

Joint Academy of Medical Sciences & Royal Society Climate Change and Health: Just & Healthy Transition Roundtable - Summary

Virtual meeting, Friday 23 April (14.00 – 16.30)

Creating a positive future vision of a more sustainable and healthy economy

Participants raised several cross-cutting points and themes:

- **Local and regional initiatives are leading the way.** National rhetoric is often not backed up by action, but we can look to devolved administrations, metropolitan mayors etc. to drive a just and healthy transition. Participants pointed to examples such as the Just Transition Commission in Scotland and The Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission.
- **Including those most vulnerable in the discourse is crucial to meet data gaps.** One of the most critical issues about ethnicity and diversity and how it relates to transition is that not much research has been done. One reason we are far behind is that we do not see enough engagement through climate conversations with these communities. Participants noted two community-led campaigns in London – Clean Air for Southall and Hayes, and the Stop the Silvertown Tunnel Coalition.
- **International spillover of the UK transition.** Decarbonisation in the UK cannot be just and healthy if it relies on harmful extractive industries in the global south (e.g. cobalt mining in the DRC for electric vehicle manufacture) or export of harmful waste (e.g. chemical waste and e-waste from renewable energy manufacture).
- **Coherent policy design and systems approaches** - Understanding and addressing interlinkages within and around the decarbonisation transition requires coordination between different ministries when designing policies will be crucial. There is a need to emphasise and articulate solutions which are capable of tackling multiple issues at a time, and explore the **adoption of systems perspectives more broadly**, which could support efforts to avoid unintended impacts on health and inequalities. Alongside this, it will be important to build an understanding and awareness of the international impact of these solutions.

Imperatives for a just and healthy transition

Participants noted that the fundamental issues critical to achieving decarbonisation are fairness and inequality, with several specific areas highlighted:

- **Gender.** Women are the largest single group affected by PTSD due to extreme weather impacts such as flooding. Despite the greater burden, there is not enough inclusion of women in the effort to tackle climate change, and not enough women's voices at the top table.
- **Ethnicity.** 'No justice without racial justice'. For example, BAME communities are most at risk of overheating and flooding in Glasgow. Participants highlighted the lack of diversity in discussions of just transitions.
- **Green recovery and COVID-19.** BAME migrants are three times more likely to have lost jobs during lockdown. The idea of a green recovery has mostly been driven by economists, hindering a more strategic approach built on values in which social issues can be seen as co-benefits rather than just add-ons. The narrative of recovery needs to be reframed from a fast recovery to a fair and just one.
- **60% of emission reductions need to come from societal change and action.** Public engagement and behavioural change are therefore vital. The makeup of modern Britain, gender equality and diversity of society, must be truly reflected in programmes of work, providing opportunities for everyone. The creation of jobs needs to focus on capacity building and education for those bearing the brunt of climate change. The glue to it all is access to finance that is fair and sensitive.

Employment

Challenges and trade-offs:

- While the evidence is that in the long term the transition will be neutral for employment on aggregate, there will be differing impacts geographically and socio-economically. Different sectors will see different effects, e.g. fossil fuel extraction and other carbon-intensive industries. In the UK, these areas are still struggling from previous economic transitions.
- Faster transitions are more likely to bring negative employment shocks – trade-offs of a quick transition.
- Employment insecurity has consequences for mental health and can also manifest in physiological health conditions, e.g. coronary heart disease.
- Unemployment is also associated with worse health, including the stigma around unemployment, risk of poverty, risk of impact on future employment.
- Unemployment forecast to increase to 6.5% by the end of this year, which is predicted to result in an extra 200,000 people in the UK experiencing poor mental health as a result. This has impacts on health services and provision.

- The effects of climate change on the health of workers are striking for the poorest where outdoor work is most prevalent, and the informal economy is largest. Increases in temperatures reduce the hours of work and possible methods of work, and there are links between heat stress and non-communicable diseases as well as infectious disease.
- More than 1 billion workers are exposed to outdoor air pollution, and close to 900,000 workers die every year due to pollution and unsafe working environments due to air pollutants.
- While we often assume green jobs are healthier and safer, we need to be aware that there could be potential adverse effects for occupational health. For example, risks from chemicals used in sustainable technologies, rare metal extraction relying on forced labour and child labour.

Opportunities:

- The same policies which will aid a just transition are ones which improve job quality and skills retraining – focus on carrot rather than stick.
- Policy tools to cope with these shocks are known to us – while the UK track record is not great and previous shifts have not been well managed, we can learn from these mistakes and be more ambitious.
- Focusing on the positives of the decarbonisation transition is important to maintain public opinion – people tend to be loss averse.
- Participants pointed to work done at regional levels such as Greater Manchester. Andy Burnham has committed to retrofitting across the city and region as a win-win-win programme to address zero-carbon targets. The programme addresses skills inequalities for young workers and those needing to move away from declining sectors, making homes warmer, and reducing energy costs.
- Another example is the Just Transition Commission, which reported to the Scottish Government last month. Almost without exception, their recommendations have been embedded into the manifestos for the next Scottish Parliament. The commission dealt with a range of issues including improving the mobility of workers between industries.

Built environment

Challenges and trade-offs:

- There are 28 million homes in the UK that need to reduce emissions and be made climate safe. How can this be done equitably and with efficient use of resources?
- In altering dwellings to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to expected changes in climate, is essential that other problems are not created: for health and wellbeing; the buildings and their contents; the economic, social and cultural viability of communities and the wider environment.
- Transition from urban to rural somewhat apparent during the pandemic – what are the implications of that for a green transition? Urban to rural movement is probably for socially mobile people anyway – environments need to be reshaped for mixed uses, need to think about equity issues.
- Disadvantaged groups, who are more likely to live close to areas with environmental burdens, will bear the biggest health impacts from our uncertainty in how to measure impact. This is important for how we measure, communicate, and think about uncertainty – what are the alternatives for policymakers. Often, uncertainty is used as an excuse not to act – instead, we need to make sure we act in the least bad way.
- Priorities for decision making and policies in the UK have focussed on economic development. It will be important to highlight how any recommendations will impact economic measures, such as through health economics or improving local retail environments.

Opportunities:

- Participatory approaches and systems perspectives are important. How do we make people aware of questions they are not even asking? There is a need to bring multiple perspectives together – physical modellers, residents, housing association, environment and governance.
- Critical is the focus on integration. This area has seen progress in Wales due to the Future Generations legislation, which has led to a new transport strategy based on four pillars of wellbeing including the idea of cohesive communities and active travel.
- The 20-minute city – discussed a lot internationally and in the UK. Positive for climate change and mental and physical health – requires a fundamental restructure of lots of places. Not a panacea, very costly. Location of new development in places where active travel is possible.

The role of legislation in a just transition

Challenges and trade-offs:

- There are discrepancies between different laws which make it unclear how the Secretary of State can be held to account for meeting climate change targets – need to aim for coherence in these legal obligations.

- While some Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) refer to health (for example the UKs NDC references air pollution), it is not widespread or integrated.
- In UKs NDSC, nothing is mentioned about the health co-benefits of mitigation. This is probably an avoiding mechanism, as not including them means states are not forced to report on them and go through technical review. States want to avoid getting caught out. There is currently no real focus on including health aspects in NDCs internationally as a self-standing aspect of mitigation which would be the ideal scenario.
- Participants noted that in the context of the Future Generations Act in Wales, the government needs to be pressed on where connections are being made. The promise of 60 thousand new green jobs is exciting – but where is the skills pipeline for those jobs? Predominantly the jobs are for white middle class men – how can all of society take part in this transition?

Opportunities:

- The Future Generations Act is the only legislation in the world aiming to protect future generations (<https://www.futuregenerations.wales/>) – it has the potential to provide a framework for other countries and/or regions to follow. The act sets out requirements for institutions - including government - to demonstrate how decisions impact the ability of future generations to meet their needs.
- Rather than introducing new legislation to aid decarbonisation initiatives, participants noted that there were opportunities to reform existing laws to target climate challenges. One example is the Planning Act 2008, in which one instrument – Government Policy – was not defined and was interpreted by the Supreme Court as meaning only written statements, which does not include ratification of the Paris agreement. Ensuring that Government Policy makes references to NDCs would enshrine international commitments to domestic law.
- Including health co-benefits in NDCs as part of the GHG target in mitigation would be a stricter target than including them in adaptation, as there are reporting requirements for mitigation. Participants thought that the UK pushing for including health into NDCs would send a strong signal and have great international impact.

Resources and case studies mentioned by participants.

- The Next Level: Good Lives for All in Greater Manchester (March 2021). https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/4337/gmca_independent_inequalities_commission_v15.pdf
- Just Transition Commission: A National Mission for a fairer, greener Scotland (March 2021). <https://www.gov.scot/publications/transition-commission-national-mission-fairer-greener-scotland/>
- OFFSHORE: Oil and gas workers' views on industry conditions and the energy transition (September 2020). <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Oil-Gas-Workers-Report-Final-Web.pdf>
- NOT ZERO: How 'net zero' targets disguise climate inaction (October 2020). https://demandclimatejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NOT_ZERO_How_net_zero_targets_disguise_climate_inaction_FINAL.pdf
- Towards Reparative Climate Justice: from Crises to Liberations. https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5e2191f00f868d778b89ff85/6071e27f9e138da86620f637_CW_GND-Reparations-Harpreet.pdf
- A Care-Led Recovery from Coronavirus (June 2020). <https://wbq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Care-led-recovery-final.pdf>
- PROCURING WELL-BEING IN WALES: A Review into how the Well-being of Future Generations Act is informing procurement in Wales. <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ENG-Section-20-Procurement-Review.pdf>
- Economic narratives for a 'just transition'? (September 2020). https://www.strath.ac.uk/media/1newwebsite/centres/ippi/pdfs/KT_ZEP_Brussels_26_Sept.pdf
- Steel manufacturing in Wales: ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future (November 2020). https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/74541/13/Munday_Turner_CEP_2020_Steel_manufacturing_in_Wales_ensuring_a_sustainable_and_prosperous_future.pdf
- CLEAN AIR FOR SOUTHALL AND HAYES – 'community group fighting for our right to breathe clean air in Southall and Hayes'. <https://southallandhayescleanair.org.uk/>
- Stop the Silvertown Tunnel Coalition. <https://stopsilvertowntn.com/>
- Health and Climate Justice at COP 26 (December 2020) - <https://www.medact.org/2020/resources/briefings/health-climate-justice-at-cop-26/>