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Opinion

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Vital journey has to start somewhere

The latest IPCC report made it clear that time is scarce and strong action is required to prevent climate chaos. The report has resulted in some intense questioning. What is our best course of action given our increasingly dire circumstances? Clearly individual actions are not enough to avert climate chaos. Or are they?

Sure, doing our recycling and switching to energy-saving light bulbs isn't enough, but serious, sustained changes in individual behaviours combined with others doing the same are a key part to building the momentum for cultural change.

Studies show when one neighbour puts up solar panels, others are more likely to follow suit. Communities taking action sends a signal to politicians on the priorities of their voter base. Ethical consumers send a signal to industry to innovate if they want to stay abreast of the latest trends.

If we don't take action it sends a signal too. It signals that climate change isn't an urgent priority. It suggests to our politicians and those around us that it's socially acceptable to continue on, business as usual.

Here at Cambridge Carbon Footprint (CCF) we're winding down from the massive Sustainable Fashion Festival we organised last week. It might seem frivolous to be talking about fashion, but clothes and textiles account for 12 per cent

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of global carbon emissions. Curbing fast fashion is a serious issue.

In some ways, the fashion industry demonstrates the dilemma we face. It is the second most polluting industry, which surely is the responsibility of those producing the products. But demand for clothing has increased dramatically.

In 2014 we purchased 60 per cent more clothing than we did in 2000. You could argue that the fashion industry plays a role in generating that demand, but it seems obvious that our lifestyle plays an important role too. If our friends think it's important to keep up with the trends, then we feel the pressure to do so too.

Consumerism is a culture that we create together.

Some argue that focusing on individual actions is a distraction from the important task of pressuring government and industry. While that's a really important job, it's not one everyone is ready for.

What might seem trivial to one person is the entry point to sustainable action for another.

The journey we're undertaking is incredibly urgent and important, but it still begins with a single step.

At CCF our goal is to meet people where they are on that journey, but always pull them through to bigger actions and deepen their engagement with the issue. What's important isn't where we start, but that each of us starts somewhere.