

Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil

Your local county voluntary council



12. Climate change

12.2 Why climate change issues are important for the third sector

Climate change will affect the people you work with

Climate change is not just an environmental issue, it affects all of us as there are social and economic impacts. As third sector organisations and groups we need to understand what these impacts will be, how they will impact on the people and communities we support and consider that we need to do to address these impacts.

Of course, there are lots of trends that are likely to have a major impact on the third sector in the coming years. Climate change is an essential one to consider, as it cuts across many of the issues our sector is already dealing with. For example it will hit the poorest and most vulnerable in our society hardest and fastest. Climate change will exacerbate these and many other existing inequalities that many in the third sector work so hard to tackle: it's a matter of social justice. So the issue has huge implications for our sector, whatever field you are in.

We therefore need to understand how a changing climate will impact on those we support and the work that we do to meet their needs.

Changing Weather Patterns

Despite efforts to reduce the impact humans have on the environment, some climate change is now considered inevitable and new weather patterns are already emerging across the globe and within Wales. Impacts of weather changes due to climate change include health problems as a consequence of the heat waves; infrastructure impacts through disruption to travel via extreme weather events; economic and personal losses through flooding. We therefore need to help these communities and groups of vulnerable people to develop their 'adaptive capacity' to be able to cope with these changes.

For more details of how it will affect different groups of people see Information Sheet *12.4 Climate change social justice - impacts on vulnerable groups*. This sheet also includes examples of third sector organisations who working to address these impacts.

Government policies to reduce carbon

In addition, policies to help mitigate climate change will have an effect on the people we support; this is an impact that we are likely to see very soon. These will include policies to mitigate carbon emissions in energy costs, travel, housing and lifestyles. The UK Government's Climate Change Act includes a system that caps CO₂ emissions over five-year periods to help us stay on track to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050.

In order to reduce our societal impact on the environment the Sustainable Development Commission and others recommended that the Welsh and UK Government are seeking to move towards a low carbon economy. Again, this will have impact on the way our current infrastructure, services and jobs are provided so it is something that will impact on the areas in which the third sector works.

For more information on low carbon economy see the Sustainable Development Commission's Low Carbon Wales: Regional Priorities for Action

www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=1018

Reducing our impact on the Environment

As third sector organisations and groups we need to understand how our actions impact on the environment to help ensure we reduce or contribution to climate change.

Our actions between now and 2015 are critically important if climate change is not to become catastrophic and unstoppable across the globe. Carbon emissions need to fall dramatically in the next decade. And even then, the impacts of climate change will still be devastating in some regions of the world.

Here in Wales the aim is to reduce emissions by 40% by 2020 and by 80% by 2050 (compared to 1990 levels). We all have a part to play in achieving that.

For third sector organisations, this makes sense: we exist to make a difference, to make the world a better place. So we need to act in ways that won't damage the planet now or in the future.

Your organisation's carbon footprint represents the quantity of carbon emissions associated with its activities. The amount of energy an organisation uses for heat, light, manufacturing, and transport, and the resources it consumes, all contribute to its footprint. By adopting a less carbon-intensive way of operating, you can reduce your footprint – and probably your costs too. For further information see 12.11 Reduce your organisation or group's carbon footprint.

We also need to consider what relationship our work may have in terms of the natural environment, the resources it provides and we rely on i.e. 'eco systems services'. For more information the way we view, protect and manage the natural resources of Wales see the Welsh Government Living Wales.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/nef/?lang=en>

Third sector role in climate change

The third sector has a key communication role to play in engaging communities and individuals, especially harder to reach and vulnerable groups, to support them in considering how climate change impacts on them and how they can build resilience to it by adapting their homes and communities.

When extreme events happen, such as flooding, the third sector and communities will play an important role in the response and in providing help in the aftermath of such events.

The third sector also has an important advocacy role: we must ensure that climate change mitigation policies are fair and do not disproportionately impact on already disadvantaged people. We must also campaign and advocate for a more sustainable future.

The third sector also has a role to encourage and enable our beneficiaries and communities to change their behaviour and live in a more sustainable way. The third sector can be a key stakeholder in providing solutions and projects for our beneficiaries and our communities to live in a sustainable way. For further information see *12.12: Take local community level action on climate change*

It is also critical that we mitigate the effects of climate change in the next few years and reduce our own carbon footprint.

The Welsh Government sees the third sector has having a crucial role in helping to address climate change. For more information on the role Welsh Government sees for the third sector read 'Climate Change Strategy for Wales: Sector Action Highlights - Third Sector'

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/desh/publications/141011ccstratthirdsectoren.pdf>

Climate change will affect how your organisation does its work

More stormy weather, higher energy prices and reduced transport reliability are just some of the climate-related trends that are likely to have a direct impact on every organisation. As with other risks, it would be impossible to manage every threat that climate change could pose for your organisation. The key will be to explore the range of challenges you could face, and assess them according to their likelihood and the impact they would have. You'll then be able to create a plan for managing the risks. It is also likely that your organisation will face growing pressure to act sustainably from legislation, funders and other stakeholders.

Engaging with climate change issues has lots of benefits

Tackling climate change offers the opportunity to help achieve existing goals and future-proof efforts to build more resilient communities, stronger local economies and a

more equitable society. Taking action on climate change also offers opportunities in terms of saving money through reducing your carbon footprint and income generation, particularly around community renewable energy.

For an insightful overview of the shift required and the role of third sector in this look at the Carnegie Trust's Making Good Society which identifies the most pressing issues facing civil society in the 21st Century. There is also an animation which plots the growth in understanding about the challenges of climate change and looks at the role of civil society in creating policies that will keep our planet alive.

www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/2005---2010-programme/future-of--civil-society/climate-change

Further Information

For further information and discussion on the impact of the third sector taking action on climate change refer to:

New times, new connections: civil society action on climate change.

This publication explores the landscape of civil society action on climate change, providing a number of recommendations for how to move this agenda forward.

www.greenalliance.org.uk/page_93.php

An unexamined truth.

This report describes a pilot project that has supported non-environmental voluntary organisations to explore how the impacts of climate change will affect their primary charitable purpose. The approaches taken by the four groups of organisations that led the work will be of interest to all those in the voluntary sector, the independent funding community and in government that are interested in practical ways to widen the circle of organisations involved in action on climate change.

www.baringfoundation.org.uk/UnexaminedTruth.pdf

'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

Disclaimer

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