International Climate and Energy

Goals

To empower grassroots activists and organizations in other nations by transferring knowledge and expertise related to coal, to promote a global transition from fossil fuel dependent to clean energy access, and to reform international financial institution funding to support clean energy development instead of dirty fossil fuel energy, especially coal.

This assessment combines the following international programs: 1) International Coal Project, 2) International Climate and Energy Campaign, 3) International Climate Leadership Campaign, 4) International Financial Institution Standards, and 5) International Financial Institution Reform Campaign.

Major Accomplishments

International Coal Project

Number of coal-fired power plants under development dropped dramatically in 2016, including a 48 percent drop in pre-construction activity, a 62 percent drop in construction starts, a 19 percent drop in ongoing construction, and a 29 percent drop in completed projects, compared to 2015. In China and India, where industry once forecasted unending, exponential growth in coal demand, 68 gigawatts of construction is frozen at more than 100 project sites.

Supported the planning process of the European coal phase-out campaign by sending top Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign staff to European planning meetings, making Beyond Coal Campaign staff available to European colleagues planning the coal phase-out campaign, coordinating on shared media opportunities, and developing technical trainings on litigation and organizing strategies requested by the Europe coal phase-out campaigners.

In South Asia, worked with organizations in both India and Bangladesh, including continued support of organizations working in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat that are opposing over 25,000 MW in coal-fired power plant projects. Continued to support grassroots training programs led by four organizations in India, including six such trainings to train community leaders in finance, legal, and organizing strategies to campaign for a more equitable and sustainable energy future.

In Bangladesh, supported the work of organizations working to protect the Sundarbans through technical expertise and coordination with international NGOs working on the campaign, “Save the Sundarbans” (in conjunction with the International Tiger Protection Project).
Work in Myanmar included a mix of technical support and grassroots training; Sierra Club was invited to lead three days of a two-month training program coordinated by the energy consulting firm Energy Resources International, focusing on international coal and finance, experiences from the Club’s U.S. coal campaign, and its approach to campaign strategy.

Began conversations with organizations in Japan to develop a strategy to elevate public opposition to proposed units in Hyogo, Chiba, and Fukushima, and the grassroots and communications strategies necessary to launch a nationwide discussion on the entire coal plant pipeline.

Released the third annual joint report with Greenpeace and CoalSwarm detailing the status of the global coal pipeline. Boom and Bust 2017: Tracking the Global Coal Plant Pipeline shows that with dramatic policy and economic shifts in China and India, the coal-boom turned to bust in the past year, including (as referenced above) a 48 percent reduction in the pre-construction pipeline and a 62 percent reduction in construction starts worldwide. The report had 841 media hits with a potential reach of almost 1 billion people.

International Climate and Energy Campaign

The Club was instrumental in pushing the U.S. to submit an ambitious pledge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 26–28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025 in the Paris Agreement. Helped galvanize consensus among the major green groups in the U.S. in support of this goal, including Natural Resources Defense Council, World Wildlife Fund, and the League of Conservation Voters, Union of Concerned Scientists, and the World Resources Institute.

To support the impact of the U.S. pledge, worked closely with the U.S. delegation to help unlock parallel actions from other countries and conducted extensive outreach to media and civil society partners.

Before the conference, the administration worked to ensure that all countries put forward Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs). Virtually all did, leading to a successful final outcome. President Obama attended the opening of the conference and won plaudits for his efforts, particularly his outreach to the most vulnerable island states. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry led the delegation for most of the conference. The U.S. participated in the “High Ambition Coalition,” an ad-hoc alliance of countries from different negotiating blocks that came together to demand a high-ambition outcome. Both the president and the secretary expended considerable effort on diplomatic outreach, both to resolve issues as they arose and to ensure that other countries were onboard with a strong deal.

International Climate Leadership Campaign

Contributed to securing a strong Paris Agreement that sets a temperature target of “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5°C.”

Sierra Club leveraged its administrative advocacy, media, digital, and grassroots capacities to deliver a clear set of messages to decision-makers and the public in support of the Paris process, so as to (1) support and defend the administrative regulations and pledges that underlie the U.S. Paris
contributions; and (2) advance other climate-related work of the Sierra Club at the local, state, and federal levels.

Engaged 3 million U.S.-based Sierra Club members and supporters through the #ActInParis campaign, a 360° organizing, communications, digital, and marketing campaign (including celebrity and grassroots engagement, social media, and online organizing) to make the case for a robust set of agreements and strong U.S. leadership.

Sierra Club’s executive director and board president both attended the Paris COP, where they were frequently quoted in major news outlets, wrote blogs, made public appearances, and worked to deepen our partnerships with other constituencies working in support of climate action. In addition, the Sierra Student Coalition did extensive youth-oriented media work, both independently and in partnership with other youth groups.

International Financial Institution (IFI) Standards

Strengthening the World Bank’s Environmental and Social Policies

- Working with partners in a global civil society coalition, helped educate key decision-makers at the World Bank and in the U.S. government about emerging issues in the safeguard review (a framework to assess possible environmental and social risks and the impacts – positive or negative – associated with a development intervention) with particular focus on issues related to climate change in the environmental assessment policy and in anticipated provisions addressing resource efficiency.

- Submitted detailed comments that partner organizations have used in their advocacy. Along with the Bank Information Center (BIC), World Resources Institute (WRI), and Oxfam, hosted an all-day consultation on climate-related safeguards with key Bank decision-makers and government officials. The "Second Consultation Draft" of the new policy included some of the improvements recommended by the Club, but also included some backsliding. The Board adopted a new Environmental and Social Framework in August 2016.

Establishing a Sound Policy Framework for the Green Climate Fund

- The Club continued work to influence critical design issues, such as the Green Climate Fund’s (GCF) funding priorities, operational policies, and environmental and social safeguards. Throughout the grant period, lobbied GCF staff and Board members and attended Board meetings. Pushed the Board to adopt critical decisions defining the objectives of the fund and reiterating the importance of achieving a paradigm shift toward low-emission and climate-resilient development, and identifying selection criteria. The Club pushed for a strong monitoring and accountability framework that includes a sustainability policy and oversight procedures and for a stronger permanent policy on information disclosure. Important decisions on monitoring and accountability, implementing of safeguards, and designing the independent recourse mechanism have been deferred until 2017.
Ensuring that IFIs Focus on Providing Sustainable Energy for All

World Bank: The Sierra Club hired a consultant for a research project comparing the cost and rate of electricity connection via grid-connected versus distributed renewable connections in a select number of countries. This tool is intended to help educate policymakers about the affordability and practicality of off-grid solutions for energy access. The Club also updated its energy access scorecard with Oil Change International and Oxfam America, planned for release in time for the World Bank spring 2016 meetings.

Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im) and Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC): Due to Club advocacy efforts, continued to see the OPIC and the U.S. Export-Import Bank shifting their portfolios away from fossil fuels and toward clean energy. The Club also coordinated a letter to President Obama from 14 environmental organizations and off-grid clean energy entrepreneurs, urging Obama to increase U.S. support for India’s ambitious energy access goals. Like Power Africa, this initiative would coordinate energy access funding across U.S. agencies including United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the OPIC, and the U.S. Ex-Im Bank.

International Financial Institution Reform Campaign

The most important outcome was the development of the China and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) coal restrictions, which Sierra Club worked closely with the Obama administration to secure. The belief is that over time these agreements will serve as the first step toward phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies. The Club will continue to push the U.S. administration to focus on these agreements in bilateral and multilateral discussions.

The OECD reached an agreement on restrictions for export credit agency financing for coal, marking the first limits on finance from the world’s largest supporter of coal, Japan.

The Kosovo C Coal project has not moved forward as pressure on the World Bank to live up to Dr. Jim Yong Kim’s (President of the World Bank Group) climate rhetoric increases. Met with a number of key World Bank offices, including the U.S. Executive Director, to argue why new coal development would be a bad decision for Kosovo.

Export-Import Bank, Overseas Private Investment Corporation, World Bank, and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are living up to their commitments, putting pressure on new development banks in Asia to limit their support for coal.

The U.S.-China climate announcement included a pledge by China to end financial support for high-carbon projects overseas along the lines of President Obama’s Climate Action Plan, followed by evaluations of each other’s fossil fuel subsidies.

The adopted Green Climate Fund standards commit to measure how accredited entities evolve their entire portfolios toward lower emissions and climate resiliency and make that evolution a consideration in reaccreditation. The Green Climate Fund also adopted a monitoring and accountability framework and information disclosure policy to improve transparency in decision-making and ensure outcomes are being met.
Key Metrics Achieved

Consolidated (quantitative) program metrics not applicable; principal strategies delineated below.

Principal Strategies

International Coal Project

Empower networks of coal opponents in India, China, Southeast Asia, Japan, and Australia.

Transfer the Club’s knowledge and expertise in fighting coal to international partners and members of the international network and support these members with technical and training services.

Learn from organizations opposing coal and share their stories with the public to develop an alternative international narrative that affirms coal is not the answer to energy poverty.

Challenge international financial institution investment in new coal plants.

Seek to increase financing (potentially through appropriate program-related investments) and exposure for clean energy companies working beyond the grid to support poverty alleviation.

Conduct targeted grantmaking to support organizations seeking to limit the impacts of new coal fired power plants on air and water.

Unify, inform, nurture, and provide support services to local activists opposing coal development around the world.

International Climate and Energy Campaign

Support grassroots partners internationally as they pursue a transition towards clean energy development and away from fossil fuel projects that would put their communities’ health at risk.

Advocate for policy and finance frameworks at the national and international levels that facilitate ambitious climate action and increased clean energy access.

Conduct targeted grantmaking to support organizations seeking to limit the impacts of fossil fuel projects on air and water.

Use media outreach and online organizing to build awareness and activate support for an international transition beyond fossil fuels and toward clean energy access.

Defend the Paris Agreement, OECD coal restrictions, and U.S. Treasury coal guidelines from the Trump administration’s attempts to roll back progress on international climate and energy commitments.

Ensure implementation of OECD coal restrictions by the Export-Import Bank of the United States.
International Climate Leadership Campaign

Secure aggressive domestic carbon limits through the EPA Carbon Rule.

Pursue a strong 2020 mitigation pledge through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process.

Administratively lobby for equitable U.S. contributions to GCF funding.

Mobilize an energized and informed base of Sierra Club supporters to hold the administration and its successors accountable to emissions and funding targets.

International Financial Institutions Standards

Push the World Bank to adopt new environmental and social safeguard policies that strengthen and extend existing safeguards, do not weaken existing standards, and include provisions to ensure that the World Bank's investments are as pro-poor and sustainable as possible.

Advocate that the Green Climate Fund establishes a sound policy framework that prioritizes the highest impact-lowest risk projects and ensures the rigorous application of strong environmental and social standards and public participation requirements.

Employ Sierra Club staff to opportunistically engage the U.S. government on related IFI issues.

International Financial Institutions Reform Campaign

Leverage the administration-wide restrictions on international funding for coal projects and to address energy poverty through improved clean energy funding, as well as the implementation of energy lending reforms at the U.S. Export-Import Bank and European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Ensure the rigorous implementation of the new energy strategy at the World Bank, EBRD, and Ex-Im that publically distances these institutions from coal projects such as the Kosovo C project.

Continue to build alliances with environmental and allied organizations, especially local groups concerned about IFI-funded projects, in order to help them gain access to critical information, hold decision-makers accountable, and secure access to and participation in key decision-making processes, both directly at the IFIs and through advocacy with U.S. government officials who exercise oversight of the IFIs.

Call for increased support from the World Bank and other IFIs for distributed renewables as a means to address energy poverty to both meet the energy access needs of large parts of the world’s population and to provide a counter-narrative to the coal industry’s false claim that coal is synonymous with development.
Reflections on Campaign Equity, Inclusivity, and Justice

The International Climate and Energy Campaign strives toward inclusion by building partnerships with groups most impacted by international fossil fuel extraction and combustion, relies on leadership by volunteers and grassroots partners, and works in solidarity and mutuality with frontline groups in developing countries. The Sierra Club is partnering on grassroots coal finance fights in India and Kosovo, facilitating direct granting partnerships between grassroots groups and the Sierra Club Foundation and is using its media reach to amplify the voices of fossil fuel fights led by international partners (in Europe, Asia, and the Global South). The Club works hand-in-hand with partners to listen, to learn, and to support the engagement of diverse partners in the global movement to transition to a clean energy future with access for all.