

**Concept Paper:
Climate Justice: Addressing the Human Cost of Climate Change
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Global Context

“man is both creature and moulder of his environment” (2006: 1)¹.

Human interaction with the environment has been hotly debated since the UN proclamation in 1972 (Ibid). Since then the Earth Summit in Rio (1992)² and the Kyoto protocol (1997)³ re-enforced concerns that the destructive behaviour of some (mainly industrialised nations) are having a disproportionate impact on the wellbeing of others, majority of who are already vulnerable (mainly developing countries). The Kyoto Protocol aims at addressing the impact of climate change by getting Governments across the globe to actively reduce greenhouse gases for committed periods. It is expected that Governments would have in place adaptation frameworks and national strategies to transform human behaviour and attitude towards the environment. Based on sequential negotiations, the protocol defines the specific first-period as 2008-2012 (Grub, 2009)⁴.

In this regard, the United Nations Framework Convention on Human Rights (UNFCCC) will be meeting for the last time at Government level in Copenhagen, this December, before the first framework period runs out in 2012. The Copenhagen meeting is expected to review progress on the implementation to date prior to the renewal of the agreement in 2012.

Alongside this, given the urgency of the matter in the aftermath of recent international environmental disasters (for example, Sunami in South-east Asia, Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans), the Human Rights Council⁵ adopted its first resolution on Human Rights and Climate Change in 2008. The resolution, reminds us yet again of climate change impacts on the realisation of basic social and economic rights of people across the globe (ie: food, water, health,

¹ Stockholm, 1972-Declaration of the UN on the Human Environment: www.unep.org

² UN Conference held 20 years later in Rio de Janeiro: key message it was regarded as an “unprecedented for UN” as people from all walks of life attended. Key message in this conference was that humans would need to transform their behaviour and attitude to the environment if we are to successfully address climate change and environmental degradation: www.un.org

³ Signed in Kyoto in 1997 to implement the principles declared at the Earth Summit. / Key objective was to get governments to agreed targets for reducing greenhouse gases for committed periods and for this to be reviewed and negotiated for successive periods.

⁴ Source: www.eoearth.org.

⁵ This is an inter-governmental body within the UN made of 47 states responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of Human Rights across the globe.

education and housing). Similarly, the UNDP⁶ in its 2007-2008 Report concurs that *“climate change is the defining human development challenge of the 21st century”* and warned that *“failure to respond to that challenge will stall and then reverse international efforts to reduce poverty. The poorest countries and the most vulnerable citizens will suffer the earliest...even though they have contributed least to the problem”*

Yet it is fair to say that despite these efforts, human behaviour and attitude on the ground appears to be changing at a very slow pace. Evidence suggests that although there is some progress in the right direction, industrialised states are still to translate good intentions into sustainable, measurable, remedial actions at national and local levels. To some extent, the challenge is being taken up by the voluntary and community sectors but many lack the level of resources that is required to develop long-term, sustainable national programmes for transforming human behaviour and attitudes on a large scale. Needless to say the longer national action is delayed the greater will be the human cost, as the proportion of those denied access to basic services will escalate.

There is now ample evidence to show that the theoretical predictions made three decades ago are fast becoming a lived reality. For example, if the predicted climate change pattern persists, a large number of citizens are likely to be made homeless or indeed, stateless through natural disasters. The subsequent social and economic effects for receiving nations will be profound in terms of the human costs. Thus the urgent need to mobilise global, local and individual action cannot be overstated and governments' role in reversing some of the damage done to the environment is no longer a moral obligation but a legal and imperative one.

Local Context

Recent studies (Stern Review, 2006, Sniffer 2009) show that the impact of climate change will not be exclusively restricted, as widely believed, to developing countries. Sniffer (ibid) reports, for example, that: *“Changes in the weather, and more extreme conditions, such as heat waves, heavy rainfall, flooding and storms will have significant social impacts on UK society”*.

Although they note that the impact will be differential across the UK, they nevertheless point out that the impact will affect substantial proportion of citizens' especially in terms of wellbeing across our regions and countries: *“In particular, climate change will affect physical, as well as mental health and wider quality of life. It will also affect people's access to, and the quality of, basic goods and services such as water, shelter and food, as well as other key priorities for*

⁶ The United Nations Development Programme (which is aimed at assisting governments to achieve the Millennium goals and develop local capacity)

human wellbeing such as education, employment and crime, therefore worsening social deprivation”

They conclude that those most likely to be affected are those *“living in places of risk”, “people who are already deprived by (the) health, level of income, the quality of their homes and mobility”* and *“people who lack awareness of the risks of climate change, the capacity to adapt and who are less supported by family friends and agencies*

Given the enormity of the problem, it is clear that efforts by government to address the impact of climate change needs to be systematic, integrated and must involve institutions and citizens alike. BTCV (2006)⁷ concur: *“environmental projects should be linked to an infrastructure of longer term networking and support so as to empower and enable groups wishing to work beyond immediate biodiversity action plan priorities...we believe that improving local biodiversity can have spin-off effects such as improvements to community safety and community spirit as well as individual health and well-being. For some people, a practical involvement in environmental projects can lead to new skills and employment opportunities-so there can be economic benefits as well”*

Policymakers and practitioners, community and voluntary groups are yet to fully grasp the centrality of their role in finding and delivering solutions to limit the social cost of climate change. In particular, the capacity of the voluntary and community sector in raising awareness of climate change and enabling citizens to adapt their environmental behaviour is still to be fully exploited. Indeed, progress on climate change will continue to be patchy if relevant partnerships are not fostered and adequate resources are invested in sustainable programmes of people centred environmental activities. Sniffer (2009) concur: *“Action is needed at all levels: international, national, within devolved administrations and within regions; at a local level by councils and local agencies; but also at a community level, through voluntary and community groups, and with individuals”*.

Human Rights Approach

In this respect, the Human rights framework which pays particular attention to the rights of all individuals to life and security; food; subsistence and health provides a useful blueprint for addressing climate change: Proclamation 7 of the Stockholm Declaration, for example, makes clear that: *“To achieve this environmental goal (ie climate change) will demand the acceptance of responsibility by citizens and communities and by enterprises and institutions at every level, all sharing equitably in common efforts. Individuals in all walks of life as well as organizations in many fields, by their values and the sum of their actions, will shape the world environment of the future”*.

⁷ BTCV Biodiversity Position Paper, April 2006

The UN (Robinson, 2007, Pillay, UN High Commissioner, 2007) strongly advocates a human rights approach to climate change and argues that human rights principles provide a strong foundation for policy making as it puts the principles of equality, fairness and justice at the heart of the process. Moreover, given the human dimensions of climate change, it makes sense to put people at the core of environmental negotiations and interventions so that core minimum standards are set and agreed. In this respect the human rights approach is ideal, as it will ensure participation, non-discrimination, empowerment and proportionality and accountability of all stakeholders. Additionally, given that the UN has recommended this approach for global negotiations, it makes sense to adopt the same approach locally. In this respect, the Scottish Government's recently published 'Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2009) provides an excellent impetus for mobilising collective, agreed, national action. Not only is the latter impressive and innovative, the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill will provide a solid base for taking a human rights approach in addressing climate change impacts, as it has at its heart substantive human dimensions.

The Conference

Given that the United Nations has identified 2009 as a crucial year for Climate Change, culminating in the UN Climate Change Conference Copenhagen on 7 – 18 December, this prestigious and unique Scottish conference will be held in Glasgow on 23 November 2009. It aims to bring the human cost of climate change into sharper focus, to put human rights and social implications at the heart of policy thinking and to provide Scottish Ministers with new perspectives to take to the table in Copenhagen.

The conference will be the first important step in bringing to life the process of developing climate change policy for Scotland as it will involve a range of key community and voluntary sector partners, private and public sector, with the Scottish Human Rights Commission providing guidance on a rights based approach.

The conference partners want to bring together key policy makers, influencers and activists from the social, environmental and economic sectors to share ideas and develop proposals for action that can help give Scotland a leading role in the global debate.

John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance & Sustainable Growth, will deliver the keynote address. The Programme will also include perspectives from the Scottish Human Rights Commission and SEPA, along with other national and international speakers who will set the scene for the day's interactive networking and discussion sessions. The theme of 'climate justice' will inform the debate and

we hope the event will stimulate new and lasting contacts and networks for delegates.

Most Importantly, the conference will conclude with the signing of an agreed communique on Human Rights and Climate Change from the Scottish Government, The Scottish Human Rights Commission, BTCV Scotland and The Scottish Environment protection Agency