Learning Report
For COP21 2015

Student: Su Tsz Ki

For original full report with multi-media and reader-friendly format, please visit:
http://sukicop21reflection.weebly.com/
What's COP21?

Significance: COP21 is a crucial international conference as it has, with the cooperation with over 190 countries, reached a major agreement on the action plan for tackling issues with the rising global temperature. This conference in 2015 is also the very first time in over the 20 years of UN negotiations, to achieve a legally binding and universal consensus on the climate, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C.

Professionalism: The conference attracted close to 50,000 participants including 25,000 official delegates from government, intergovernmental organisations, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society. Moreover, hundred millions of media have been reached. The conference brought together global leaders, government, CEOs, senior executives, national, regional and city leaders, investors and industry experts to share ideas and accelerate innovative solutions to address climate change, catalyse innovation, and accelerate sustainable development.

Impact: The conference not only encourages engagement and debates leading up to the United Nations’ COP21 conference, but also a global collaboration with different countries to implement regional strategies and concrete legislative policy in dealing with global warming.
The Hong Kong-China panel session

I am honoured to be invited to share my thoughts and experience as a university environmental activist and to discuss some social environmental issues in the Hong Kong-China panel session on 7 December 2015. It was such an exciting experience to meet and work with the HK government officials and some other organisational leaders in Hong Kong. I have also learnt to negotiate of what I hope to present and suggest as a university representative during the idea exchange.

I really treasure this great opportunity which has given me clearer directions and has made me more committed to the collaboration with different people, as that I can be more understanding to different obstacles and potential solutions to environmental issues which are intertwining with numerous factors.
Great Thanks to Mr Kam-Sing Wong

In the past, I easily felt frustrated and upset towards some governmental policies and the lack of platforms in the society for the public to know more or carry out environmental practice. But after these years when I see the passionate contribution made by the Environment Bureau, I am becoming more optimistic in the environmental education in Hong Kong. The invitation from the Government to the youngsters and different parties in the society is making a more effective collaboration and communication for the sake of better policy making and promotion.

HK Climae Change Report 2015:
"It might not be a new idea, but it's important to start at universities."

Solutions using urban farming and energy saving interacting technology were introduced in the session. I shared the two projects which are involving more than 400 students and staff at my university dormitory. Despite our Government has yet to actively promote and publicly adopt methods of urban farming to reduce food waste problems, I have a strong belief that modern urban farming can be a very effective and down-to-earth way to promote environmental awareness and food security. It can also encourage citizens to socialise with each other, sharing and discussing integrated methods for improving the society.
The Youngsters

We are committed, but also distressed.

We are really serious to that.

Photos taken just before the release of the drafted conference agreement, 10 December 2015
(P.S. with a toilet paper printed with the most updated IPCC climate change report)

"Are we treating the Climate Change Report like a roll of toilet paper?"

The young touched me.

One of the most touching moments was when I saw a thousand of young delegates from all over the world came together and spoke out their voices bravely as one. In the past, politics and activists were always the persons who could involve in the environmental decisions. But for this time, the roles of teens have become important. Their mature ideas and creative strategies inspired me a lot. And what has touched me the most --- is their faithful belief and youth empowerment which tells that youth should also have the say to take charge of their lives.
Teenagers using innovative strategy --- pretending they are dying to attract attention and showing people the danger of anthropogenic climate changes.

Young people urged their governments to have a more aggressive target to deal with global temperature growth.

Canadian youth delegates celebrated the retirement of fossil fuel industries after their country has agreed to the 1.5°C commitment.
When we are talking about climate change and environmental issues, people may usually think of politicians and environmentalists. This 15-year-old hip-hop artist argues that everybody can be the change agent. It is never limited to those people.

Thousands of young representatives from all over the world gathered together and demonstrate their will and requests before the official announcement of the drafted COP21 agreement.
I was sooo lucky that I was able to meet with the President of the very first and only Government-NGO-collaborating compost project in Paris before the COP21 agreement and going back to Hong Kong! He was a very nice and helpful gentleman who is experienced in community compost project. Since in our university we also have a large scale of food waste recycling system, I hope to learn more about effective management of food waste and compost and how they (the Paris organisation) encourage the community to treasure their food "waste".

This site visit and experience exchange touched me a lot! It's always good to know that someone in elsewhere is doing something and having similar belief like you! I really appreciate their professionalism and persistence in maintaining soil and compost! I hope our Hong Kong Government can be willing to support and offer assistance to local composting projects!
The farming garden

Such a small compost centre manages 8000L food waste per year!

A housewife mixing her food waste with brown leaves

The composting method in the quarter is simple and traditional, but their compost quality is very good and high in nutrients! With the collaboration with the Paris Government, they are able to sustainably get free brown leaves from local communities, to maintain the compost temperature at 50-80°C.

P.S. I was lucky to meet and interview a local user of the compost system when I had the site visit.
The Agreement

Record: 195 countries agreed, by consensus

At the Paris conference on the 12 December 2015, all the 195 UN countries finally adopted and agreed to the first ever legally-bind global climate deal, though there was a day delayed and many civic participants had left from the conference place. The 195 countries made promise to cut down greenhouse gases emissions in order to keep the global temperature increase to "well below 2°C" above pre-industrial levels. Thanks to the strong advocacy from the many civic parties, intergovernmental leaders, young leaders, etc. from different countries, the UN at last added one more statement --- "pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels" to encourage concerted commitment in the goal of curbing climate change crisis.

Updated List of Countries who have signed the Paris Agreement:
http://newsroom.unfccc.int/media/632121/list-of-representatives-to-high-level-signature-ceremony.pdf
Some developing countries expressed their concern in keeping the track.

It was motivating that all the UN countries agreed to implement the deal, yet it also made me feel a bit worried when knowing that some developing countries might have difficulties to keep on the track. In my opinion, it is always tough to decide which approach is the best and most fair one to all the parties. It takes time and a lot of negotiations to see a better agreement. Nonetheless, I believe that the Paris consensus is a win for all. Ultimately, every country has their responsibility to take action plans in keeping the planet safe and sound. For Africa in particular, it may be an opportunity for the different parties to share responsibility, and to explore new strategies, approaches, and technologies to deal with the issues.

Though HK did not make an official declaration, we've become more committed.

Although Hong Kong Government did not officially make a declaration that this city would strictly follow the guidelines, I am glad that the Environment Bureau has been playing a more active role in promoting environmental awareness and enhancing facilities in sustainability. However, I still hope that Hong Kong as a regional stakeholder can express more in the reviewing COP conference in 2018, as a declaration or an official promise is not only telling a statement, but also showing how committed and determined the Government are.
Final Thoughts

On the way home...

a piece of diary I wrote on the plane when coming back:

Every subtle learning opportunity...
The importance of leadership...
The involvement of youth...

Please don't stop at the green-washing stage...
A seed has been planted...
The determination and demonstration of the UN's will to change...

Hong Kong's progress is still far too slow...
Essential to have BOTH skills and genuineness...
And I hope more green facilities and platforms can be developed here in Hong Kong, so that people are able to try, to experience, and to learn and reflect more what a sustainable living can be!

See Some Examples