

## Teacher Climate Change Briefing – Q&A

### Introduction – The issue of climate change

Climate change offers humanity no second chances:

Rich countries must reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions first and fastest, with ambitious targets at home. High levels of “rich-country” pollution over the last century mean that even ambitious emissions-reductions targets will not be enough to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Deep emissions reductions in rich countries are still critical, but climate security will now be won or lost as a result of *co-operative efforts* in which rich countries finance large-scale reductions in emissions in developing countries.

Through a campaign of action and learning children/students can show they care and make a positive change to the future of climate change outcomes.

### Questions covered in this document:

1. Before I dedicate my teaching time to climate change – is it definitely happening?
2. Why is Oxfam concerned with climate change?
3. I thought the Kyoto Agreement had addressed these issues?
4. Aren't the Kyoto targets being met then?
5. What does current scientific knowledge suggest?
6. What is happening in Copenhagen in December 2009?
7. Why is it important for me to communicate what is happening at Copenhagen with my students?
8. Is it true that most of the countries suffering the effects of climate change are not those that caused them?
9. So what will make a fair deal at Copenhagen?
10. Are the rich and poor nations likely to agree on what needs to be done?
11. What will it take to make a difference?

## Q&A

### 1. Before I dedicate my teaching time to climate change – is it definitely happening?

The Earth's climate is definitely changing and we can be sure that atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased as a result of human activities. The concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide are higher now than at any time during the last 420,000 years.

Overwhelming scientific evidence supports the conclusion that observed changes in the global climate are, in large part, due to human activities and primarily related to fossil-fuel consumption patterns.

Without urgent action to curb greenhouse-gas emissions, the Earth will become warmer by 2050 than at anytime in the last 10,000 years.

### 2. Why is Oxfam concerned with climate change?

No one will be immune, but climate change will have a disproportionate effect on the lives of people living in poverty in developing countries.

Between 1990 and 1998, 94 per cent of the world's 568 major natural disasters, and more than 97 per cent of all natural disaster-related deaths, were in *developing countries*. A major concern is now the increasing burden that climate-related disasters present to Oxfam and the wider international humanitarian relief community.

People living in poverty are more likely to live in unplanned, temporary settlements, which are erected on unsuitable land – most prone to the risks of flooding, storm surges, and landslides. Most barely make a living through subsistence farming or fishing - and have no savings or assets to insure them against external shocks.

They lack sanitation and access to clean water. Poor diet and inadequate health-care provision mean they have little resistance to infectious diseases.

Their lack of social status and the informal nature or remoteness of their settlements means that they do not receive warnings of impending disasters as we would do. Relief efforts are least likely to reach them.

Lack of education and official neglect means that they have little alternative after disasters but to remain in or return to the same disaster-prone areas, with hardly anything left and with an increased risk of the same disaster happening again.

Poverty increases people's exposure, and climate change increases the risks; therefore Oxfam is concerned that people living in poverty and poor communities are the most vulnerable from climate change. It also threatens to undermine recent progress on poverty reduction in many countries, let alone reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

### **3. I thought the Kyoto Agreement had addressed these issues?**

The objective of the Kyoto climate change conference was to establish a legally binding international agreement, so that all the participating nations commit themselves to tackling the issue of global warming and greenhouse gas emissions. At Copenhagen a decision on what will REPLACE the Kyoto Protocol will be agreed and will also be LEGALLY BINDING. Under Kyoto, industrialized countries agreed to reduce their collective greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 5.2% from the level in 1990. The target agreed upon was an average reduction of 5.2% from 1990 levels by the year 2012.

### **4. Aren't the Kyoto targets being met then?**

Overall worldwide emissions appear to have risen by just over 3 per cent in the years following 2000-2004, with little sign that they are slowing currently. Yet even if industrialised countries were to cease all emissions from today, developing-country emissions alone would overshoot the 2°C pathway by 2020 on current trends. We now face a far greater climate challenge than when the Kyoto Protocol was first agreed over 10 years ago. Unbridled emissions growth in developing countries is no longer an option.

This means, that even if some countries have stuck to their quota, with those that haven't, and those that refused even to participate taken into account, the Kyoto Protocol may well not have had the desired effect – therefore taking action now for the future is absolutely crucial.

### **5. What does current scientific knowledge suggest?**

Scientists urgently need to set out what the emissions pathways in line with limiting the warming within 2°C (above pre-industrial temperatures) would look like. Until this information is available, the only tolerable strategy is to minimise the risks that poor people face first on the basis of the most recent scientific findings. If emissions go over 2°C then irreversible changes will start to take place.

More ambitious emissions reductions targets mean poor people will face fewer risks of hunger, ill health, insecurity, and death. In response to the latest science – and in order to protect their people from irreversible and catastrophic levels of climate change – 92 of the nations most vulnerable to climate change have called for global warming to be kept within 1.5°C.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are growing faster than scientific models predicted just ten years ago. Ice sheets are melting faster, suggesting that runaway climate change could already be in motion. While policy makers continue to assume that a halving of global emissions by 2050 can avoid catastrophic levels of climate change, the recent scientific findings suggest this goal falls far short of what is needed.

Together with most organisations dedicated to humanitarian causes, Oxfam's concern lies in avoiding a reverse in human development – and preserving a climate that makes poor people's efforts to escape poverty possible.

## **6. What is happening in Copenhagen in December 2009?**

From 7-18<sup>th</sup> December 2009 the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) will take place in Copenhagen. The goals of the climate change convention are to stabilize the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at a level that prevents dangerous man-made climate changes.

To fend off disaster, the agreement in Copenhagen will need to ensure that global emissions peak by 2015 at the very latest, and that total global emissions in 2020 will fall back to 1990 levels – or even lower.

The December days in Copenhagen in 2009 will be absolutely crucial in asking the world's nations to agree on a common way forward and take decisions – this will replace the Kyoto agreement in moving forwards for the future. It is likely not to be known until right at the end of the conference what has been agreed (and indeed *if* a future agreement can be gained) and the impact this will have on all the nations involved.

## **7. Why is it important for me to communicate what is happening at Copenhagen with my students?**

An agreement struck at the UN climate conference in Copenhagen could pave the way for a post-2012 climate regime that staves off catastrophic climate change. A fair and adequate global climate regime requires a massive effort across the board to reduce the risks to lives and livelihoods that poor people face first and most.

Time is running out. We face a small and shrinking window of opportunity to put ourselves on a pathway to prevent catastrophic climate change. The Copenhagen UN climate conference in December 2009 represents a last chance to change course.

Through a campaign of action and learning children can show they care and make a positive change to the future of climate change outcomes. Acting now will be less costly than delaying action and students can be part of this by influencing change.

## **8. Is it true that most of the countries suffering the effects of climate change are not those that caused them?**

Yes, there are huge inequalities in looking at who will suffer the most from the effects of climate change, and who is causing most of the emissions. As developed nations, the industrial revolution paved the way for the world's richest countries to dramatically increase emissions. However developing countries are now paying the price for our successful economic models.

### **Examples:**

- An average Australian emits nearly 5 times as much as an average Chinese, and the average Canadian emits 13 times as much as the average Indian
- About 100 countries, with a total population of nearly a billion people but less than 3 per cent of the global emissions, will have to suffer the effects of climate change impacts in the near term
- Developed countries are responsible for approximately 76 per cent of the GHG emissions already released into the atmosphere
- No country will agree to a post-2012 climate regime it perceives to be unfair. An agreement that simply maintains, or worse increases, existing injustice and inequality, is unacceptable.

## **9. So what will make a fair deal at Copenhagen?**

Oxfam's analysis of 'fair shares' suggests that more than 95 per cent of the (Annex 1 – a group of the world's richest countries) target falls to just six countries and groups.

For these six, the 2020 emissions targets (in relation to 1990 levels) are as follows: Australia (40 per cent), Canada (43 per cent), the EU (44 per cent), Japan (52 per cent), Russia<sup>24</sup> (20 per cent), and the USA (45 per cent).

These targets are substantially higher than any currently contemplated by Annex 1 countries so far, and show the extent of the political challenge Annex 1 countries must rise to if we are to secure the future of our planet.

## **10. Are the rich and poor nations likely to agree on what needs to be done?**

Rich countries argue developing countries must start to make emissions-reductions commitments before developed countries meet their commitment to take action first and fastest, and have provided long overdue funding.

Developing countries argue that they cannot take the same kinds of commitments until these previously made promises from developed countries are met.

Until developed countries take a leadership role consistent with their responsibility for emitting the vast majority of the atmospheric build-up of CO<sub>2</sub> over the last century, and show that economic well-being and welfare can be maintained while drastically cutting emissions, developing countries cannot be expected to take the same level of action as developed countries.

Countries such as the UK and Germany have shown that it is possible to maintain economic growth while reducing emissions; other developed countries must also set this example.

## **11. What will it take to make a difference?**

To achieve a deal in Copenhagen, richer countries must facilitate mitigation efforts in developing countries by contributing finance, technology, and capacity-building support.

This is not aid; rather it is part of rich countries' fair share of the global mitigation effort. The extent of mitigation actions by developing countries will be directly related to, and largely contingent upon, such support.

Oxfam believes that rich-country governments need to plan on making at least \$150 billion per year in public finance available to the international climate regime by 2013.

There are two things that need to happen:

1. Deep emissions cuts from developed countries
2. Financial assistance from developed countries for developing countries to reduce their emissions and to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Basically: cuts in emissions and cash to help poor countries.

From <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/issues/climatechange/>

# Pupil Climate Change Briefing – Q&A

This section is to help think of answers to some of the questions students may ask:

1. What will happen when we're older?
2. What is happening now?
3. What can I do?
4. Will it make a difference?
5. Why do people stay there when it floods/there is a drought etc - can't they just move somewhere else?
6. Are they doing anything to stop it?

## Q&A

### 1. What will happen when we're older?

Scientists have found evidence to show that the Earth is warmer now than it ever has been before. This is because of the humans like us that live on the planet and the amounts of emissions (or waste/greenhouse gasses) we are making from the way we live – such as factories for making clothes and cars, power stations for electricity, flying to holidays around the world and driving our cars etc....

In the future there is likely to be:

- More flooding as sea levels rise
- It will be harder to grow food crops and keep animals alive in certain places because of droughts (not enough rain)
- Glaciers will begin to melt which would impact the animals that live in cold, wintry environments
- Hurricanes/bad tropical storms could happen more often, which will cause lots of damage to buildings, homes and water supplies - and cost large amounts of money to repair.

### 2. What is happening now?

Some of the effects of climate change can already be seen.

These include:

- More and more floods *in the UK* and abroad – like in Bangladesh

- Droughts which make it hard to grow crops and keep animals alive – like in Kenya
- Glaciers that are melting – like in Peru
- Diseases that are spreading such as malaria because of rising temperatures – like in Tanzania

### 3. What can I do?

We can all make a difference by changing our day-to-day choices.

It is definitely possible to stop some of the things that might happen – we can all make a difference by working together!

Also:

- Write to Gordon Brown and ask him to attend the Copenhagen meetings (he has still not confirmed)
- Watch the film ‘The Age of Stupid’ (certificate 12) to get a better understanding of the issues
- Attend a huge rally in London on 5<sup>th</sup> December (dressed in blue to represent a human flood)
- Hold your own local “Wave” event
- Get active at school and home – raise awareness through events, actions and talk to people about what is happening

### Examples:

- Choosing local food when we go to the supermarket so that it hasn’t travelled miles to get into our lunchboxes
- Learning to grow some of our own food
- Set up a school Eco-Committee (if you haven’t got one already!)
- REDUCE the amount of items that we would normally use, throw away or recycle – remember **REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE!**
- Calculate our own carbon footprint and WALK or CYCLE to school and to the shops/friends houses when we can
- Turn down our heating and put another jumper on when we feel cold
- Turn taps off when not in use and only use enough water for the job in hand – such as boil just enough for ONE cup if the cup of tea is only for your mum
- Monitor how much energy we use at home and at school
- Use energy saving light bulbs at home and at school
- Try to do more by hand (like wash up!) and use machines less often as they use lots of energy

### 4. Will it make a difference?

Yes!

Just think – the more people that follow YOUR EXAMPLE, the more we can change people’s habits and use less of the world’s resources – this will help stop the climate changing.

If we all work together we can demand real and immediate change in the actions of our governments.

### **5. Why do people stay there when it floods/there is a drought etc - can't they just move somewhere else?**

Often people have lived in the areas that are affected all of their lives and don't have anywhere else to go. They are not able to move around as easily as we can with our cars, trains, aeroplanes – and it costs money to move.

It is the people in some of the poorest regions of the world that are living with the consequences of climate change.

### **6. Are they doing anything to stop it?**

People are trying to adapt to the changes they are seeing where they can – for example, if living in an area that is often flooded then rather than raise chickens, ducks have been introduced as they can cope better with the water levels. Lots of communities are having discussions about planting alternative crops, but these have to be reliable, as the food will be feeding their family and possibly also their animals. Plus at the moment the weather is unpredictable – so changing all of their farming and growing is a risky business.