

# Climate change: Campaign summary

September 2007



## “Climate change ... threatens to undo decades of development efforts.”

*UK Environment Minister Hilary Benn and the heads of nine international development agencies*

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing humanity. There is an overwhelming scientific consensus on that. But it is not just an environmental issue, it is a development issue, and a global justice issue.

Rich countries like the UK are responsible for climate change. It is our excessive carbon emissions that are driving it. But it is poor countries that will bear the brunt of the impact. Hundreds of millions face drought, floods, starvation, disease and death. Climate change is the single greatest threat to the world's poor. And our government knows it. Yet despite all the recent pledges, the targets, the speeches, they are still failing to implement the measures needed to make our share of necessary emissions cuts. In fact, UK greenhouse gas emissions are actually rising.

It is not too late – we can stop disastrous climate change striking, but it will take a political sea change. The choices made by politicians in the next 5-10 years will determine the extent of the devastation that people will face.

The World Development Movement's climate change campaign is calling on the UK government to show the world it can be done. The Government must transform our economy to reduce our carbon emissions to sustainable levels, and transform the prospects for the developing world at the same time. But the latest research shows we have just four years to get the programme needed in place.

If we all take action, we can make our government take concrete action. Before it really is too late.

## A development issue: A justice issue

Climate change is usually seen as an environmental issue. But it is the world's poor who will be most affected, and least able to cope. It will destroy any hope of a path out of poverty for millions. Although more money will be needed to adapt to temperature changes that are already inevitable, it is not 'just another problem' that can be dealt with by aid. Rich countries must drastically cut their emissions, or it will be impossible to make poverty history.

The impact of climate change on the poor will be:

- ✦ **Flooding:** A 4°C rise in global temperature could lead to up to 300 million more people suffering from coastal flooding each year as sea levels rise, most of them in developing countries.
- ✦ **Drought:** Rainfall will become more erratic, increasing the frequency and duration of droughts, leaving hundreds of millions without sufficient food. Some estimates suggest that crop yields in sub-Saharan Africa will fall by 50 per cent.
- ✦ **Disease:** Warmer and wetter weather will increase the range and prevalence of diseases. 185 million people in sub-Saharan Africa alone could die as a direct result.
- ✦ **Death:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates climate change is already causing over 160,000 deaths per year.

Yet the poor are least responsible.

- ✦ The average UK citizen releases the same amount of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in 2.5 days, as a Malawian does in a year.
- ✦ Rich countries are responsible for 80 per cent of the manmade increase in CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere.
- ✦ Despite having only 15 per cent of the world's population, rich countries emit 50 per cent of the world's CO<sub>2</sub> each year.

*“We have made no contribution [to climate change], but suffer the highest impact – that makes it a huge case of moral inequality against which the global citizenry, the global nation states, must take action. If not we'll be calling it climatic genocide.”*

Atiq Rahman, Bangladesh

## UK government hot air

The UK has a historic responsibility for climate change. Our wealth is built on over 150 years of excessive carbon emissions. So we have a duty to take immediate action to reduce them, particularly given that most emissions in the south are the result of development and consumption for basic needs, not luxuries or lifestyle choices.

## Aviation: The UK government's litmus test

The government claims it is taking climate change seriously, but it is failing to take the action needed in a whole range of areas, of which aviation is the most blatant.

Aviation makes up 10–15 per cent of the UK's climate change contribution, and is our fastest growing source of emissions. Yet the Department of Transport is planning for a doubling of air passenger travel and air freight by 2020 and 2010 respectively (based on 2002 levels). The resulting increase in emissions will more than cancel out the reductions expected from all other sectors of the economy, so the government cannot meet even its own target of cutting emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 unless it stops this growth.

Instead, the government refuses to include aviation in its emissions reduction targets, continues subsidising the industry to the tune of £10.4 billion a year, and only proposes putting aviation into an 'emissions trading scheme' that British Airways says would not reduce its growth targets at all.

The government's rhetoric on climate change cannot be taken seriously by anyone, including other nations, until it has the policies to match. And the key litmus test by which its commitment to taking action on climate change should be judged is whether it stops further airport expansion and introduces the environmental taxes needed to curb the aviation industry's planned growth.



But despite claiming world leadership on climate change and international development, unless the government makes policy changes now it will miss its target of 20 per cent emission cuts by 2010 (based on 1990). In fact, since Labour came to power, UK carbon emissions have increased by about 6 per cent.

## There is a solution

Some climate change is with us, more is inevitable. But to stop it becoming catastrophic, we must keep the increase in average global temperature to less than 2°C. That means reducing carbon emissions by at least 80 per cent (below 1990 levels) by 2050.

The Kyoto protocol, the main international agreement to combat climate change, sets targets for the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> rich countries can produce each year. However, it will lower emissions by just 5 per cent below 1990 levels. Much more action is required.

Our government could really be a world leader on climate change, showing others it can be done and helping to develop the technologies and economies of scale necessary for poor countries to develop sustainably as well.

The proposed climate change bill is an important step forward, but at the moment it aims only to reduce carbon emissions by 60 per cent by 2050, and international aviation emissions are not included in these targets. As well as passing a stronger climate bill, the government must implement a major programme of action within the next four years, including reductions in energy use, carbon produced in electricity generation, and car and aviation emissions.

Only by leading through action can the UK convince the rest of the world to take action too. Further delay will require much more drastic and less manageable cuts.

## Time for a sea change

WDM is calling for the UK government to:

- ✦ Cut carbon emissions by 80 per cent (below 1990 levels) by 2050.
- ✦ Include international aviation in the climate change bill emissions targets.
- ✦ Implement an environmental tax to curb the growth in aviation, and stop further airport expansion.

Internationally, our government must support targets within the post Kyoto agreement to ensure greenhouse gas emissions are irreversibly declining by 2015.

## Take action to end climate injustice

**Rich country emissions are fuelling climate change, which causes and locks in poverty. All the debt relief, aid and trade reform that campaigners have spent decades fighting for could be swept away.**

**WDM's long history of working with southern campaigners to tackle the root causes of poverty allows us to speak with authority about why climate change is a development issue, and a global justice issue. Please take action, and together we can stop climate chaos.**