Asian Journal of Innovation and Policy (2020) 9.1:095-105
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7545/ajip.2020.9.1.095

Strategic Communication for Establishing Collectivity for UN International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies

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Abstract Air pollution is a global challenge that not only threatens public health, but also takes away lives. Strategic communication, in other words, public relations, is an essential way of tackling air pollution and managing the risks involved. Engaging global citizens into the public sphere requires the building of a sense of collectivity and duty on achieving clean air. Strategies and policies on an international scale that are based on the theoretical framework (Behavior Procedure Model) and focus on leading citizens into the mature and unified Collectivity during the observance of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies' are crucial. Notably, the Asian continent has inevitably found itself at the crossroad between economic growth and environmental protection, and has even been observed to be pursuing a passive response to air pollution. The key communication strategies are supported by the three goals, which include: expanding existing communities and building a new Collectivity, supporting international solidarity and individual member state activities, and implementing systems and structures. The key goals can be further specified into six strategies. This paper has analyzed global problems and discussed possible communication strategies to increase public engagement for the observation of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.' It will be the responsibility of all nations to implement the aforementioned strategies and policies as well as promoting global action.

Keywords Air Pollution, Climate change, Strategic Communication, Collectivity, United Nations, International Day of Clean Air for blue skies

I. Introduction

Air pollution is a global challenge that is not only threatening public health, but is also claiming lives. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 12.6 million deaths each year are attributable to avoidable environmental risk factors, while an estimated seven million deaths are

Submitted, April 10, 2020; 1st Revised, April 23, 2020; Accepted, April 24, 2020
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associated with air pollution every year. In addition, 92% of people worldwide do not breathe clean air (WHO, 2017). Even if it does not lead to death, air pollution is attributed to exacerbating existing diseases and invoking new severe and long-lasting illnesses such as respiratory disease, stroke, and cancer in all people regardless of gender and age. Moreover, some are cautiously suggesting that air pollution and climate change influence the spread and scale of viral diseases such as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). A recent national study conducted in the United States found that long-term exposure to PM2.5 correlates with COVID-19 death rate (Wu, Nethery & at al., 2020). It is expected that global demand for immediate and powerful environmental action will prevail for the upcoming decades, and will even influence the dynamics of global politics (Porter & Brown, 1991). The need to go further than merely being aware of the dangers of air pollution and climate change at a global scale, but making a concerted and united effort for response and action is becoming mainstream.

	South Korea	China	Japan	Mongolia
1st	Lack of available resources for cooperation	Direct relevance to the factors of political, economic, history, and security conflicts	Direct relevance to the factors of political, economic, history, and security conflicts	Low understanding and lack of common awareness
2nd	Lack of effective cooperation projects	lack of effective cooperation projects	Low understanding and lack of common awareness	Lack of available resources for cooperation
3rd	Low understanding and lack of common awareness	Lack of available resources for cooperation	Conflict of interest and power relations among stakeholders	No response

Source: Chu, J. M., et al. (2005).
Note: The obstacles are listed in the order of the severity of its impact.

Figure 1 Obstacles to Environmental Cooperation in Northeast Asia

Despite the fact that air pollution is particularly severe among East Asian countries, the level of regional cooperation on solving air pollution is contrasting from that of developed countries and regions such as Europe. This could be mainly due to the integrated and convergent nature of the European Union, or due to the underlying historical context and weak solidarity of the Northeast Asian region. Chu, J. M. et al. (2005) has identified factors that hinder

environmental cooperation, as displayed in Figure 1. For countries in the Northeast Asian region, especially Korea and China, the public's current level of awareness and perception regarding the environment, particularly on the severity and condition of air pollution, could be an important index factor.

In Korea, the public and civic society's sentiments toward government is widely influenced by the administration's ability to improve air quality. Studies further show that poor air quality and particulate matter air pollution in Seoul negatively impact the level of happiness among Seoul citizens (Kim & Jin, 2018). The Chinese government is also faced with rising public demand for improving the nation's worsening air quality (Xinhua 2018). The Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China has set the building of an ecological civilization as a primary national task, and in 2019, proposed effective and feasible emission reduction measures including the 'Three Year Plan for Winning the Blue Sky War' (2019).

In its current state, air pollution is a danger to the global human community and a threat even to the survival of future generations. While air pollution is caused by both human and natural factors, a substantial amount of evidence points to the fact that the majority of air pollution is caused by human activity. Over time, the severity of air pollution and awareness of humanity's contribution to the degradation of air quality increased. In response, stakeholders from various sectors and levels have pursued efforts to solve air pollution. Regardless of such efforts, air pollution still persists. This is because the transboundary nature of air pollution means that no country nor region can address air pollution single-handedly. These efforts need to be combined and pursued in a integrated manner and on a global scale. As mentioned earlier, air pollution is perceived as more than an environmental problem; it is also a political issue for countries like Korea and China. As a result, such countries have been focusing on multilateral cooperation to overcome these problems.

During the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019, the Korean government proposed the designation of a UN international day that is grounded in multilateralism and global solidarity and recognizes the importance of clean air. As a result of such efforts, on November 26th, 2019, the Second Committee of the 74th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted by consensus of all the UN member states a resolution of designating the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.'

The resolution (UN, 2019) states that:

> Recognizing that clean air is important for the health and day-to-day lives of the people, mindful that air pollution is the single greatest environmental risk to human health and one of the main avoidable causes of death and disease globally,
>
> …

> Acknowledging the importance and urgent need to raise public awareness at all levels and to promote and facilitate actions to improve air quality, bearing in mind that clean air is important for the health and livelihood of people. (General Assembly resolution, 2019)

This signifies that the resolution perceives poor air quality as a problem that affects the health and lives of global citizens more than any other environmental problem. It is now time for citizens around the world who have been suffering from the ramifications of air pollution to take organized action and build a Collective to raise awareness on the importance of clean air. The building of such a Collective will entail more than issuing declarations or implementing rigid top-down policies, but instead, put a greater emphasis on horizontal and interactive communication. The role of this Collective will be to lead global citizens to reach a mutual consensus on the importance of clean air for all people. The very first celebration of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies' will occur on September 7th. The day will serve as the cornerstone for raising momentum for the pursuit of clean air for blue skies, and climate action in the longer term, among global citizens.

II. Theoretical Backgrounds

Kyoto Protocol	Paris Agreement
An international treaty **legally binding developed country Parties** to emission reduction targets (Annex I of the UNFCCC)	An agreement seeking to **accelerate and intensify the actions and investment** needed for a sustainable low carbon future **without specific emission targets**
Top-down approach in terms of emission reduction targets.	**Bottom-up** approach with countries deciding emission reduction targets internally.
First commitment (2008-2012): Emission reduction by **5%** below the 1990 Second commitment (2013-2020): Emission reduction by **18%**	**Removed the strict difference** between the developed and the developing nations successfully made **all nations to commit** on emission reduction domestically (NDCs)
After the second commitment period (2013-2020) **ends on 31 January 2020**	**Post 2020** agreement

Source: Wirth, D. A. (2017)

Figure 2 Comparison of Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement

The Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement reveal a significant difference. Although the Kyoto Protocol has contributed to highlighting the severity of climate change and raising awareness at a global level, it had its shortcomings

in that it encouraged voluntary emission reduction among a limited number of developed countries as opposed to providing practical solutions. On the other hand, the Paris Agreement has set the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions for all participating parties (albeit on a voluntary basis) as its goal. Since its ratification, the Paris Agreement has evolved into a policy for promoting the reduction of greenhouse gases, which aggravate air pollution by emitting air pollutants (although the level of reduction differs per parties). The two policies differ in their ability to move beyond international cooperation and accelerate action among global citizens, a difference attributed to the 'Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC).'

As one of the key guiding principles of the UNFCCC, the principle of CBDR-RC (UNFCCC,1972) has been unintentionally controversial for the past two decades for being ambiguous on the responsibility of reducing greenhouse gas emissions as well as enabling certain countries to evade the responsibility of reduction altogether. The severity of this problematic situation has served as an opportunity for the international community to strengthen solidarity and push for the signing of the Paris Agreement. The Agreement serves as a new turning point in the history of global climate change policies, which have been making slow progress for the past decades. The goal of the Agreement is to equally share the burden of climate action among all countries, developing and developed nations alike. Since the signing of the Paris Agreement, Korea has been actively pursuing responsible climate action with the status of a developed country, not as a developing country (Choi, Song & Lee, 2020). The Agreement is significant in that it emphasizes that climate and environmental problems are no longer pertained to a handful of nations, but are problems of global nature that must be solved based on multilateralism.

The severity of air pollution is perceived differently among regions and nations. While air pollution has a significant impact in certain areas such as developing nations, its impact is not as far-reaching in others. Due to this difference in perceiving air pollution as a threat, efforts to solving air pollution have been pursued in a sporadic and fragmented approach. However, the global dynamics that contribute to air pollution must be taken into consideration. As of now, developing nations in Asia and Africa account for most of the global air pollution levels. However, historically, these countries did not have as many opportunities to acquire the necessary infrastructure and resources to pursue green and sustainable development. Furthermore, these countries are situated at the bottom end of the global value chain, and are largely responsible for manufacturing and producing products and goods to fulfill global consumer demand. In its essence, air pollution cannot be reduced to a regional or country-specific problem. Therefore, co-moving at a global scale that is based on multilateralism must be pursued to raise air pollution as a global priority.

Leading global citizens into the public debate necessitates the establishment of a new Collectivity. This will require a renewed set of values and goals, an implementation strategy, and a detailed program that will serve as a communication guideline for global citizens to engage in action. In general, solving a problem within a community must be carried out in the order of 'co-exposing,' 'co-focusing attention,' 'co-cognizing,' and 'co-moving' (Kim, 2002) as in the Behavior Procedure Model.

Source: Song, J. (2010)

Figure 3 The process of problem-solving within Collectivity

A community is enlightened about a particular problem through 'co-exposing.' The community then engages in 'co-focusing' and identifies the most significant threat or risk factor of said problem. Afterward, the community agrees upon a solution through 'co-cognizing,' and then solves the problem through 'co-moving' (Kim, 2007). The aforementioned new Collectivity is different from a community in a general sense, as the Collectivity aims to form a sense of unity among mature citizens and engage them as active participants throughout the entire process of solving problems relevant to achieving clean air. Strategies and policies of international scale that are based on this theoretical framework, and focus on leading citizens into the mature and unified Collectivity during the observance of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies' are extremely important.

III. A New Direction for Collectivity

Operative clause 2 and 5 of the UN resolution of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies' reiterates the importance of international communication and promotes co-moving at a global scale:

> Invites all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, other international and regional organizations and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, individuals and other relevant stakeholders, to observe the International Day in an appropriate manner and in accordance with national priorities, and to continue to give consideration to enhancing international cooperation in support of the efforts of all Member States towards clean air. (General Assembly resolution, 2019)

The resolution not only promotes the raising of awareness and participation of all stakeholders, but also requires the UN Secretary-General to strongly recommend all member states and UN bodies to observe the International Day.

Strategic communication policies that emphasize solidarity and co-moving for the new Collectivity are a pre-requisite. The establishment of a Bill of Rights for clean air must be created to raise awareness on the right to breathe clean air and encourage subsequent efforts to secure that right. Strengthening co-moving among UN agencies, securing open and active support of member states, and persuading the industrial sector are also some important measures that must be pursued. Ultimately, establishing a fundamental framework dedicated to the building of the Collectivity, which is based on a shared perception as well as the carrying out of an awareness campaign is needed. In addition, on the first 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies', the focus should not be on solving air pollution itself, but on presenting a set of visions and goals which aims to strengthen a sense of Collectivity among the international community as well as the global civil society.

The global vision is to build a Collective that recognizes and is aware of the importance of clean air. The overarching goal is to call on global citizens to move together and emphasize solidarity on the importance of clean air for blue skies. The key goals include: to strengthen strategic communication among global citizens, to support engagement and action among member states and UN agencies, and to establish the necessary institutions and framework needed to build the Collective.

The following five pre-requisites can be considered during the process of formulating an implementation strategy: 1) recognizing that air pollution is not a region-specific problem, but a global challenge that requires movement at an international scale; 2) creating a program that is dedicated to raising public engagement with the understanding that raising awareness among global citizens is key to building Collective action; 3) encouraging holistic participation among UN agencies and member states by aligning the implementation strategy with the UN Sustainable Development Goals; 4) implementing specific and detailed follow-up measures to achieve the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and 5) tracking implementation on a regular (annual) basis.

IV. Implementation Strategies

The key communication strategies are supported by the three goals of 'Expanding existing communities and building a new movement,' 'Supporting international solidarity and individual member state activities' and 'Implementing systems and structures.' The goals can be further specified into the following six communication strategies:

Key Communication Strategies	**Expanding existing communities and building a new movement**	**1. Enhancing global branding and campaigning**
		2. Organizing programs for the Movement
	Supporting international solidarity and individual member state activities	3. Supporting UN inter-agency advocacy
		4. Supporting action of and among member states
	Implementing systems and structures	5. Implementing systems and policies that serve as follow-up measures for the UN resolution
		6. Securing sustainable financing

Figure 4 key communication strategies needed to realize the key goals

Enhancing global branding and campaigning. Global branding and campaigning are more than just raising awareness on the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.' It also about educating global citizens on the underlying philosophy, values, and future direction of the Day. It could also involve carrying out activities in connection with campaigns that have consistently raised exposure and global attention. This would serve as the 'co-exposure' stage of solving air pollution.

Organizing programs for the Collectivity. The second strategy calls for the planning and operating of programs and projects for the Collectivity to engage and participate in. This could involve launching a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) programs that are organized in connection with international NGOs. This process would serve as the 'co-cognizing' stage required to advance to the 'co-moving' stage.

Supporting UN inter-agency advocacy. Enhancing advocacy involves building positive awareness among all UN agencies. This could take the form of improving strategic communication within the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) system or supporting solidarity-based action among UN agencies. The ultimate goal of supporting inter-agency advocacy is to raise awareness on the importance of clean air, the existence of the International Day,

and the fact that the observation of the Day is a high-priority topic, at an internal level.

Supporting action of and among member states. This strategy aims to create solidarity among member states and support domestic measures within member states. As the topic of transboundary air pollution has gained more attention among neighboring countries, there is a growing need for cooperation among member states. By supporting and managing the domestic co-moving efforts of member states, global citizens can recognize the importance and high significance of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.'

Implementing systems and policies as follow-up measures for the UN resolution of the International Day. The fifth strategy focuses on institutions and policies that can raise and spread awareness about the International Day. The implementation of organized institutions and sturdy supporting policies will help secure its legitimacy. This could also involve the launching of an initiative dedicated to planning and managing the observation of the International Day based on the key communication strategies.

Securing sustainable financing. Carrying out the observation of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies' and its subsequent follow-up measures will require stable and consistent financing. This can be partially covered by the financial contributions of member states, but attracting private finance should also be an option. Relationships with Corporate Shared Value (CSV) or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs that encourage the participation of private enterprises must be developed. Civic crowd-funding is another approach.

Feasible and detailed plans for the implementation of the six strategies must be based on the five pre-requisites aforementioned.

V. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed global problems and discussed possible strategic communication activities dedicated to raising citizen engagement for the observation of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.' The focus of the discussion has not been on solving air pollution itself, but on proposing sustainable strategies and policies on building a new Collectivity for global citizens in the preparation of the first observation of the International Day. The expected results are as follows: 1) raised awareness on the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies' and increased co-moving at a global scale; 2) improved mutual and horizontal solidarity among UN agencies, governments, civic society, and citizens; and 3) initiation of sustainable follow-up measures and securing a sustainable financing structure.

There is an increasing spiral into panic and confusion due to the prevailing invisible war with COVID-19. Historian and a philosopher, Yuval Harari, said that the COVID-19 outbreak presents the international community with two important choices. The first choice will be deciding between totalitarian surveillance and citizen empowerment, and the second choice will be deciding between nationalist isolation and global solidarity (Financial Times, 2020). It is now time for us to change our attitude and approach towards not only air pollution but also climate change. We need to consider how much of an influence the potential risks and dangers could have on our everyday lives.

Ironically, the COVID-19 outbreak has played a significant role in substantially improving the air quality of many countries, including Korea, China, and India. However, this also means that the resumption of economic activity after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic could possibly lead to an overshooting of greenhouse gas and particulate matter emission levels. Against this background, the role and responsibilities of all nations have become clearer than ever. Advanced nations in the European and North American regions, as well as Korea and championing countries dedicated to climate action, must serve as model examples for the rest of the world by using the observation of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies' as an opportunity to work on the acknowledgment and protection of citizen empowerment and lead global citizens into a new Collectivity based on multilateralism and solidarity. In other words, the responsibilities of developed nations will be to implement the aforementioned strategies and policies as well as promoting global action (co-moving). This is what the global community's experience with dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us.

In conclusion, this paper has proposed six strategies and related measures for promoting global action through the observation of the 'International Day of Clean Air for blue skies.' The Asian continent has inevitably found itself at the crossroad between economic growth and environmental protection, and has even been observed to be pursuing a passive response to air pollution. It is expected that strong public demand for air pollution solutions will rise in Southeast Asian and Southwest Asian countries, as is being currently observed in Korea and China. Governments of Asian countries need to prepare for such changes and also provide air pollution policies that address such public discontent, and participate as active members of the international community.

This paper has discussed communication strategies that focus on raising global public awareness of action against air pollution and climate change at an international scale. This article is thought to provide practical implications and guidance to policymakers. However, from an academic perspective, there are some aspects lacking in terms of research framework and analysis, which must be further complemented through follow-up research.

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