

Climate change and social justice

Investigations
Work in progress

Start date: March 2009

How will climate change affect people and places facing poverty and disadvantage in the UK?

While there is increasing consensus that humans are contributing to the causes of climate change, there is limited understanding of how it might affect people and places in the UK in the long term.

There is concern that people and places facing poverty and disadvantage may be most at risk from the negative effects of climate change but that we are not well prepared to address this. It is not clear how we can develop responses that take account of these issues.

This programme will:

- explore the links between climate change, poverty and disadvantage in a UK context;
- support the development of socially just responses to climate change in the UK;
- seek to ensure that people or places facing poverty and disadvantage are not disproportionately affected by climate change, or by policy or practice responses to it.

We aim to:

- provide evidence on the social impacts of climate change in the UK, in order to raise awareness of the consequences of climate change for vulnerable people and places; and
- support the development of fair responses to climate change among policy-makers, practitioners and communities undertaking activity on mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation to climate change at a national, regional and local level.

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For the latest information, visit:

www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/climate-change-and-social-justice

At a glance

Programme title: Climate change and social justice

Aim: Supporting the development of socially just responses to climate change in the UK

Timescale: 2009-2011

Budget: £914,000

Contact: Katharine Knox (Programme Manager)

In March 2009, the JRF launched a programme of work looking at climate change and social justice. This paper outlines what we are doing, why, and what we hope to achieve through this work.

This summary gives a broad overview at the start of the programme. However, our programmes of work develop throughout their course. For the most up-to-date information, visit: www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/climate-change-and-social-justice

What is the issue?

Despite increasing policy focus on climate change both in the UK and globally, there has been limited consideration to date of the social implications, especially relating to people in poverty and disadvantage in a UK context.

What do we want to achieve?

Our overall goal is to influence the development of policies and practice relating to climate change. We want to ensure that these take account of the needs of people and places in poverty and disadvantage, so as to ameliorate the impacts of climate change for these groups.

This programme focuses on developing a better understanding of the relationship between climate change and social justice. The programme seeks to:

- build understanding and awareness of the relationship between climate change and social justice across policy and practice audiences and, potentially, the wider public;
- provide evidence on the social impacts and implications of climate change for disadvantaged people and places to inform national, regional and local responses to climate change;
- influence national policies relating to both adaptation and mitigation to support a progressive and socially just approach; and
- support practical technical and social innovation on local initiatives with wider national significance including through our own operations in the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust.

Our audiences will include policy-makers in the UK government and devolved administrations, other national stateholders, local service providers and non-governmental organisations, including community groups active at national, regional and local level who have a key role in responding to climate change or social justice issues.

What are we doing?

This programme is in three phases. We are interested in developing the programme in partnership with other organisations working in this area.

2009: Research

This work will build up evidence on both the social impacts and social justice implications of climate change in the UK.

We are interested in exploring which people and places in the UK are vulnerable to climate change and the relationship between risk and different aspects of disadvantage. This work aims to help policy-makers and practitioners to develop effective responses to climate change that take account of poverty and disadvantage.

We anticipate a range of approaches to this work; for example, research that:

- identifies and maps out which people and places are vulnerable across the UK considering a range of dimensions (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, health, status and location);
- reviews the impact of previous climate-related events, or similar scenarios of extreme change, to draw out future implications for disadvantaged groups or places;
- projects the relationship between anticipated climate changes and particular aspects of social disadvantage or inequality to consider how this might be affected in the future; and
- explores climate change concerns for people on low incomes.

2010: Policy and practice development

In order to develop responses to climate change we need to consider opportunities for both mitigation and poverty and social justice concerns relating to key topics that require action across both domains, such as:

- sustainable housing;
- fuel poverty;
- water poverty;
- 'green' taxes;
- personal carbon allowances/budgets;
- household insurance; and
- local adaptation strategies.

We anticipate commissioning research and analytical papers on different themes and arranging seminars with key stakeholders.

2010-11: Technical and social innovation

To boost local resilience to climate change, we want to support practical local initiatives that have wider national significance.

We will be exploring more fully how this might work in light of the activity of other organisations but expect that this could include:

- supporting environmental and poverty groups working together in a vulnerable community, or initiatives to scale up locally led mitigation or adaptation activity;
- research that explores wider lessons from innovative schemes where JRF/JRHT has a strategic interest.

Why is this topic a priority for the JRF?

There are several reasons why JRF wants to look at this issue.

It builds on existing work

Although climate change is a new focus for the JRF, it relates to areas in which we already have substantial expertise. In particular, previous JRF work has explored the relationship between environmental and social concerns.

It links our research and operational interests

The Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust as a housing provider is also developing learning on how we can respond effectively to climate change in a practical way and support the adaptive capacity and resilience of communities.

The JRHT is trialling new technology and monitoring the energy-efficiency of our housing stock. It is also considering how residents use their homes in practice, which may affect the overall energy performance of our homes.

Evidence on the social implications of climate change for the UK is limited

The implications for people facing poverty or disadvantage are only beginning to be explored in the UK. There is a need to fill gaps in understanding to inform policy: policies being formulated now may have long-term negative impacts if the social justice issues are not considered at an early stage.

JRF is well placed to help build coalitions

There is growing recognition that climate change is a social, not simply an environmental, issue. There is a need to develop third-sector capacity to respond to climate change and for non-environmental organisations to engage with the issue. In its convening role, JRF hopes to assist non-governmental organisations to increase their role and voice on this agenda to influence change.

It fits our strategic agenda

Climate change and environmental sustainability have been raised as future issues of concern by those involved in steering work under our key themes of poverty and place.

What has informed our thinking?

The programme is based on the following scoping work, including meetings with key stakeholders to generate ideas, stakeholder mapping and network development:

- an overview paper and roundtable discussion with environmental and social policy-makers, practitioners and academics to explore the key issues that a JRF work programme could cover. This generated some 100 ideas cutting across our interests in poverty, place and empowerment;
- informal meetings and discussions with key stakeholders including government departments (prior to the formation of the Department of Energy and Climate Change), academics and think tanks, third sector and funding bodies active in this field;
- attendance at two national climate change conferences and a conference of the Transition Towns movement;
- participation in discussion forums held by other stakeholders, focusing on the social impacts of climate change and the implications of climate change for civil society;
- discussions at the JRF conference, A Changing Climate, held in January 2009.

About the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust are two independent charities that work together to understand the root causes of social problems, identify ways of overcoming them, and show how social needs can be met in practice.

Our purpose is to influence policy and practice by searching for evidence and demonstrating solutions to improve:

- The circumstances of people experiencing poverty and disadvantages;
- The quality of their homes and communities;
- The nature of the services and support that foster their well-being and citizenship.

Most of our work centres on the interconnected themes of poverty, place and empowerment.

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