

The No-Nonsense *guide to* Communication, Climate Justice and Climate Change

Climate justice is a vision to alleviate the unequal burdens created by climate change. It calls for the fair treatment of all people, freeing them from discrimination through policies and projects that address climate change and the structures that create and perpetuate inequalities. Climate change induced by humans is one of today's most serious global environmental problems. It is a profoundly ethical issue that raises questions about how people define their roles and responsibilities toward one another, future generations, and other species.

'There can be no ecological security without climate justice. Equity is a precondition for sustainability. We will live together or die together.'
Vandana Shiva¹

WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?

Climate justice urges action to avoid catastrophic climate change and to address the social, ecological, political, and economic causes of the climate crisis. It aims to promote and strengthen the rights and voices of ordinary people affected by climate change.

The arguments for climate justice are based on the knowledge that the planet has limited resources and that the current pattern of production and consumption contributes to harmful greenhouse emissions.

The climate justice movement raises ethical questions about corporate-driven globalization and the neoliberal economic policies that promote unsustainable production, consumption, and trade. It argues that the global North is primarily responsible for climate change and has greater technological, financial and institutional capacity to tackle it. And it believes that the North should take responsibility for providing financial and technical assistance to enable the South to act. Key issues include:

Climate policies: Most climate policies chosen by industrialized countries are driven by domestic



considerations and not global concerns. The initial burden of emissions' reductions, which should fall on the industrialized countries, has instead been softened by emission targets imposed on developing countries and by market mechanisms which may worsen global warming (carbon trading, etc). Negotiations to find solutions have so far focused mainly on the technical sphere and have been headed by special interest groups such as large oil, coal, and utility companies, and by governments such as the United States, which has not signed the Kyoto Protocol.

Environmental effects: Many believe that people who are already the most vulnerable and marginalized experience the severest impacts and are in the greatest need of adaptation strategies in the

BOX 1

What is the UNFCCC?

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a broad statement of principles and objectives relating to climate change. Participating governments agreed to share information on the amount of greenhouse gas pollution they emit, and on possible solutions to climate change, in addition to providing information and financial support to help developing countries reduce emissions. The UNFCCC is a voluntary convention, without any binding targets.

Once it became clear that under a voluntary system climate change pollution was increasing rather than decreasing, the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere.

face of shifts in weather patterns. The vulnerable and marginalized have the least capacity or opportunity to prepare for the impacts of a changing climate or to participate in negotiations on mitigation. Since women constitute the largest percentage of the world's poorest people, they are most affected by these changes.

Reduction targets: market-based policies such as cap and trade systems, or recent proposals for a global carbon tax, reinforce the idea of a single policy that can help achieve all carbon reduction targets. Many people in global government forums, civil society and developing countries are opposed to this type of single solution. In addition, it is questionable how independent governments are of the influence of large multinational corporations, such as the fossil fuel and energy industries.

Technology transfer: the transfer of existing and new technologies for climate change monitoring, mitigation and adaptation strategies is a major element in addressing climate change. However, governments are not willing or able to provide them because intellectual property rights (IPR) over these technologies are mostly owned by the private sector.

BOX 2

What is the Kyoto Protocol?

The Kyoto Protocol (1997) is the international plan to reduce climate change pollution. By January 2009 183 countries had ratified the Protocol, which sets targets for industrialised countries to reduce their pollution and gives them flexibility as to how they can reach those targets. The Kyoto Protocol established the international trade in 'carbon credits'. Developing countries participate in the Protocol in a number of ways, including through Emissions Trading, the Clean Development Mechanism, and Joint Implementation.

Social rate of time discount: this is the rate used to compare the well-being of future generations to the well-being of those alive today. The choice of an appropriate discount rate seeks to establish inter-generational equity and has been the subject of debate among policy-makers and economists. If costs and benefits in the future weigh more heavily in current decision-making, larger and more drastic abatement efforts will be necessary today.

Agrofuels: Extensive new monoculture plantations for the production of agrofuels are increasing greenhouse gases through deforestation, drainage of wetlands, and communal land-grabbing. The whole cycle of production, transformation, and distribution of agrofuels, does not, except in some cases, produce less greenhouse gases than fossil fuels. Moreover, there is simply not enough land in the world to generate all the fuel necessary for an industrial society whose needs are continually increasing.

Carbon trading: The carbon market in its current form creates transferable rights to dump carbon in the air, oceans, soil and vegetation far in excess of the capacity of these systems to hold it. Billions of dollars worth of such rights may be awarded free of charge to the biggest corporate emitters of greenhouse gases in the nations that caused the climate crisis and already exploit these systems the most. The cost of future reductions in fossil fuel use is likely to fall disproportionately on the public sector, vulnerable communities, and indigenous peoples.

Clean Development Mechanism (CDM): This scheme encourages industrialized countries and their corporations to finance or create cheap carbon dumps such as large-scale tree plantations in the South as a lucrative alternative to reducing emissions in the North. Other CDM projects, such as hydrochloro-fluorocarbons (HCFC) reduction schemes, focus on end-of-pipe technologies and do nothing to reduce the fossil fuel industries' impact on local communities. In addition, these projects dwarf the tiny volume of renewable energy projects which constitute the CDM's sustainable development window-dressing.

WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?

Climate change is any long-term change in the patterns of average weather of a specific region or the Earth as a whole. Climate change is the result of a great many factors including the dynamic processes of the Earth itself, external forces including variations in sunlight intensity, and more recently human activity. External factors that can shape climate are often called climate 'forcings' and include such processes as variations in solar radiation, deviations in the Earth's orbit, and the level of greenhouse gas concentrations

The single human activity that is most likely

BOX 3

What is Copenhagen 2009 about?

The Kyoto Protocol to prevent climate change and global warming runs out in 2012. To keep the process on track, a new protocol is needed. At the conference in Copenhagen 2009 the parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meet for the last time before the climate agreement needs to be revived. Therefore, the Copenhagen conference is vital to the future of the world's climate. It is expected that a new Protocol to address global warming and climate change will emerge

to have a large impact on the climate is the burning of 'fossil fuels' such as coal, oil and gas. These fuels contain carbon. Burning them makes carbon dioxide. People burn fossil fuels when they drive cars, use coal-fired electricity, fly in planes, or consume products. Some of the gases released from burning fossil fuels are 'greenhouse gases', which act like a blanket around the earth, trapping heat and warming the earth's atmosphere. Industrialised countries have released huge amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

From 1906 to 2005, global average temperatures have increased by 0.74 °C (23 F). The rate of global warming has increased massively from the 1970s to the present. This has led to a rise in global sea levels and a highly increased frequency of extreme weather events such as heat waves, droughts, floods and hurricanes.

It is now unequivocally accepted by the world's scientific community that human activities intensify the natural greenhouse effect by emitting heat-trapping gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O). Between 1970 and 2004, global greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 70% due to human activity.

By 2100, global temperature could increase by 1.1 °C to 6.4 °C, depending on the international community's ability and willingness to effectively mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. Never before in human history have we experienced a climate temperature change of this magnitude.

Climate change has become a global issue affecting everyone on the planet. If people work together and take immediate action, they can stop dangerous climate change. If it is to be halted, industrialised countries need to reduce greenhouse pollution by 20% by 2020, and by 80% by the middle of the century. Key ways to achieve this are:

- Set legally binding targets to reduce climate change pollution.

- Switch to renewable energy sources, like solar and wind power, and move away from dirty coal.
- Set energy efficiency targets to ensure energy is used wisely.
- Shift from private cars to public transport.
- Stop large-scale land clearance.

Environmental challenges

Scientists warn that destabilized ecosystems could react with unpredictable, abrupt and nonlinear events with catastrophic consequences for humans and the environment. These nonlinear changes are fuelled by 'self-regulating positive feed-back loops' that accelerate the destabilization process.

Research suggests that these feedback loops have already begun: During 2007, the withdrawal of Arctic ice broke all previous records, reaching an all time low of 4.13 million sq km and falling below the previous record of 2005 by an area roughly the size of Texas and California combined. Due to feedback processes, scientists drastically reconsidered their previous estimates of an ice-free Arctic projected for the latter half of the 21st century and are now forecasting a total disappearance of Arctic sea ice at a much earlier point in time.

Climate change leads to a *massive meltdown of glaciers and inland ice*: According to the United Nations Environment Programme, Himalayan glaciers – the world's largest store of water outside the polar caps serving as a freshwater reserve for almost 40% of the world's population – are retreating at rates between 10 to 60 meters per year. As glaciers retreat, lakes form, which accumulate increasing amounts of water, putting downstream communities at risk of glacial lake flooding.

Global warming has a *devastating impact on the world's ecosystems and biodiversity*: Around one-half of the world's coral reefs have suffered 'bleaching' as a result of warming seas. For many species, climate systems are changing more rapidly than they can adapt to. And according to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the current rate of extinction of species is up to 1,000 times higher than the fossil record indicates.

Social challenges

Climate change has a *disproportionate effect on the world's poor*. Their susceptibility to climate change is higher and their capacity for adaptation lower, because they lack the means to protect themselves from rising sea levels, increased natural hazards and changes in rainfall patterns. The *inverse relationship* between responsibility for the causes of climate change and vulnerability to its impacts is one of the most urgent ethical challenges posed by global warming.

Agricultural production and food security:

Changes in temperature, rainfall patterns and water availability have long-term impacts on the viability and productivity of agricultural systems. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that an expected increase in average world temperatures of 1 to 3°C would lead to a drop in cereal production in more than 65 countries that now include half the world's population.

Water stress and water insecurity: More than one-sixth of the world's population (around 1.1 billion people) live in glacier- or snowmelt-fed river basins and will be affected by seasonal shifts in stream flow, increased short-term risks of flooding and long-term risks of drought.

Rising sea levels and exposure to climate disasters: According to UNDP, some 262 million people were affected by climate disasters from 2000 to 2004, over 98% of them in the developing world. The risk of being affected by a natural disaster in a developing country is almost 80 times higher than in the developed world.

Human health: Global warming is extending the reach of mosquitoes and other carriers of vector-borne diseases such as Malaria and Dengue Fever. These human induced changes are most widely felt in developing countries.

Climate change and water

Water is one of the significant adaptation issues facing vulnerable peoples and ecosystems. Human-induced climate change has severe consequences for peoples' access to clean drinking water, including extending areas of drought and the length of time drought endures, floods resulting from extreme weather events that pollute wells and overwhelm sanitation systems, and rising sea levels which cause salt water incursions into fresh water sources, etc.

With water being a basic and indispensable source of life and sustenance, climate change is a very real and profound peril to the sustainability of many communities around the world.

WHAT ARE GREENHOUSE DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS?

The *Greenhouse Development Rights* framework (GDRs)² is designed to protect the right to sustainable human development, while driving rapid reductions in global emissions. It puts into operation the principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which calls for States to commit themselves to 'protect the climate system... on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective

capabilities.'

As a first step, the GDRs framework codifies the right to development as a 'development threshold' – a level of welfare below which people are not expected to share the costs of the climate transition. This threshold is not an 'extreme poverty' line, typically defined to be so low (\$1 or \$2 a day) as to be more properly called a 'destitution line'. Rather, it is set to reflect a level of welfare that is above basic needs, but well short of today's levels of 'affluent' consumption.

People below this threshold are assumed to have little responsibility for the climate problem and little capacity to invest in solving it. People above the threshold, on the other hand, are assumed to have realized their right to development and to bear the responsibility for preserving that right for others. They must, as their incomes rise, gradually assume a greater part of the costs of curbing the emissions associated with their own consumption, as well as the costs of ensuring that, as those below the threshold rise towards and then above it, they are able to do so along sustainable, low-emission paths. Moreover, and critically, these obligations are taken to belong to all those above the development threshold, whether they live in the North or the South.

Investment in climate mitigation and adaptation can be straightforwardly interpreted as total income, excluding income below the development threshold. A nation's aggregate capacity is defined as the sum of all individual income, excluding income below the threshold. Responsibility for the climate problem is similarly defined in terms of cumulative emissions since 1990, excluding emissions that correspond to consumption below the development threshold. 'Development emissions,' like 'development income' do not contribute to a country's obligation to act to address the climate problem.

Thus, both capacity and responsibility are defined in individual terms and in a manner that takes explicit account of the unequal distribution of income within countries. This is a critical and long-overdue move, because the usual practice of relying on national per-capita averages fails to capture either the true depth of a country's developmental urgency or the actual extent of its wealth. If one looks only as far as a national average, then the richer, higher-emitting minority lies hidden behind the poorer, lower-emitting majority.

These measures of capacity and responsibility can then be combined into a single indicator of obligation, which has been called the 'Responsibility Capacity Index' (RCI). This calculation is done for all Parties to the UNFCCC, based on country-specific income, income distribution, and emissions data.

IS THERE A GENDER DIMENSION?

Gender inequality underlies the vulnerability and poverty of large sectors of the world's population. As many development agencies point out, vulnerability is differentiated by gender. Women represent the majority of low-income earners. They are imprisoned in cycles of dependency and have to struggle on a daily basis to maintain households and take care of their families.

In particular, women's limited access to resources and decision-making processes increases their vulnerability to climate change and their knowledge and expertise are largely ignored in public debate, which impedes their ability to contribute their unique and valuable perspectives on climate change.

In the developing areas of the world, women are the main users and managers of natural resources. Environmental degradation carries with it serious adverse effects on women and their families. Worse, households dependent on women's labour in subsistence or cash cropping or on plantations are also badly affected by storms and droughts.

The impact of more frequent extreme weather will also be gender differentiated:

- It will increase male migration, placing a further burden on women's responsibilities and chores inside and outside the household;
- It will lead to changes in crop and livestock production with associated effects of gender division of labour and income opportunities;
- It will increase difficulty of access to resources, especially for fuel wood and water, with consequent increased workloads for women and children.

Women do develop strategies to protect the sustainability of their livelihoods. But the magnitude and scale of predicted environmental stress is such that it can overwhelm their ability to react to new threats. Very poor, nomadic women may have a relatively high adaptive capacity due to their intimate knowledge of their natural environment. Densely populated agrarian regions subjected to an increase in extreme events may be the most vulnerable.

Increased cases of malaria and dengue fever, for example, weaken vulnerable members of the household with the result that the burden of care falls mainly on women. In addition, food and water issues will affect women more drastically than men, given their respective roles in communities.

HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE THE ISSUES?

Mass communication plays a key role in informing people about environmental issues. The media are an influential source of readily available images, meanings, and definitions about the environment, the way

questions are addressed, presented and resolved.

The climate debate itself has become an 'umbrella' concept sheltering a variety of previously separate and distinct issues. But as with any topic in the political or social arena, communication practitioners and journalists need to understand the science of climate change, its causes, controversies, current and projected impacts.

A good way to begin is to research established sources, such as reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), SciDevNet, trustworthy local scientific experts, or reading the latest articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals or reputable popular science publications. This is particularly true for journalists in the developing world, where the issue generally goes under-reported despite the fact that the poorest countries are most vulnerable to climate change.

Most audiences want to know about facts and impact: How will people be affected by climate change? The problem is getting meaningful scientific information for specific localities because, apart from some generally well-understood effects like rising sea levels, climate models become less accurate at smaller scales. But there are other ways to give climate change a local focus:

Local voices. Interviewing ordinary citizens and giving a voice to those most vulnerable to climate change is an important role for journalists to play, particularly in developing countries. The poorest communities are most at risk. They may already be struggling to survive and have few resources to adapt. Yet their views generally go unreported in global coverage of climate change.

Compare local and global causes. Many of climate change's projected impacts – increased flooding or landslides, reduced fresh water supply, changes in animal and plant populations – can also be caused by local environmental changes such as deforestation, road building or unsustainable hunting and gathering.

Use different sources. Too often, journalists only report what they hear from government officials speaking at conferences. Scientists are also excellent sources – but their words often need to be explained in everyday terms. Include the voices of other stakeholders, whether local villagers, nongovernmental organizations or business people.

Explore adaptation. Many stories on climate change, particularly in developing countries, will be about how cities, communities and people can adapt. This will involve better environmental practices: protecting coastal ecosystems, wetlands and forests, or ensuring sustainable land use and disaster preparedness. Strengthening such awareness is a task for media practitioners and communicators everywhere.

FOUR PRINCIPLES FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Recently, *New Internationalist* dedicated an issue of its monthly magazine to the topic of climate justice.³ It was unequivocal in stating that climate change – caused by human activity – is threatening the lives and livelihoods of billions of people and the existence of millions of species.

NI Magazine stressed that social movements around the world are actively pursuing urgent and radical change, especially in advance of the Copenhagen Conference (see Box 3). NI laid out an agenda for action that communicators could also tackle in the context of their own work. It was broadly based on the following four principles:

1. The rich take responsibility

The burden of adjustment to the climate crisis must be borne by those who created it. This means:

- A 90% cut in greenhouse gas emissions from industrialized countries by 2050.
- An end to over-production for over-consumption, and a dramatic reduction in wasteful consumption by Northern and Southern elites.
- Financial support from the North to the South to help with the cost of adjusting to the effects of climate change and continuing to develop along sustainable lines. This transfer of wealth should be based on the principle that the rich world owes the poor world an 'ecological debt', and it must be subject to democratic control.

2. Leave fossil fuels in the ground

Climate change is caused by burning fossil fuels. We need to stop it at source. Leave the coal in the hole, the oil in the soil. Invest instead in energy efficiency and a massive expansion of community-controlled renewable energy.

3. Fair and effective solutions

Climate solutions should actually work, and not create further problems. This means:

- Ending the aggressive promotion of false solutions such as carbon trading, agrofuels and geo-engineering. These allow the rich to avoid their responsibility to make major changes; help corporations to increase their profits; and have negative knock-on effects on the world's poor and the planet's ecosystem.

- Planning and executing a just transition to a low-carbon society that protects people's rights, jobs and well-being.

4. Equal access to resources

Natural resources must be conserved for the common good, not privatized and unsustainably exploited. People's sovereignty over land, energy, forests and water must be upheld and reclaimed. ■

Notes

1. In response to a request for a quote (6 June 2009).
2. See: <http://www.ecoequity.org/>
3. *New Internationalist* 419, Jan/Feb 2009.

Many sources were consulted in writing this summary. Most can be found on WACC's web page dedicated to 'Climate Justice' at <http://www.waccglobal.org/en/activities/climate-justice.html>

This No-Nonsense Guide is a resource compiled by Philip Lee and published by the World Association for Christian Communication (2009).

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC)

promotes communication for social change. It believes that communication is a basic human right that defines people's common humanity, strengthens cultures, enables participation, creates community, and challenges tyranny and oppression.

WACC's key concerns are media diversity, equal and affordable access to communication and knowledge, media and gender justice, and the relationship between communication and power. It tackles these through advocacy, education, training, and the creation and sharing of knowledge.

WACC also runs the Centre for Communication Rights portal – a source of documents and materials about all aspects of communication rights.

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