

Swansea Council for Voluntary Service

Your local county voluntary council

12. Climate change

12.4 Climate change social justice - impacts on vulnerable groups



Groups vulnerable to climate change

The groups of people most vulnerable to climate change are generally those already identified as most vulnerable or disadvantaged in some other way, both globally and in the UK.

The Stern Review recognises that the poorest and most vulnerable people in society will feel the impacts of climate change the most as they are the least able to adjust to the changes that climate change will bring. The people identified at risk are those deprived by their health and mobility, those who lack awareness of the changes, those who have less social capital and the poorest in our communities. Climate change will therefore exacerbate these and other existing inequalities - it's therefore a matter of social justice and equality.

The impact of climate change on vulnerable groups is often not highlighted in climate change policy or its general narrative. It needs to be considered in adapting to climate change - thinking about how to alter policy and services to reflect the future weather patterns (e.g. increase in migrant population, change in weather events such as hotter and wetter periods, more extreme weather events). It also needs to be considered in trying to mitigate climate change through reduction of our carbon output - moving to a low carbon economy.

This lack of integration of the impacts on vulnerable groups into climate change adaptations and mitigation is aggravated by the inability of the disadvantaged to influence climate-related policy decisions.

The third sector therefore needs to recognise the importance of climate change as a social justice issue and respond by engaging in the debate and offering solutions that enhance rather than further hinder people's lives.

Understanding the social justice and equalities issues relating to climate change, both the impact of the weather changes and the changes to the way we live our lives to address our emissions, can be challenging, especially as it thinking about something we are not directly used to. Thinking of what policies and initiatives to address them can be even more difficult.

Broadly speaking there are three key dimensions to the link between climate change and social justice; a triple inequality:

- unequal distribution of the impacts of climate change (flooding, water resources);
- unequal responsibilities for climate change;
- unequal costs of mitigation and adaptation

Impacts of Climate Change

Changing weather patterns will bring consequences affecting many aspects of our lives. For example, our emergency services will be put under increasing strain due to extreme weather events, transport and other systems will face frequent interruption and many health conditions could be exacerbated, such as heat related deaths, respiratory allergies will increase due to increased mould growth in housing caused by more humid winters.

Wider global climate-related trends will also have an impact on the UK. Prices of energy, food and other goods are likely to rise if supply chains across the world are disrupted or sources disappear. Climate related immigration into UK is likely will impact on community cohesion and service provision.

Transition to low carbon society

Making the transition to a low carbon economy is part of approach to reducing our carbon emissions (mitigation). This transition needs to be a step change in responses to climate change and resource scarcity that will prevent catastrophic climate change and simultaneously enhance, rather than undermine, social justice. Given the likely differential effects of the problems, this transition should be made in a socially-just way. Failure to meet this challenge could mean coming decades are characterised by a series of self-reinforcing social, economic and ecological crises.

Opportunities for new approaches based on 'virtuous circles' need to be identified. Social, economic and environmental objectives need to be pursued coherently. Across all areas - such, as energy, health and transport – there are opportunities for virtuous circles that deliver positive self-reinforcing results. A comprehensive national and international decarbonisation strategy offers the opportunity to address many social as well as environmental ills. In combination with wider efforts to restructure our economic and financial system and re-evaluate the core values held by society, we can create a decarbonised, fairer world for ourselves, the environment and future generations.

There are a number of initiatives and project which are exploring the links between social justice and climate change and also demonstrate an approach where climate change and poverty or disadvantage are tackled simultaneously and which identify approaches which enable a socially just transition. Stop Climate Chaos Cymru report

Cutting Carbon Creating Jobs has examples of approaches to addressing climate change which also offer solutions to social problems.

http://issuu.com/scccymru/docs/scc_cutting_carbon_report_final?mode=embed&viewMode=presentation&layout=http%3A%2F%2Fskin.issuu.com%2Fv%2Flight%2Flayout.xml&showFlipBtn=true

Joseph Roundtree Foundation

JRF has an ongoing research programme exploring the social justice impacts of climate change. Within this research climate disadvantage is determined not just by the likelihood and degree of an individual or group being exposed to a hazard but also by their social vulnerability to such hazards. Vulnerability is a matter of how external events convert into changes in well-being. An individual or group is more vulnerable if they are less able to respond to stresses placed on their well-being. The report identifies two aspects to vulnerability:

The geography of vulnerability and climate disadvantage

Areas across the UK which are more likely to be affected by climate impacts and less likely to adapt. It found that most extremely socially vulnerable neighbourhoods are in large urban centres. There is also a strong coastal component to the geography of socio-spatial vulnerability, which is most marked in Wales, where over half of the most socially vulnerable top 10 per cent of neighbourhoods are within 1km of the coast.

The socially variables of vulnerability and climate disadvantage

A number of variables were identified as leading to climate vulnerable:

- poverty and deprivation
- new residents – whether associated with new arrivals more generally or with a component of new overseas arrivals (as in England and Wales);
- mobility and access – the ability to respond to events and recover from them is a function of personal mobility and accessibility of services;
- sensitivity – a number of the determinants of climate sensitivity were grouped, allowing for the identification of areas with high proportions of young children or elderly people. In Wales and Scotland, age and ill-health were linked, and in Scotland and Northern Ireland age and household composition were linked;
- enhanced exposure – some neighbourhood groups were identified through environmental indicators. In Northern Ireland the proportion of residents in high-rise housing was identified as a distinct measure of socio-spatial vulnerability in its own right.

For more information on JRF's climate change social justice programme look at their website:

www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/climate-change-and-social-justice

Carnegie Trust

The Carnegie Trust also explores the links between climate change and social justice

'Bridging the gap between climate change, resource scarcity and social justice: The future role of civil society associations'

www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/getattachment/971fba58-dc14-48b9-8b77-e6f7230cd26a/Bridging-the-Gap-Between-Climate-Change,-Resource-.aspx

'Making good society'

www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/getattachment/425ea7ae-58fd-4751-a52e-2e78362c97f4/Making-Good-Society.aspx

NCVO

NCVO has a programme supporting the voluntary sector in England to take action on climate change. This includes a Vulnerable people and climate change project which is helping VCOs supporting vulnerable people in England to understand and respond to the particular risks their beneficiaries may face from climate change. Find out more about the [vulnerable people and climate change project](#).

In 2009 they ran [The Big Response](#) project, helping four non-environmental charities to identify how climate change could affect their beneficiaries and work.

Key impacts identified both the direct impact of the weather changes but also secondary impacts on people and society, including energy supply, increased cost of living, funding availability, impacts on housing and increased pressure on mental health and through insecurity and migration.

This project supported with organisations working with older people; substance misuse and homeless people; people with sight loss and organisation providing emergency response.

From the project, they have developed an online guide to help you [explore what climate change could mean for your organisation](#).

For more details see *The Big Response project* at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/thebigresponse

Equalities and Human Rights Coalition

WCVA held a round table discussion between members of its Equalities and Human Rights Coalition and practitioners working in the field of sustainable development and climate change. It highlighted the links between the issues of equalities and climate change, the potential tensions and the need to work more closely together to develop a socially just transition and provide adaptive capacity for vulnerable groups. The round table provided case studies of organisations working to support equalities groups address climate change including women; BME groups; disabled people; faith groups and international community. The report document can be accessed [here](#)

WCVA has worked with members of the Equalities and Human Rights Coalition and of the Climate Change Leadership Group to provide case studies of work organisations are doing to address climate change these include

[Chwarae Teg](#)

[Disability Wales](#)

[Displaced People in Action](#)

The Baring Foundation

In September 2008, the Baring Foundation launched a Special Initiative that aimed to explore very practically how to support non-environmental voluntary organisations to explore how the impacts of climate change will affect their primary charitable purpose and then to share this new insight with practitioners and policy makers. This included organisations who work to support social justice issues - Children and Young people; community hub and refugee and asylum seeker. A number of responses were developed through this initiative; links to these can be found within the publication.

www.baringfoundation.org.uk/UnexaminedTruth.pdf

People in poverty

The failure to see that the problems of climate change and poverty are interrelated has meant that at times the environmental and social justice movements have worked against each other, rather than working together. In reality, lifting people out of poverty and creating a sustainable environment are not conflicting aims; these goals are actually mutually supportive. New Economic Foundation 'Tackling climate change reducing poverty' produced a good introduction to these links.

www.neweconomics.org/publications/tackling-climate-change-reducing-poverty

A number of Communities 1st initiatives demonstrate how this can be implemented on the ground. For example for inspiration look at the Green Town, Blaenau Ffestiniog - <http://www.sustainwales.com/casestudy/blaenau-ffestiniog-town-council>

Many Communities First Partnerships are also considering the impacts of climate change and improving their environment. The [Community Action Eco-Guidance packs](#) also provide further information. You can access the guidance packs [here](#)

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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