

# Climate Justice and Sustainable Development

This was the fourth of four initial talks from the Reading Climate Forum. Dr Rayner Mayer (from Sciotech Projects and University of Reading) hosted a lively discussion on the ethics related to climate change.

## Climate Justice:

In the first section, Rayner introduced the concept of Climate Justice. He reminded the audience of the increase in extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts, associated with increasing climate change. These threaten lives and livelihoods across the world. He also noted that there are other trends that are very concerning, for example:

- 96% of the world's glaciers are receding (including those in the Himalayas, which supply water to 2 billion people).
- Rain forests absorb around 10% of annual CO<sub>2</sub> globally. They are, however, very susceptible to die-back if the average global temperature increase goes beyond 2 degrees Celsius.

He concluded that some regions are more affected than others; and that developing countries are disproportionately responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change, whereas poorer peoples are more vulnerable to the consequences.

In the subsequent discussion 'Is This Climate Justice?', the following thoughts were raised:

- Karma for the human race as a whole
- Ideas for equitable solutions, e.g. Contraction & Convergence (see: [http://chrisbeales.net/environment/emissions\\_UK%20vs%20China.html](http://chrisbeales.net/environment/emissions_UK%20vs%20China.html))
- Deeper issues / injustices in our global society: neoliberalism, consumerism
- No one thinks it is just but we need hope and solutions
- We need to change our lifestyles
- We need to know the facts and how to change - there is a justice lacking in access to information
- Tribalism in opinion - people follow political and social opinion makers rather than accepting the science / evidence
- Stern (in Blueprint for a safer planet) notes that we cannot afford not to adapt to climate change as it is cheaper to invest now than trying to make good once the climate changes
- Fossil fuel companies have a vested interest - concerned about stranded assets
- The UK Green Deal didn't work - it wasn't attractive enough because commercial rates of interest were such that any savings were consumed by interest charges
- Tax payers could end up paying for emissions trading

## Sustainable Development:

In the next section, Rayner discussed Sustainable Development. In simple terms: it is an obligation for the present generation to leave the world (biosphere) in a fit state for future generations.

He noted that we have had successes so far, with millions of lives being saved as a result of the 8 'Millennium Development Goals' (2000-2015). These included: halving extreme hunger and poverty to one billion; halving child mortality; reducing deaths to Malaria by 6 million, and increasing access to clean water for over 1 billion people.

In the next 15 years we have the international 'Sustainable Development Goals' including: to end poverty, to end hunger, to reduce inequality and to ensure sustainable use of eco-systems - see <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>. These include tackling climate change - if we don't tackle the UN estimates that there could be up to 100 million climate refugees by the end of the next decade- it is notable that 12-out-of-the-17 goals will also be impacted by a changing climate.

In the following discussion -

- We have a duty to ensure that these goals happen and 'no one is left behind'
- The next generation will see us as stupid
- Note(in the UK alone) the number of cars have increased by 50 million in the last 10 years, which demonstrates that we value mobility over environmental impact
- We may need to restrict our freedom of choice... possibly by using financial incentives, as fossil fuels are too cheap and society rather than the individual pays the social/environmental cost
- People need to understand the bigger picture: e.g. getting a larger car to keep your children safe is contributing to a world which will cause them more harm in the future
- The Millennium Goals could result in an increase in global population initially ...including more affluent citizens. However, it was noted that the lower child mortality the smaller family sizes become
- Some noted that we need a breakthrough in technology...e.g. a 'World War II type effort'.
- There is some good news though, e.g. UK is still setting good greenhouse gas emissions targets (see <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/28/uk-ministers-world-leading-carbon-emissions-reduction-target-climate-change> )...but note that the public are generally ambivalent to this.
- More equal countries have better environmental regulation
- Concern raised that green revolution has resulted in a big biodiversity collapse...storing up trouble for the future.
- Global Justice Now talks about the need for Food Sovereignty: There are brilliant methods to increase food production, such as Agroecology, which is based on knowledge and tradition of local farmers combined with technical expertise. In this context, small-scale improvements are better than corporate exploitation. This could help Africa produce 100% of its food - it is currently producing around 75%.

## **COP21 – the Paris Accord:**

Finally Rayner talked about December 2015's Paris Accord. In this, 195 individual nations have submitted 'Declared National Contributions', which are emissions reduction promises. These will be reviewed every 5 years. All countries signed-up to trying to prevent global temperatures from rising by more than 2 degrees Centigrade, however the current declared contributions could result in a 2.7 degrees temperature rise which is higher than that agreed in Paris.

Religious leaders, including the Pope, are making strong calls for us to act on this global threat to life on earth. It is important that there are 'top-down' agreements like the Paris Accord, however it is equally important that we look at our own lifestyles and what are we going to do about it.

In our final discussion:

- Note that the global economic system makes this difficult
- Need to leave most of the fossil fuels in the ground but they are such a cheap and addictive form of energy
- We also need more Energy Conservation/Insulation as well as joined-up thinking, so our "solutions" don't create new problems, e.g. diesel and biomass add to Air Pollution and in the case of biomass, the degradation of forests all around the world, similarly the roll out of white/blue-rich LED's in order to save energy leads to Blue-Rich Light Pollution.
- Flying is an easy lifestyle choice but will be a big part of your personal carbon footprint (see [http://chrisbeales.net/environment/personal%20action\\_findings.html](http://chrisbeales.net/environment/personal%20action_findings.html))
- We need an alternative vision to replace the current economic system (they exist, see Zero Carbon Britain for example <http://chrisbeales.net/environment/zcb.html>)
- We need to restrict our materialism, and consider our rights to: flying, consumption, children!
- More egalitarianism and also more joined-up-thinking in the green movement, e.g. local pollution vs global climate issues.
- We need an alternative economy...note a focus on renewables and energy efficiency could lead to 1 million climate jobs.

Notes: Chris Beales and Tanja Rebel