

Battle of the skies

The Carbon War Room has enlisted the expertise of entrepreneurs to find market-driven solutions to climate change. Mike Scott speaks to CEO Jigar Shah about their intercontinental strategy



PHOTOS: ISTOCK

The rate at which greenhouse gases are being inadvertently pumped into the atmosphere is unsustainable. We need to move from the current state of affairs – where economic growth is inextricably linked to carbon emissions – to a situation where economic growth does not entail harmful emissions and the destruction of natural resources.

While this is easier said than done, right across the economy there are things that will enable consumers and businesses to save money, create jobs and reduce our impact on the planet. According to

management consultants McKinsey & Company, at least 30 per cent of global emissions could be offset at a profit using existing technology.

Many of these solutions do not happen because there are barriers at various levels, from the absence of proper government engagement to lack of funding – or simply because a solution falls outside the responsibilities of any of the organisations involved.

Jigar Shah, CEO at the Carbon War Room, comments: “The Carbon War Room exists to identify these gaps and associated opportunities. We do this by harnessing the enthusiasm

and expertise of entrepreneurs to unlock gigaton-level climate solutions. More than solutions, we seek initiatives that will have the biggest impact.

“Some of the world’s most successful entrepreneurs joined forces to set up the Carbon War Room. Because we are funded by private business people from three continents, we have the independence and flexibility to concentrate on the issues that our research has identified as the most important.

“Despite our entrepreneurial focus, we are a non-profit organisation – not an investment fund. Rather than investing in individual companies, we

are looking to create the conditions that will enable all businesses to profit from driving down emissions. Instead of backing specific players in the market we’re trying to help build the playing field, and ensure that it’s level.

“Nor, despite our personal commitment to this project, are we trying to persuade people to take personal steps to deal with the challenge – plenty of other organisations are doing that important job and doing it well. The Carbon War Room is about identifying systemic failures and coming up with tools to tackle those failures. We aim to blaze a trail in the areas ▶

we have chosen, serving as an icebreaker that will create the space for others to take advantage of opportunities.

“As our name suggests, we are approaching the challenge of climate change with a coherent strategy. The Carbon War Room has identified 25 areas where action is needed, and we are currently working on four that we consider are the most urgent and where we have the most capability to do something about it: Shipping, Energy Efficiency, Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Intervention.

“While very different, these areas share a common opportunity of cutting a huge amount of emissions coupled with major economic potential. Yet there are significant obstacles to realising that opportunity. In shipping, one problem is information – it is very hard for customers of shipping services to tell an efficiently built and well-run ship from one that’s not efficiently built or run. Because of this the industry innovators are not rewarded and needless fuel – which equals both money and CO₂ – is wasted.

“The Carbon War Room is working to build a strong global coalition of ship owners and their clients, port authorities, financiers and technology providers. We are encouraging action by early adopters to send a clear signal to the industry that business will embrace new standards, deriving economic benefit from doing so. In the same way all electrical goods in the EU are currently rated for efficiency, we believe it shouldn’t be long before ships go the same way.

“In the energy efficiency sector, we have launched the ‘Green Capital – Global Challenge’ to get money into making existing buildings more energy efficient – again saving money and CO₂ for the planet. The gap in this sector is to ensure the ambitious but necessary sustainability plans of mayors and civic leaders are met with sufficient private finance available to fund these ambitions.

“In the agriculture sector, we face a situation where demand for food is set to double by 2050, where most fertilisers are derived from oil, and where many people in poor countries burn biomass for their heating and cooking needs. If these

trends continue, the affected nations will not be able to meet their climate targets. Biochar is a little-known but potentially massive part of the solution that can keep carbon out of the atmosphere for 1,000 years, increase crop yields, lower use of artificial fertilizer, manage waste, and create renewable energy at the same time. We are working to investigate further, then raise awareness of biochar’s

carbon capture and storage, to creating artificial clouds. All of the technologies are a long way from being realised and need much more research to determine whether and when they should become a reality.

“There is a feeling that planning for this eventuality distracts from the battle to cut emissions. But we feel that not to act would be irresponsible, and this is an



Shipping is one of the areas that The Carbon War Room is addressing



“Business is the key to decoupling economic growth from emissions growth”

area where an independent group such as the Carbon War Room can help develop strong governance processes that will enable governments to decide how these technologies should ever be deployed, and if so, who should help them achieve it.

“We are clear that business is the key to decoupling economic growth from emissions growth – and that the process of doing so will be a massive opportunity to create wealth, jobs and a sustainable future. Measuring our progress will be vital, and we see capital invested as a leading indicator of whether we can win our battles. If we can get \$1bn of funds flowing to each of the areas we are focusing on, we will be well on the way.”

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benefits, and help push more funds into the sector and develop the market.

“Despite all the action to deal with climate change, the probability of us keeping rises in temperature to below 2°C is fairly low, so we are also investigating the viability of climate intervention technologies that can buy some time to make the transition to a low-carbon economy. There are a number of potential solutions, ranging from