

How to... give people a voice: Climate hearings

Climate Hearings are events that give people who are suffering the impact of climate change the chance to make their voices heard locally, nationally and globally.

In 2009, Oxfam and partners aim to organise thousands of Climate Hearings in at least ten countries, involving 500,000 people. The aim is to provide a platform for the people who are most vulnerable to climate change, so that their voices can be heard by decision-makers and delegates – first at local then national Climate Hearings, and ultimately at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference in Copenhagen. The hearings will gather and document powerful personal testimonies showing the impact of climate change on ordinary families.

Climate Hearings are an essential part of our campaigning toolkit in 2009, as we strive to raise awareness of the human face of climate change and call for urgent, global action to contain climate change and help poor people adapt to its consequences.

In the UK local hearings are being organised by Oxfam offices in the months leading up to Copenhagen. Activists are encouraged to get involved and where possible organise their own events. In December, a global hearing will take place in Copenhagen, Denmark. A powerful panel of advocates will be assembled – and negotiators, government ministers and other delegates will be invited to attend. Materials from the local and national hearings will be used. There is potential to bring participants from local and national events to Copenhagen.

Planning your local climate hearing

- Establish an organising committee and define roles and responsibilities
- Organise a venue making sure it is an appropriate size for the number of guests
- Choose a date that is likely to work for local people and preferably that gives you a hook for media attention – such as the various intercessionals (UN progress meetings) and other climate focused meetings and events in the political and social calendar.
- Write an agenda, something along the lines of:
 - Short speech by the chair (and/or celebrity, if using one) in which the objectives of the hearing are clarified.
 - Introduce the panellists.
 - Hear the testimonies (consider providing about five testimony-givers who should be selected and prepared in advance).
 - Take two or three more testimonies directly from the audience, if appropriate
 - After testimonies have been heard, the panellists have a short discussion about conclusions and recommendations which will be relayed to the audience.
 - Complete action cards and create a statement to send to your MP (England), MSP (Scotland), AM (Wales) + Ed Miliband + Gordon Brown about what your communities issues are, what international issues are and what you want them to do about it.
- Invite speakers & participants, including
 - Residents from the worst hit areas;
 - Well-known advocates and social-/moral-/faith-group leaders/farmers union;
 - Local authority officers responsible for climate change and adaptation work;
 - Local MP/MSP/AM and other decision makers;
 - Oxfam regional offices;
 - Local media;
 - Local celebrities;
 - Representatives from local Diaspora communities;
 - Programme speakers (you can ask your regional office for availability once you have set your date)
- Arrange refreshments
- Speak to as many participants as possible before hand to ensure testimonies, case studies and facts are prepared
- Plan how you will promote your hearing before and after
- Make sure you make the link between the adaptation issues here in the UK and those that are occurring in other countries around the world. Regional offices can provide you with PowerPoint and video footage showing the issues and outcomes of some of the international hearings that have happened so far in countries including Malawi and Bangladesh.

- A limited amount of funds of up to £100 is available to help you organise and run a climate hearing, this can be obtained by sending a 1-2 side proposal to ssaunter@oxfam.org.uk. It is worth talking to organisations that provide small community grants such as Awards for All, the Co-op and your local authority – by working in a partnership with other groups you may increase your chances of attracting funding.

Running the event

- Open with a well-briefed speaker who can introduce climate hearings – why they are so important – how is climate change affecting lives? How have hearings gone internationally so far? What we hope to do/ achieve with the results?
- A standard panel size is four people; however, this shouldn't limit the number of panellists if more would be appropriate to your context.
- One chair should be selected who should be properly informed of the objectives and processes of the meeting.
- One moderator should be selected to help facilitate the hearing. The moderator should be fully conversant with the issue.
- Allow time for residents to tell their story or 'testimony' demonstrating how climate change has affected them; allow time for discussion and interaction.
- Allow time for 'experts' from local authorities and organisations like the Environment Agency to provide their experience of climate change – how has it affected work loads, budgets etc. What are they doing about climate change – adaptation work, planning etc?
- Make sure enough people are designated to record testimonies in writing, on audio, or on video where permission has been given to do so (anonymity must be respected, if requested). Write up key case studies. Look for compelling stories around climate change and vulnerability. Add quotes and include clear mentions of some solutions at the local, national or global level.
- Use appropriate sound systems to ensure the active participation of panel, testimony-providers and audience.
- Lead the discussions to ensure action points are taken and all those present are clear what is being done about climate change at a local level and how people can do more through personal and community action and through lobbying the government.
- Write up results and share them with Oxfam, media, MPs/AMs/MSPs
- Contact your regional office to tell them what you are doing and seek their support and advice.

Recommendations

- Make sure your hearing includes a diverse group of people (men, women, young and old) from the local area giving their personal accounts. Do you have any Diaspora communities locally who may have a special interest in the issue?
- Involve local authorities and organisations such as the Environment Agency who work on adaptation to climate change, such as problems caused by local flooding.
- Get creative! Make your hearings a little unusual, or eye-catching. Do something a little extra to attract the media such as inviting local celebrities, asking musicians, dancers, poets, drama groups etc to create CC performances.
- Ask local schools if they can contribute in some way – are they an Eco school? Are any of the children-covering climate change as part of the curriculum?
- Invite your MP/MSP/AM and ask them to feed back your concerns to the government.
- Keep your proposed number of actions to a minimum, don't detract from your main message... and don't confuse the public, or the media.

Suggested questions for testimony-givers

- In what ways have you experienced the climate changing?
- In what way has any such climate change helped or not helped you?
- What impacts are these changes having on you/your family/your community?
- Does the climate impact differently on women and men? If so, how?
- How are young people affected?
- What is the impact on older people?
- What is the impact on local business?
- What kind of support will help you overcome the negative impacts of changes in the climate – in the household, community etc.
- If there is one important thing that needs to be done to reduce the impact of climate change NOW – what would that be?
- What does the future hold for you?
- What kind of support has helped you in the last few years to overcome poverty?

Writing your proposal

In order to be eligible for funds to help you organise and run a Climate Hearing, you will need to submit a 1-2 sided proposal including:

1. Details of the date, location, agenda and invitees (including panel).
2. Clear mention of the number of testimonies (preferably five) you will gather and from whom
3. A commitment to document case studies from the testimonies
4. What outcomes and results you hope to get from the event
5. Details of any partners you will work with to organise the event
6. Details of any plans you have to involve media and local MPs/MSPs/AMs.

Contact details

For further information please contact Suzanne Saunter on 01865 473 154, ssaunter@oxfam.org.uk.

Alternatively you can seek advice and support from your local Community and Activism Campaigner:

Wales: Bethan Harper,
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