"Every day is earth day." "Invest in our planet." "End the era of fossil fuels." "Protect people and the planet." "Electrify the grid." "Be stewards of the environment."

These are just some of the phrases and slogans I heard used repeatedly over the course of the recent Earth Week 2023, all of which I entirely agree with. Such phrases and slogans are a powerful communication tool, conveying ideas in a concise and memorable way. Conversely, they can oversimplify complex issues by using reductive language that ignores the nuance of detail of a particular topic.

There are few issues more complex than climate change. Very often climate change is conceived first and foremost as an environmental issue. Such a conception is understandable given that it is driving up average global temperatures, sea levels are rising, glaciers are shrinking, drought is becoming more common, and heatwaves are becoming more frequent and severe. These adverse environmental impacts, however, carry serious implications for other elements of human society. Many forms of infrastructure, from broadband to bridges, are at risk of climatic shock. Human health may become more susceptible to a wider range of communicable diseases as well as heat stress. The food system may become less dependable as growing seasons shift. As climate shocks and extreme weather events worsen it is possible that access to credit may become more expensive and insurance premiums may increase. In short, climate change threatens almost every component of the communities in which we live.

While a phrase or catchy slogan may pique someone's interest or succinctly build awareness, clearly the complexity of the climate crisis requires a much deeper conversation and a multifaceted response. It is not enough to define climate as a problem which can be solved exclusively by government agencies. Nor is it sufficient to hold responsible private companies and then expect them to entirely resolve the issue. Likewise, individual behavior change won't solve the crisis in which we find ourselves. It is not surprising that the concept of a "whole of society" response to climate change has been in the ascendancy in recent years. Recognizing that simply saying "a whole of society response" is tantamount to using a slogan or catchy phrase, it warrants some unpacking.

At its core, a whole of society response requires an unprecedented level of collective action and decision making. Frontline communities, youth and indigenous groups will need to feature prominently in decision making as well as the development of climate interventions. Government, the business sector and the science community will need to forge effective, data driven working relationships. Civil society, in its broadest sense, will have to continue to serve as a source of trusted information, monitor the policies and actions of government and businesses and advocate for those most vulnerable to climate change as well as deepening their collaboration to protect the planet.

Of course, this is all much easier said than done. Achieving effective collection action requires probing the assumptions that underpin multiple relationships as well as recasting them in a way that is more responsive to the needs of the age. For instance, many contributor countries will need to recognize their role in creating a historic deficit of trust that has grown from their failure to meet certain commitments and put in place measures to correct this deficit. Similarly, forms of prejudice and animus that exist between those who have vastly different conceptions of the climate crisis itself as well as what a collective response could look like will need to seek out points of unity that allow collective action to flourish. Further, our global society is going to be required to grapple with the implications of foundational principles and values. It will become increasingly important that we begin to understand and actively apply values such equity, justice, solidarity and sufficiency if we are going to achieve planetary sustainability.

In essence, what climate change demands is more change. Institutional and individual. Incremental and transformational. Incremental changes in an individual's daily life, such as eating a more climate friendly diet, seeking to reduce carbon intense energy use and choosing more sustainable transport options can contribute to emissions reductions. Institutions – governments, business entities and more – will need to enact immediate transformational changes that enable rapid and deep decarbonization.

In closing, it is entirely conceivable that creating the opportunity for a broad diversity of stakeholders to come together in a space which isn't characterized by perpetuating self-interest, consciously sets aside the assumptions and patterns of behavior that have given rise to the climate crisis and leaves animosity at the door could allow for the sort of visionary discussion that identifies collective opportunities to reverse humanity's unsustainable trajectory and distill grassroots insights to build safer, flourishing communities.