Interview with Charlotte Streck*

1. *Over a decade ago, you co-founded Climate Focus, one of the leading advisory companies working on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Forests and agriculture have featured prominently in your work throughout this period. What has your experience been working as a lawyer in a research and advisory context, and, more specifically, how would you assess the role and prospects of legal professionals working on climate change and land use?*

The moment I decided to set up Climate Focus, I converted from an institutional lawyer and employee to a social entrepreneur. This transformation is more profound than I had anticipated. While funding insecurities are a continuous challenge, I discovered quickly that the work in a small organisation has the potential to be more agenda-setting than the work in a large institution. For us at Climate Focus, it is essential that we remain cutting-edge and able to produce relevant opinions and advisory pieces. If we fail in this, our funding will dry up very quickly.

The work at the nexus of land use and climate change has been very gratifying in that respect: a wallflower of climate policy for a long time, it took a while until governments woke up to the role of forests in climate change. Even though REDD+ has helped to rally forces behind a common agenda against deforestation, a lot remains to be done until governments and private actors have fully embraced the notion of integrated land policies and investments.

For lawyers active in this area, the problems of land title and land conflict provide an ongoing area of work. Stable tenure is at the core of sustainable landscapes.

2. *Before establishing Climate Focus, you worked as a Senior Counsel with the World Bank, helping pioneer some of the Bank's earliest initiatives related to climate change. In retrospect, how would you describe this period working in a large intergovernmental organisation, and what advice would you give to young lawyers interested in a career there?*

I joined the World Bank after completing my PhD, and it was my first full-time career job. I had dreamed

of working in an international organisation since high school, and was very grateful for the opportunity that was awarded to me when I joined the World Bank. The international environment in Washington and at the Bank was thrilling and exhilarating at the same time. I found myself surrounded by extremely intelligent people that were driven by a desire to change our world for the better. Working in the pioneering area of climate change in the early 2000s allowed me and my colleagues to be more creative and flexible than in many other areas of the Bank. Inspiring management and excellent colleagues made for a stimulating work place.

After five years, I resigned from the World Bank and swapped security for entrepreneurial freedom. By that time, I felt that I could contribute more to climate change by offering services to a broader range of actors. I never regretted the move, but would still recommend the work in an international organisation as an excellent stepping stone in the career of a young lawyer.

3. *In recent years, you have also branched into philanthropic activities, for instance through Sinfonía Trópico, an initiative to promote the protection of nature and biodiversity in Colombia through art. How has that compared to your work as a consultant and legal adviser, and more generally, what would your advice be for lawyers looking to enter the world of philanthropy and advocacy?*

I started working on climate communication after a sabbatical in 2012, which led me to realise that as climate change professionals many of us had lost the ability to communicate in plain language to the broader public. I felt the urge to complement the analytical work of Climate Focus by projects that communicate to people via the arts and music. Sinfonía Trópico is a project that seeks to create positive identification with the environment in post-conflict

* Dr Charlotte Streck, Co-founder and Director of Climate Focus, and Chair of Climate Strategies. The interview was conducted by CCLR Editor-in-Chief Michael Mehling in August 2017.
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Colombia. As a scientist and lawyer, I have been trained in two very different approaches to thought processes and communication. Artists take yet another route to reach people. I am convinced that we need to activate all channels of thought and action to address the urgent challenge of climate change.

4. *Alongside your advisory work, you have also been an influential scholar throughout your career, with a prolific publication record covering a wide range of topics from environmental auditing and management to global governance and, in the past decade, various aspects of climate change mitigation and adaptation. Looking back, what have been the most exciting issues you have been able to work on, and looking forward, where do you see*

climate law scholarship evolving in the coming decade?

The most important aspect of my academic engagement is the work with students from all over the world. Engaging in joint thought processes, questioning assumptions, and seeking new policy solutions for managing our global commons are the most rewarding part of my academic engagement. Another aspect is my strong desire to put as much (and still too little) time as possible into more profound analysis and literature review. Consultancy often falls short in that aspect. The interaction with scholars and peer reviewers allows an in-depth analysis of topics and academic questions outside the straight-jacket of client-driven terms of references.