned about a method that minimises grain loss in ‘Silo’ storage facilities to just half a percent. That’s a world record: globally, dozens of percent of seeds in storage are often lost due to disease, mould, and insects. Imagine how many greenhouse gas emissions and agricultural lands could have been saved if, in the world as a whole, the rate of grain lost in storage was reduced to just half a percent.

Water is another area where Israel is leading on a global scale. If we had only known to better leverage this expertise, our solutions could have brought relief to many hardships across the globe, boosting Israeli exports and the economy at the same time. In sewage purification, Israel is a global power, recycling almost 90% of its sewage water and reusing it in agriculture. Think of the greenhouse gas emissions, environmental pollution, and ecosystem destruction that could have been avoided if the entire world was recycling at this same rate. Israel is also leading the way in the reforestation of semi-arid areas. Over a hundred years of experience in reforestation have brought Israel invaluable knowledge, statistics, and understanding of how to plant forests and preserve them in regions with low precipitation. During a time where the world is increasingly considering nature-based solutions and mass-scale tree-planting programmes as a method of mitigating the implications of the crisis, it is in fact modest Israel that has much to offer.

Israel also possesses the most advanced technologies, and extensive experience, in the field of renewable energy. One of Israel’s extraordinary technologies produces energy by harnessing the power of sea-waves; the company developing this technology, Eco Wave Power, won an award at the Madrid climate conference last year.

Other Israeli companies are also leading in the fields of energy efficiency and energy storage solutions, and are at the forefront of animal protein replacement. Israeli companies have successfully developed lab-grown meat, lab-grown protein mimicking high-quality meat and chicken protein, and proteins produced by fermentation. While understanding that the animal food industry plays a major role in the creation of the climate crisis, and that this industry’s impact is only exacerbated by the global increase in meat and plant food consumption, we can see that Israeli developments not only represent a major contribution in the prevention of climate change, but have tremendous business potential as well.

Other Israeli developments forged in the worlds of innovation, apps, artificial intelligence and recycling make use of more energy-efficient industrial materials in their manufacturing process, and more. Israel has the potential to become a world leader in climate innovation, and will have a key ability to position itself as a global solutions provider following the coronavirus crisis. Beyond all the envisioned benefits, Israel will also be able to improve its image and status in the world, and fulfil the Jewish value of "repairing the world.”

For this to happen, Israel needs to recognize that it has unique assets, natural and applicable solutions, pre-developed technologies, and practical experience. It must make an institutionalised and economic decision to advance the issue of climate change in a proactive, organised, and systematic matter by synthesising all the different sectors involved, from government and the private sector, through to academia and civil society. In doing so, we will forge a united front that will effectively tackle the issue together. Advancing Israel’s innovative climate solutions, allocating the resources needed for their implementation, harnessing all the key players, and formulating a comprehensive agenda, will set Israel on course. It is within our hands to seize the opportunity that the coronavirus crisis has given us.

The author is an Ambassador, Israel's Special Envoy for Climate Change and Sustainability at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This article was published in Haaretz newspaper on 22/4/2020 and appeared originally in

[Zavit – science and environment news agency.](https://www.zavit.org.il/intl/en/)