

Dancing Together: Environment, Development, Aid and Faith Organisations in Climate Politics in the United Kingdom

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I believe that the presence of a very loud and vocal and confrontational grassroots movement on climate change is the thing which will really click everything up a notch in terms of policy and things actually happening (Marshall 2006).

This paper investigates the politics of climate change in the United Kingdom, and in particular, the role of environment non-governmental organisations (ENGOS), aid, faith and development non-government organisations (NGOs). I argue that the drawing together of environment and development concerns is a natural progression in climate politics, given the interdependent nature of development and environmental issues, particularly in developing regions. In addition, this is not surprising given the social justice dimensions to climate change impacts and climate change adaptation, and the pre-existing social justice focus of aid and development organisations. Where other NGO alliances are rare, the combination of a strong civil society, a shared social justice perspective, and a number of important personal connections within the movement laid the groundwork for a strategic joint NGO on climate change. The political result of an alliance between environment groups and aid organisations in the UK context is a strengthened political impact given the wide community support for development and aid organisations and their established voice in politics in that country.

Introduction

Climate politics has received a renewed surge of attention in recent times in part due to new revelations of its seriousness (IPCC 2007), due to the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, to a number of high profile reports (for example, Stern 2006), and due to popularisation amongst Western publics (for example, via the movies *An Inconvenient Truth* and *The Great Global Warming Swindle*). While climate politics as a whole encompasses a large number of actors in complex interrelationships, this paper focuses exclusively on the politics of ENGOS on climate issues, or as I term it, “climate activism”.

This paper investigates and analyses climate activism in one Western nation, the United Kingdom. The paper begins by establishing the context within which ENGOS operate, including the current state of play on climate issues, the UK environmental policy arena and the UK’s history as an actively exclusionary state in relation to ENGOS. This context is a powerful determinant of the playing field within which climate politics occurs and shapes the opportunities and challenges that face those engaged in climate politics. The second section of the paper then takes stock of the current state of climate activism in the United Kingdom. In the final section of the paper I argue that the context of British environmental politics has led to a number of key elements or characteristics within British climate politics that are unique. These elements include a strong social justice focus and agenda. This agenda has enabled strong and meaningful alliances and partnerships with other groups in civil society, in particular, development, aid and faith organisations. In addition, these alliances and connections have been fostered and made possible by a group of mid-level, professional activists, that have been employed at key organisations and in key positions throughout the sector over time. The strength and endurance of these connections have led to the formalisation of these partnerships in a

large joint campaigning coalition between environment and development groups on climate change: *Stop Climate Chaos*.

The strategies of British ENGOs and their ability to overcome the long standing “alliance problem” in environmental movements provides interesting lessons for other ENGOs and climate activists in the Western world. It also highlights approaching difficulties for Western governments as ENGOs explicitly draw stronger links between development and social justice within the climate change debate, effectively critiquing business as usual responses that fail to consider equity and justice.

Research methodology

These findings emerged from a research project on British climate change campaigns conducted by the author in 2006. The project sought to investigate the understandings of climate change campaigners of UK climate politics. The project began by establishing contact with groups involved in climate change campaigning in the UK. These organisations were identified through a survey of contemporary media commentary on climate change issues focusing on the non-governmental organisations involved in current debates around climate. From contact with the organisations, staff members involved in those campaigns were identified. The eventual interviewees were all full-time, employed campaigners within non-governmental organisations. Identified individuals were contacted to discuss the project and their potential participation; a total of 16 individuals were initially interviewed. Subsequently, interviewees were asked to nominate other campaigners involved in the climate change debate that they thought were important to speak to due to their involvement in the British climate change debate. This method is referred to as “snowball sampling”.

Snowball sampling is used in qualitative research design and method across a range of fields and disciplines. The most important advantage of the technique is that the approach enables the researcher to benefit from the participants’ understandings and knowledge of the target individuals and the community relevant to the research project. “Snowball sampling is a method that has been used in the social sciences to study sensitive topics, rare traits, personal networks, and social relationships. The method involves the selection of samples utilizing “insider” knowledge and referral chains among subjects who possess common traits that are of research interest” (Kaplan, Korf, and Sterk 1987, 566). Thus, as a method of selection of activists involved in climate change campaigning, snowball sampling is an appropriate and useful tool.

The primary research tool to identify, elaborate and capture campaigner views and knowledge was in-depth interviewing. The in-depth interview can be viewed as “a conversation between researcher and informant focussing on the informant’s perception of self, life and experience, and expressed in his or her own words” (Minichiello 1990, 158). Those interviewed are able to express their ideas, thoughts and views in their own words, through conversations that take place facilitated by a structured, but open-ended interview process (Minichiello, 1990; Reinharz, 1992) using this research approach. A semi-structured approach to interviewing was used. This provides a guide for the conduct

of interviews, while enabling free interaction between the researcher and the interviewee(s) (McCracken, 1988). Ahead of the interview, an interview schedule provided to participants listed issues and topics to guide the interview process. The intention was to provide an open and only loosely structured approach to each individual interview while maintaining a consistent focus in the discussions with each campaigner involved. The inclusion of broad open-ended questions around climate campaigns in the United Kingdom enabled participants to discuss and explore their views at length, and to raise a diverse range of issues they considered pertinent to the research project.

Groups Interviewed

The research project involved personal interviews with individuals from a range of environmental, development, faith and aid organisations within the United Kingdom active in the climate change debate. The groups involved includes a range of organisations from large, well known transnational environmental groups such as WWF, FoE (Friends of the Earth) and Greenpeace, influential national groups including People and Planet, The Global Commons Institute (GCI), COIN (Climate Outreach and Information Network), NEF (New Economics Foundation), Green Alliance, Christian Aid, and the Church of England. Also included was the student based organisation, Rising Tide, and local community social justice group, Capacity Global. Each of the groups can be considered a professional organisation with at least one individual devoted to climate change and associated issues as part of their regular work duties. The only partial exception to this is the GCI – which while wholly devoted to climate change issues is largely a one person organisation. The diversity of groups interviewed is indicative of the diversity of actors within the UK climate debate, at the local, national, EU and international levels. It is worth noting that none of the groups interviewed consider themselves as having significant access to government, and only one group sees government lobbying as its main activity (Green Alliance; Marsh 2006). This correlates with Dryzek et al's (2002) assessment of the British state with respect to environmental activism and environmental politics

While each group operates within this national context, it is also important to recognise the impact of both international involvement and engagement in transnational networks. This is particularly relevant for WWF, FoE and Greenpeace. Each is a national organisation, different from their counterparts in other national contexts, but they are also shaped by the norms, understandings and natures of their transnational organisations. In particular, the nature of the FoE's international organisation, has over time transformed the identity, focus and operations of FoE groups with an emphasis on social and environmental justice, through greater engagement with, and membership of, groups from the South (Doherty 2006; Walker 2004). The challenge of globalisation and the widening of the global environmental agenda have also meant other international environmental groups face similar questions about closer engagement with the issues of the global South. However, while both Greenpeace and WWF are also "signed up" to the idea of environmental justice, it shapes and informs their campaigning, strategies and operation much less than FoE (Rootes 2006).

The context of climate change politics in the United Kingdom

The policy context within the United Kingdom (UK), as well as within the European Union (EU) initially impacts the campaign potential and general political climate within which climate change activists must work. Two key factors influencing the general political climate for climate activism in the UK for the purposes of this paper are: the nature of British environmental policy and the nature of the British state with respect to activism and NGO politics.

The nature of British environmental policy has undergone significant change in the last 30 years. A major, but not exclusive, driver of these changes has been the influence of EU environmental policy on British domestic environmental policy style, policy structures and policy context. Before joining the EU, British environmental policy was characterised by cooperation, bureaucratic discretion and technical specialisation as well as being mainly reactive, pragmatic and case-by-case (Weale 1997; Waldengrave 1985). This was the logical outcome of the philosophy that government should shape only a broad legislative or policy framework and those agencies or bureaucrats at the local or regional level should be responsible for the specifics of implementation (Jordan 2004). However by the 1980s, British environmental policy style, approach, structures and content had put it significantly outside the norm with respect to the rest of Europe – it's environmental reputation was poor, it faced conflicts over environmental policy within the EU and conflicts with ENGOs at home. Weale (1992) argues that in the 1990s we can observe the growth of a 'new politics' of environment in Britain driven by the increased significance of environmental politics, a more transparent and accessible bureaucracy and regulation, and industry engagement with corporate social responsibility initiatives. However, despite this, Weale et al (2000) note that ENGOs have seen significant policy wins by lobbying the EU in Brussels rather than focusing all their energies in London. Thus, while British environmental policy has undergone changes since the 1970s, it still remains somewhat closed to environmental activists.

The nature of the state and its orientation or attitude to NGOs is a significant factor shaping the context within which activists operate. In their study of states, social movements and specifically environmental activism, Dryzek et al (2002) offer some insight into the nature of green politics and civil society in Britain. The study characterises states as *inclusive* or *exclusive* in their relationships with ENGOs, and the access allowed ENGOs within the state. States can also be *passive* or *active* in relation to inclusion or exclusion of ENGOs. Thus "[a]n *actively exclusive* state attempts to prevent the formulation and impede the operation of social movements that oppose its agenda" (Dryzek et al 2002, 660). In the study, the UK is the archetypal actively exclusive state: "government deliberately tried to undermine the conditions for association in civil society" (Dryzek et al 2002, 661). Throughout the 1980s in fact, Thatcher regarded ENGOs as 'the enemy within' (Porritt 1997, 62). While things have changed since Thatcher's departure and moderate groups are welcomed into dialogue, this history has significantly shaped British civil society and the way ENGOs have subsequently engaged, and currently engage, in climate activism in the UK.

Climate Activism in the UK

NGOs' strategy, campaigning and activism operate against the backdrop of UK and EU climate policy. The UK, under EU climate policy and the Kyoto Protocol, is committed to an impressive 60% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. This reduction, and a more immediate 20% reduction on 1990 levels by 2010, were recommended by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, and endorsed in the government's Energy White Paper in March 2003. The most significant government initiative in climate and energy policy was the recent 2006 Energy Review. The Energy Review sets the tone and targets for the next wave of changes in British energy policy to meet the EU and Kyoto targets. While UK environmental groups and alternative energy suppliers lobbied for a mandatory renewable target and energy demand management, the review focused on a new generation of nuclear power stations. However, the UK governments' own review into climate change policy in 2006 revealed that the government is off course in terms of meeting its own climate change targets (HM Government 2006), as are many Western governments. Under the Kyoto Protocol, the EU will meet an overall -8% target, while under the EU burden sharing arrangement; the UK will meet a -12.5% target.

In the NGO arena, one of the most significant developments in climate activism was the inception of *Stop Climate Chaos* in September 2005. Stop Climate Chaos is a broad coalition of civil society organisations whose key organisational concerns intersect with climate change. "We believe that civil society organizations and environmental groups, faith groups, humanitarian organizations, women's groups, trade unions and many others are in a unique position to mobilize public concern, and through this, the necessary political action, to stop climate chaos" (SCC 2006). Stop Climate Chaos as a group, and as a concept, is unique to the UK. While there are "umbrella" organisations for climate change activism in other countries, they are consultative and coordinating in their role rather than strategic and campaigning, for example, in Australia the Climate Action Network Australia (CANA) performs a coordinating role. The membership of Stop Climate Chaos has expanded significantly since its inception, but key members include Christian Aid, COIN, FOE, Greenpeace, Oxfam, People and Planet, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Tearfund and WWF-UK. The organisation is funded by contributions from FoE, Greenpeace, WWF and RSPB. This development within UK climate activism is discussed further below.

Key elements of UK climate activism

The first key element to observe about climate politics in the UK is the existence of a strong environmental justice focus. This is demonstrated within British climate activism in two key ways: firstly the social justice orientation of the major British ENGOs, and secondly, the active inclusion and involvement of development, aid and faith organisations in the climate debate and climate campaigns.

The social justice or environmental justice theme within British climate politics can be somewhat explained by the social justice orientation of the major British ENGOs, as well as a number of other smaller national and local groups. While Rootes (2006) argues that the operational commitment to environmental justice between the major organisations – WWF-UK, FOE and Greenpeace – varies, each expresses it as an organisational goal.

Social justice, it's about equality and moral responsibility [and] can be quite powerful ... we've always had that focus on social justice (Thomas 2006; People & Planet).

If you ask my colleagues who work in the Phillipines and Thailand [about social justice and climate change] ... they absolutely see it as intrinsically linked (Kronick 2006; Greenpeace).

And we decided years ago that we were never going to crack the issue of poverty unless you challenge the things that ... make and keep people poor. Climate change is increasingly one of those ... (Pembleton 2006; Christian Aid).

The ability, for example, of religious leaders to reframe the debate and to reach a whole new swathe of people who in theory have an ethical dimension to their behaviour, that's ... pretty powerful (Anonymous Activist 2 2006).

The debate about climate change is crucial to the debate on environmental equality (Adebowale 2006; Capacity Global).

And actually what we want to do is convey to decision makers and the public at large that climate change is a moral issue, is a social issue, it's a political issue ... it will cause death and hardship for countries and ... people (Sinha 2006; SCC).

This shared commitment inevitably shapes individual organisational strategies, tactics and campaigns, it also shapes the nature of British climate politics overall.

Integral to the nature of British climate politics is also the inclusion and engagement of more traditional social justice organisations, including aid, development, and faith organisations, in mainstream climate change debate. This serves to shape the debate away from scientific or technical contests over reductions targets, and instead to embrace a range of the themes including adaptation requirements, and the sharing and equity of such burdens, locally, nationally and internationally. The presence of these organisations within climate change debate in the UK gives its politics a particular thematic focus.

I think that the one thing that everyone agrees on about climate change is we have to stop treating it as a defined environmental and environmentalist issue (Marshall 2006; COIN)

I think that has been coming more to the fore and I think that's particularly as development organisations that are seeing the effects of climate change on the ground are therefore bringing that back to the UK ... and the campaigning work they do (Thomas 2006; People and Planet).

I think what we see here is an opportunity to reinvigorate the debate about sustainable development which kind of died in the late 80s and 90s... here's an opportunity to say ... growth doesn't come at any cost, it costs the environment, it also costs people who are more immediately dependent on the environment... So, I think what the development agency can do is very practically say there is a human face to this problem (Pembleton 2006; Christian Aid).

It's happening everywhere ... development and environment NGOs and activists are starting to come together and we have a really, really strong common agenda ... these people are vulnerable and are suffering [because of climate change] and you have to do something about it (Kronick 2006; Greenpeace).

We're really uncomfortable about environmental NGOs working here and development NGOs working there and ... church groups working over there ... one of the reasons why we helped set up the Stop Climate Chaos coalition is because you ... can't have social justice without environmental factors and vice versa ... they are linked (Davis 2006; WWF).

The new enthusiasm with which the development organisations are taking part in the climate change debate ... is incredibly reassuring ... my perception is very clearly that we are in an incomparable position of heightened awareness today compared to just two or three years ago (Sims 2006; NEF).

The dominant environmental justice theme within British climate politics shared between environmental development, aid and faith organisations also shapes the potential and reality of alliances between these groups within the climate change debate. These alliances can be exhibited in two key areas: those with other ENGOS and those with development or aid organisations.

NGO alliances, especially those that are not short term, or campaign specific, are not prevalent in environmental politics. This can be attributed to the range of ideological persuasions in the broader green movement, but can also be seen as a common theme amongst social movements generally, despite the possibilities presented by the anti-globalisation movement (Gould et al 2004). The different nature of British climate politics can be attributed to three factors – the actively exclusive nature of the British state with respect to ENGOS (Dryzek et al 2002), the unifying theme of social justice, and the longstanding personal connections amongst the community of professional activists.

I have earlier discussed the impact of the active exclusions of ENGOs from the British state, and the impact of this on British environmental politics has been profound. While this approach thawed with the departure of Thatcher and throughout the 1990s, to include more moderate groups such as RSPB and lobbying groups such as Green Alliance, the earlier exclusionary and disabling strategies of the British state led to the forging of an extremely strong civil society, and a common identity amongst ENGOs that is lacking in inclusionary states (Dryzek et al 2002). This united front and shared identity provided the ideal conditions for the British ENGOs' embrace of an environmental justice approach to climate change issues, and to forge alliances with social justice organisations within civil society.

The dominance of an environmental justice approach to climate change issues is rare amongst ENGOs in Western societies. While, the connections between environmental issues and development issues, are clear to many activists involved in the climate change debate, there has been little cooperation across these issues, often to the frustration of ENGO activists (Reynolds 2004). I argue that in the case of British ENGOs, the dominance of a shared environmental justice perspective provides the basis for negotiating a shared understanding of climate change issues through a shared language and transformative framework around social justice. This can be demonstrated through shared environmental justice projects undertaken within British civil society, but also through the way individual activists articulate climate change issues.

However, such alliances and shared understandings do not come into being spontaneously, and must develop and survive over time. In this case, while the active exclusionary nature of the British state with respect to ENGOs provided the right conditions within civil society to develop a shared identity based around environmental justice, other factors were also important to this development. The two key factors to facilitate the development and persistence of this shared view include increasing activist professionalism and personal activist connections between organisations.

The development of activism into a professionalised activity has evolved in Western societies, particularly in Western societies within large activist organisations or those with stable funding arrangements that allow the employment of full-time activists and campaigners, rather than relying on volunteers or administrative staff alone to support their operations. With the opening up of career opportunities within activist organisations, this has seen the development of a small number of highly trained professional activists and advocates that have worked in different positions and different campaigns within environmental, aid and development organisations across British civil society. This has helped to create and sustain a strong personal network amongst these campaigners.

Climate change activism is a small group of people ... they all know each other (Canzi 2006; FoE).

There are actually very few of us [who do climate change activism] ... there's only about

five or six of us ... we do have this informal ... network where we all talk to each other about ... particular issues .. So you do have this important grouping (Marsh 2006; Green Alliance).

Realistically ... [with regard to personnel movement between organisations] ... you find the same people moving around from one organisation to another... with them they bring expertise and interests so I think that has some influence (Feverre 2006; WWF).

We engaged in a number of very specific activities that were designed to bring environment and development organisations together ... so we created circumstances in which learning, shared learning and outreach could happen ... Out of that grew a longer, broader project ... we created the Working Group on Climate Change and Development (Sims 2006; NEF).

Christian Aid were involved (in these discussions about development and climate change) five or six years ago when Andrew Sims was their campaigns director (Marshall 2006).

It's happening [large scale alliances] because some individuals made a decision and then have been making a concerted effort that it's such an important thing that we have to try to facilitate it. So there has been a group of, half a dozen individuals who have taken a personal commitment to that (Kronick 2006).

I went to talk to a number of development groups and ... explain[ed] to them ... the latest information about the development impacts of climate change ... In other cases, I think it was more of an issue that some staff members had begun to think about climate change and what it mean to them [their organisation] (Sinha 2006; SCC).

This has served to reinforce and strengthen the shared environmental justice framework within British civil society as individual activists make and maintain connections across the different organisations as they move between campaigns, substantive positions and organisations. Indeed, in the British climate change debate, those personal connections have been instrumental in not only building a strong shared identity, but also to the development of key joint projects that laid the groundwork for formal alliances and formal joint campaigns.

The most significant of these projects, *Up In Smoke*, has produced a series of reports, and is an ongoing initiative by the Working Group on Climate Change and Development. The working group is a coalition of environmental, development, aid and faith groups within British civil society including Action and Aid International, Christian Aid, Columbian Faith and Justice, International Institute for Environmental Development, FoE, Greenpeace, New Economics Foundation, Operation Noah, Oxfam, People and Planet, RSPB, Tearfund, Feri Europe, WWF, World Vision. “Up in Smoke ... [is] ... trying to put flesh on the bones of the ... nexus of climate and development” as an issue (Pembleton 2006; Christian Aid). The first report in 2004 clearly sprung from an environmental justice framework, and emphasised that environmental and development concerns cannot be separated, and that climate change and its impacts, will prevent many

countries from meeting their development goals, and in particular, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to halve poverty by 2015 (WGCCD 2004). This first report has been followed up by three specialist regional Up In Smoke reports, two on Africa and one on Latin America and the Caribbean (WGCCD 2005; WGCCD 2006a; WGCCD 2006b). The commitment to, and success of, this collaborative venture laid an effective groundwork for further collaborative efforts, and alliance building, in particular, the formation of Stop Climate Chaos.

Stop Climate Chaos is a formal alliance organisation, based on social justice principles, campaigning on climate change in the UK. Its board includes directors and heads of campaigning from Tearfund, Women's Institute, FoE, WWF-UK, People and Planet, Oxfam, Greenpeace, RSPB, and Network for Social Change. The organization is funded by FoE, Greenpeace, RSPB and WWF-UK, making it a formal alliance organisation within British civil society. While the money and board members of SCC come from the executive level of environmental and society justice organisations within the UK, the groundwork and impetus for a formal broad scale campaigning organisation come from within the ranks of individual, professional activists within the sector. "A number of green organisations ... have been working on climate change for quite some time now ... [but] they haven't had the impact they would have wanted ... in shifting government policy ... I think what they did was look at the successes of coalitions and how coalitions can provide a pool for resources, a common voice ... [and] coalitions can add to the value of speaking to a wider audience" (Sinha 2006; SCC).

Thus Stop Climate Chaos, the most significant current element in the UK climate debate, represents a new development in broad movement strategic campaigns. The unique circumstances in UK climate politics, including an actively exclusionist state leading to a strong civil society, a shared framework of understanding through environmental justice, rising activist professionalism and strong personal connections between environmental development, aid and faith organisations, has produced a climate politics not evident in other Western nations. This combination of factors has produced a strong, shared focus and shared campaign agenda informed by an environmental justice understanding of climate change, the mitigation approaches, adaptation options, impacts and potential for reparations and compensation.

Conclusion

This paper is an investigation into the current climate politics within the United Kingdom. As all Western societies and governments negotiate the politics and implications of climate change, the UK provides one window into the dynamics of climate politics in developed countries. I argue that climate politics in the UK has evolved its particular characteristics against the history of a state that has actively excluded ENGOs, and the current transition to an environmental policy transformed by interaction with the EU. The nature of the UK's current climate activism is also shaped by three key elements within British civil society including the existence of a strong environmental justice focus, the development of activism into a professionalised activity and the strength of individual, informal, connections and networks. These elements have

provided the right conditions for the development of strong, multi-organisational alliances within British civil society on climate change. This has produced a stronger public engagement and the ability to speak with one voice in the UK climate change debate. While the full implications of this new strength are yet to be felt, this is a significant development to watch in the UK climate change debate.

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