

Together for a Fair Climate Future

Event 4 Summary: How do we tackle the unequal impacts of climate change?

11 May 2021, 1:00 – 2:15pm



Live event illustration: William Bock – Visual Scribe

We are already seeing the impacts of climate change, both in the UK and around the world. For the UK, these impacts include: extreme weather (rain, storms, heatwaves, dry spells etc.), increased flooding, sea level rise and higher tides, and biodiversity loss. In turn, climate change puts pressures on health systems, risks food security, affects people's wellbeing, mental and physical health, threatens livelihoods, increases the cost of living, and impacts communities' resilience, amongst other consequences.

Yet, the impacts of climate change are not felt equally by everyone. This event, organised by Sustainability First, asked **How do we tackle the unequal impacts of climate change?** The event explored how and why the impacts of the climate crisis unfairly affect some individuals and groups more than others in the UK, and it shared people's lived experiences of how climate change is affecting them today. The event then moved onto discussing how these injustices can be addressed, with recommended actions for change, and a call for those with lived experience of the climate crisis to be central to our response.

“ Climate change does not care about impacting people fairly ... We don't live in an equal society...that's something we can change and we can do something about and we need to – Ravina Singh ”

The ideas in this document are those of the panellists and video contributors – full credit must be attributed to them. Find out more about the speakers at the end of this summary.

10 Action Points

The unequal impacts of climate change must be recognised and actively addressed through decision making. Climate change impacts some people more than others, including women, people of colour, disabled people, and people on low incomes. It affects both the old and young differently. Socioeconomic, geographical, institutional and systemic factors determine people's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, and these causes, as well as the consequences, must be addressed through climate change decision making.

Climate change must be treated as a social, as well as environmental, issue. Social and environmental issues are not and cannot be treated separately – they interact and impact upon each other. Vulnerability to the impacts of climate change is largely socially constructed, and climate change only makes visible existing inequalities and social injustices.

“ *We have to stop thinking of issues of social and environmental justice as separate. We cannot achieve one without tackling the other. – Ravina Singh* ”

Climate change is happening now and communities on the frontlines need immediate & humanitarian responses. Many communities are already living with the realities of the impacts of climate change, from the UK to the Niger Delta to the Amazon. Action for climate justice needs to be connected to the frontlines of climate change and more capital needs to be mobilised for humanitarian responses that are centred on care and compassion. Climate justice and decolonisation must also be connected to frontline communities' movements for land rights and justice.

“ *Climate justice means that many communities are living between the two realities – we are seeing the impacts [of climate change] here, but we are also fighting daily to get basic humanitarian care to our communities who are already on the frontline – Suzanne Dhaliwal* ”

The transition to a low-carbon economy must be fair and not widen existing inequalities. The transition to a low-carbon economy and net zero (i.e. balancing out the carbon emissions produced and removed from the atmosphere) cannot be anything other than a 'just transition'. This means tackling climate change in a way that is fair and doesn't affect some people more than others or leave anyone behind. For example, climate change policies, such as on active travel, cannot further discriminate against disabled people. And the move away from fossil fuels should not lead to a loss of livelihoods for communities in these areas.

“ *If we are not careful, the transition could exacerbate existing inequalities. But it could be an opportunity to create a fairer society – Sarah Hopkins* ”

Maximise the co-benefits of decarbonisation. Decarbonising the economy can simultaneously tackle issues in other areas of society. These co-benefits must be maximised by tackling social and environmental issues together. For example, retrofitting housing can help address issues of fuel poverty and nature-based solutions can create opportunities for improving mental health. Co-benefits can help frame climate discussions in ways that are relevant to people's daily lives.

Political will, leadership, and action is needed to address the deep, systemic causes of climate change and inequality. Although individual action is important, change at the scale needed will not be possible unless we see action at the system level, driven by political leadership. Unless structural inequalities, systemic racism, and the institutional factors that cause vulnerability are tackled, the unequal impacts of climate change will continue. As citizens, we must exert political pressure on those in power to take action.

“ *We have the solutions. We have the technologies. We have the knowledge required to address climate change impacts and causes. It's a matter of political will. – Michael Mikulewicz* ”

Meaningfully listen to and engage communities in co-producing solutions. For solutions to be sustainable, they must be designed and implemented with communities. Communities have lived experiences of climate change and inequalities, as well as agency and resourcefulness to produce creative solutions. Communities want to be listened to and be involved in decision-making, and more funding needs to be committed to engaging communities, investing in community groups, and designing participatory processes, such as climate assemblies and climate juries.

“ *As disabled people, we need to be listened to and our needs and perspectives and our priorities need to be taken into account to ensure a fair transition to net zero – Susie Fitton* ”

Resource local authorities to involve local communities and act on climate change. Local authorities have good understandings of local needs and challenges. They are best placed to work with communities and find solutions that are appropriate for their area. Local authorities currently don't have the funds, resources, or sometimes the in-house expertise to tackle the issues at the scale needed. They need to be properly funded to engage local groups and tackle inequalities and for climate action amongst their communities.

The UK has a global responsibility to fund and support adaptation in other parts of the world. Both in terms of colonialism and as a high emissions country, the UK has a responsibility to countries and communities most affected by the impacts of climate change, who often did the least to cause it. The UK should provide funding through international aid, including for adaptation projects, mitigation technologies, and social protection programmes. The impacts of global supply chains must also be recognised and acted on.

Lack of diversity in the environment sector needs to be addressed. The environment sector is the second least diverse industry in the UK. Organisations in this sector need to think about who is making decisions, who is being consulted, and who is being involved, and make changes. It must create safe spaces in which people feel they can talk openly about experiences of racism. Art and creativity can help analyse how decisions are being designed, challenge existing injustices, and create safe spaces for engagement.

Panellists



Suzanne Dhaliwal – Climate Justice Creative, Researcher and Campaigner

Voted one of London's most influential people in Environment 2018 by the Evening Standard. In 2009 Suzanne co-founded the UK Tar Sands Network, which challenged BP and Shell investments in the Canadian tar sands in solidarity with frontline Indigenous communities, spurring the internationalisation of the fossil fuel divestment movement. Her corporate and financial campaigning spans over a decade, including spearheaded a European coalition to challenge the insurance industry on their underwriting of highly polluting coal and tar sands projects. Suzanne has led artistic interventions to challenge fossil fuel investments globally and currently works as a creative practice tutor and freelance consultant.



Sarah Hopkins – Director, Cynnal Cymru / Sustain Wales

Sarah joined Cynnal Cymru – Sustain Wales as Director in January 2020. Cynnal Cymru is a sustainable development organisation based in Cardiff. It works with people and organisations from across sectors and industries to accelerate progress towards a low carbon economy, a fair and just society and a thriving natural environment. Sarah has recently worked with the Electoral Reform Society and a consortium of Housing Associations on the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly, the first climate assembly in Wales.



Michael Mikulewicz – Research Fellow, Centre for Climate Justice

Michael is a critical geographer who studies the intersecting social, economic and political inequalities caused by the impacts of, and our responses to, climate change. His research is guided by the concepts of climate justice, adaptation and resilience. He works as a Research Fellow at the Centre for Climate Justice at Glasgow Caledonian University, leading its research themes on international development and intersectionality. Michael obtained his PhD in Human Geography from the University of Manchester. He previously worked as a Project Associate for the Center for Sustainable Energy in San Diego, CA, and has activist experience with organizations such as 350.org, Amnesty International and the Sierra Club.



Ravina Singh – UK Cities Senior Engagement Officer, CDP

Ravina currently works in the cities team at [CDP](#) as a Senior Engagement Officer, largely working with UK local authorities on environmental reporting and their climate action more broadly. Prior to this, she briefly worked at the renewable energy non-profit [Regen](#) supporting their policy and advocacy work. Ravina has also worked at the environmental think tank [Green Alliance](#) working on climate policy, helping to engage cross-party MPs, and supporting the organisation's Diversity and Inclusion plans.

Video contributors

We are also grateful for video contributions from:

- Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah – Co-Founder, The Ella Roberta Family Foundation
- Paul Cobbing – Chief Executive, National Flood Forum
- Liam Crouse – Organiser, Misneachd
- Sadie DeCoste – Co-Founder and Co-Director, Loss and Damage Youth Coalition
- Susie Fitton – Policy Officer, Inclusion Scotland
- Ineza Umuhoza Grace – Co-Founder and Co-Director, Loss and Damage Youth Coalition
- Michael Lomotey FRSA, MSC (he/him) – Adaptation Planning Specialist – for climate and ecology repair. Brining a race-based critique of environmentalism.
- Heather Shepherd – Flood Recovery Specialist, National Flood Forum
- Sunita – Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly Member