



Session 3: Governance and decision making in responding to challenges caused by climate change

Saturday 4th February 2011. Leftbank Centre, Bristol

Introduction

In the final and third forum session LWEC wanted to explore public perceptions of how governance and responsibility for behaviour change should operate in future scenarios where the negative effects of climate change are being felt (e.g. where people have increasingly limited access to resources such as water, food and carbon based fuels). The key questions that were asked were:

- At what level should governance and responsibility for behaviour change sit, ranging from individuals to international decision making bodies?
- Upon what principles should decisions be made about how people access increasingly scarce resources?
- What approaches are most effective in encouraging sustainable behaviours and pro-environmental behaviour change?

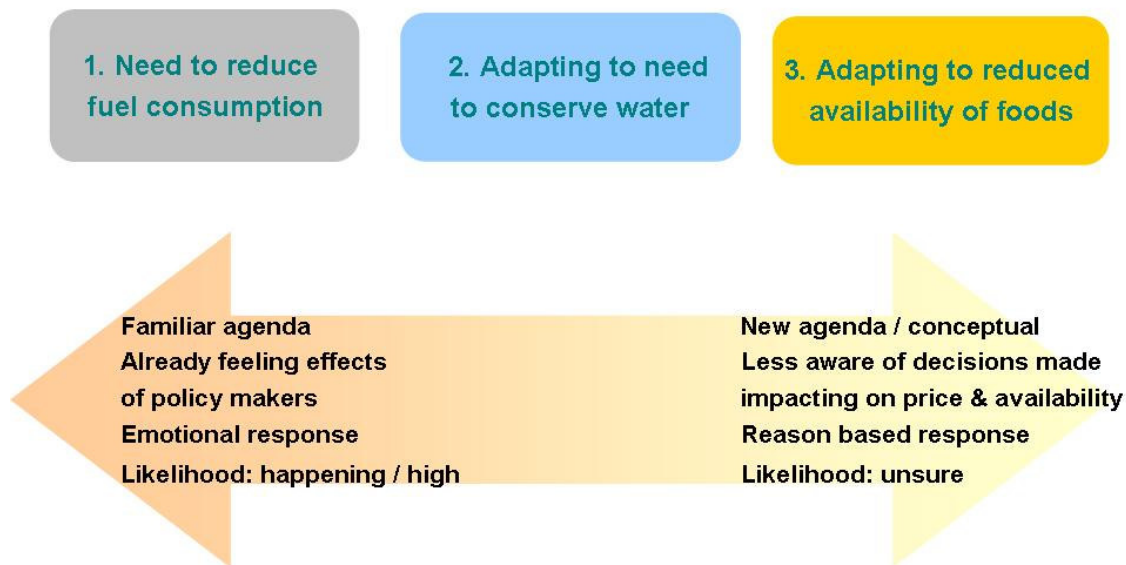
Members of the forum discussed these questions in relation to three potential future challenges: 1) reduced availability and access to a wide range of food; 2) reduced availability and access to water; and 3) the need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from transport to help mitigate climate change.

Within this report, we have provided an analysis of the conversations that were held in response to these three challenges, relating to the different resources and climate change challenges.

The role of the individual in responding to climate change

Some challenges associated with climate change were perceived as more familiar, more prevalent in popular debate and relevant to everyday life than other potential challenges. These differences seemed to have an important bearing on participants' emotional response to the topics, how far they viewed behaviour change as achievable, and the extent to which they agreed they had a role as individuals to make sustainable and pro-environmental choices. This is summarised in the figure below.

Figure 2: Mapping climate change challenges



The role of the individual in reducing carbon emissions from transport

This was an issue which elicited an emotional response from participants. Views ranged from strong defensiveness about current patterns of personal fuel consumption and a belief that individuals can only play a limited role in reducing carbon emissions, through to openness to individual behaviour change as an important way to mitigate a very real environmental threat. Those members who were more defensive about their current levels of fuel consumption and more closed to the idea of personal responsibility felt that

- in practical terms individuals were relatively powerless as compared with other bigger 'players' in the system. This was linked to a perception that it is impossible for individuals to make positive choices while other decision-makers, such as government and private transport companies, fail to offer a viable alternative in the form of an affordable, reliable and convenient public transport system. They argued that individuals cannot easily opt out from activities which at present necessitate the use of a car, and individuals cannot easily influence local and national transport infrastructures.
- in ideological terms individuals have a right to autonomy and freedom over their own behaviours, such as choosing when and how often they wish to use their car, go on holiday, transport their children to school, etc – this was strongly linked to participants' existing political outlook regarding the relationship between the individual and the state.
- there is still some uncertainty around the pace and scale of climate change – therefore it is very difficult to know what a proportionate response looks like at this stage.

Those who were more in favour of individuals having a strong sense of personal responsibility for acting in a sustainable and environmentally conscious manner emphasised

- their appreciation of people's ability to adapt their behaviours to a changing world. One older member of the forum noted how patterns in car use had changed dramatically over

the course of his life time, from a time when car use was limited because car ownership was unaffordable for most working people to a position now where it is a 'rite of passage' expectation for most teenagers. It would not be impossible for this to change once again.

- their faith in people to 'act responsibly' if they are fully informed about why they need to change their behaviours, what the benefits of making 'positive choices' are and what the consequences are of not acting responsibly (such as a negative impact on future generations). They felt that people had the capacity to behave in more environmentally responsible ways, much in the way that they increasingly adhere to socially responsible behaviours like not drinking and driving. It was noted that people are more likely to 'do the right thing' if they feel they are not acting alone, and if they feel they are being actively supported and enabled to make positive choices by other players in the system (such as government and private businesses). It is also important that they trust these supporting players to be acting responsibly and not in a mercenary or self-interested way. The role of public education, information provision and an informed public debate was cited here as an important means to emphasise personal responsibility and stimulate responsible behaviours.

Members' views tended not to shift in response to hearing new evidence and the arguments of others within the time made available for this debate. This suggests that there is a greater potential for deep seated views to be held on a politicised and familiar topics of debate that receives frequent attention in the media.

The role of the individual in adapting to the need to conserve water

Participants were generally more supportive of the need for individuals to take responsibility for changing their behaviours to use water responsibly, and less defensive than they were about fuel consumption. This was linked to the recognition that *"you need water like you need air"* and therefore a collective response to ensure fair access for all was considered a 'must do'. Furthermore changes such as installing a water meter and paying for what you use were seen to be relatively unobtrusive to one's way of life – consequently there were some within the group who recommended water meters should become standard in the future. There were also concerns amongst the group about the impact of metering on large families on low-incomes, but it is interesting to note an emphasis amongst the group on individual responsibility for responding to limitations in supply.

It is also worth noting that none of the participants had recent experience of individual choice being taken away from them (e.g. through a hose-pipe ban) or 'heavy handed' imposition of measures designed to reduce their water consumption. Furthermore, not everyone within the group paid the bills for water consumption within their home, meaning that they were new to considerations of price and consumption levels.

As with carbon emissions, forum members called for an increased level of information for the public to support them to understand the rationale for using water responsibly and to motivate them to change their behaviours. Forum members were surprised to read and hear the extent of the current water shortage in the UK as detailed in the information provided to them at the beginning of the group discussion. This points to a potential lack of education on water as a limited resource. In response to this, members noted that they would welcome meaningful guidelines on what is 'normal' and what is 'atypical' in terms of water usage. This links to the point made in relation to carbon emissions about people not wanting to act alone and wanting to be able to benchmark their behaviours against the efforts of others.

Forum members initially suggested that the water companies should be more proactive in informing users about the need to conserve water resources and providing guidelines for

usage. However, this suggestion was then contracted as Forum members reflected on the fact that private water companies were not best placed to encourage this kind of behaviour change.

The role of the individual in adapting to the reduced availability of foods

Forum members also approached this topic of debate in a less emotional and more analytical way, as compared to the later debate on reducing carbon emissions. This may have been because people had not considered this issue in depth before, and therefore brought fewer pre-conceived views about the topic to the discussion. Food is still perceived as a relatively cheap and plentiful commodity (unlike petrol) therefore some participants viewed the prospect of limited foods supplies as a longer-term possibility rather than an immediate risk. Therefore they were able to explore changes to individual behaviours without a sense that this would threaten their current lifestyle in the near future.

Although many members of the forum thought that supermarkets were, and would continue to be, the most powerful decision-makers in regard to food supply and consumption, they were also comparatively open to the prospect of individuals becoming more responsible for making pro-environmental choices in response to reduced food supply in the future. For example, they advocated

- individuals changing their behaviour to be much less wasteful of food – they felt statistics on how much food is wasted by the average household was unacceptable and that people needed to move away from a ‘convenience culture’ to be more respectful of food as a valuable resource. There was some degree of nostalgia for measures like rationing and the recent fashion for ‘growing your own’ which reinforce the value of food.
- individuals being educated (principally by government and public bodies rather than by the private sector) to be more environmentally conscious and informed consumers. One member cited the success of the ‘Five a day’ campaign as evidence that individuals can be supported to change their behaviours if provided with simple and effective messaging and information over time.

Nevertheless, it was also noted that there are likely to be barriers and limitations to individual consumers being the main drivers of behaviour change in regard to food consumption. For example, environmentally conscious consumer choices are often only available to more affluent consumers and it was thought this trend is likely to continue in the future. It was also noted food consumption is culturally driven (much more so than water) and individuals are likely to reject pro-environmental choices if this is in direct conflict with how people wish to enjoy food, express their identity through food and share food with others in social situations.

The role of other ‘players’

Beyond the role of the individual, members of the forum explored where governance and decision-making power should lie at a number of other levels, in the context of future climate change. These levels included:

Local organisations (including councils)
Markets, and corporate organisations
National government and regulators
International governing bodies

Forum members were provided with summary information on the current decision-making powers and levers of influence currently available to these players in relation to food, water and transport consumption patterns and behaviours. They were asked to make recommendations on where decision-making powers and influence should lie in the future context of climate change (i.e. scenarios where climate change has presented serious challenges around resource allocation and requires us to behave in more sustainable ways). They also considered the overarching principles and criteria that should be used to inform the decision-making processes of these players.

A table presenting an outline of the findings on perceptions of where decision-making power should lie in future climate change scenarios can be found below. The high-level findings that can be drawn from this are that:

- local organisations are seen to have limited power at present and in the future – ‘big society’ thinking appears not to have filtered through to forum members’ assessment of where power lies in relation to responding to climate change
- markets and corporate organisations are seen to be too powerful and in need of tighter and more powerful regulation by national and international governance bodies – this links to the Forum’s wider scepticism of “big business” to act in the wider interests of society. Further it was felt that “big business” could not be trusted to provide the level of information and education required to create behaviour change amongst the general public, and this responsibility falls rather to public bodies
- generally there is support for interventions led by national government (who are considered the obvious leaders of issues of this magnitude), but interventions should be designed to be mindful of people’s demand for personal choice and freedom, and not wholly reliant on punitive measures such as taxation – this is particularly important for maintaining trust that government is not acting out of self-interest
- it makes sense for there to be international-level coordination of responses to aspects of climate change that cross national borders (e.g. carbon emissions in the biosphere) and international regulation of globally traded commodities (such as food and oil).

Detailed findings on perceptions of where governance and responsibility should lie in future climate change scenarios

	Perceived degree of current power and influence	Recommended degree of power and influence in the context of future climate change
Local organisations (including councils)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparatively low level of power and influence in determining access to and consumption patterns of resources such as food and water • Higher level of power and influence in determining the extent to which individuals have a viable local alternative to private motor travel, i.e. local public transport infrastructure, community based car-share schemes, supporting businesses to act in environmentally responsible ways – although still lower in comparison to national government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlikely to have 'clout' needed to regulate access to food and water - these are seen as issues of national importance requiring a consistent rather than locally variable approach. • Opportunity to support local action for providing sustainable food supplies – e.g. local farmers' markets. But will lack proximity to players and arenas critical to influencing key determinants of consumption patterns, e.g. price as set by international markets / governing bodies and national-level supermarkets. • While there is a perceived role for regionally based water companies to act in accordance with an agreed criteria for determining access to limited resources (e.g. fairness in accessing a vital resource), there is little role for organisations at a more local level than this. • Overall perception that national rather than local government should be responsible for driving forward changes in transport behaviours and carbon emissions.
Markets and corporate organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived to be hugely powerful – especially supermarkets which are seen to have a near monopoly on how we access food; awareness of the role of international trading of food is lower • Seen to act in accordance with market forces (i.e. profit driven) so unlikely to have any natural incentive to encourage pro-environmental behaviours that encourage us to consume and spend less (unless this links to a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members highly sceptical of allowing private sector companies to make too many decisions around distribution of critical resources, or relying on them to help reduce our carbon intense transport dependency. • Perceived need for more checks and balances in the form of national and international regulation (from bodies such as OFWAT, Office for Fair Trading and the EU) to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the drivers underpinning capitalism such as the

	<p>companies brand or 'usp')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price is seen as a key determinant of consumption patterns. For example water is considered too cheap a resource currently and this is seen to encourage waste: <p><i>"Doesn't it all just come back to the money? The only reason your parents tell you to turn the light off, is because they know they'll get a big electricity bill, and the same should be true for water."</i></p>	<p>incentive to encourage higher and higher levels of consumption and mobility do not completely override the need to respond to climate change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - big business doesn't unfairly squeeze or destroy smaller players such as independent food suppliers, thereby limiting consumer choice - fairness as well as ability to pay is a underpinning criteria for allowing people access to critical resources – a future scenario in which only those who can afford to pay for increasingly expensive food, water and fuel was not considered to be acceptable - we don't wait until market forces 'kick in' to reduce our use of resources such as carbon based fuels – as by the time this is so prohibitively expensive that we are forced to consume less irreparable damage to the environment may have already occurred. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversely, increased 'marketisation' of limited resources could be helpful in some instances where there is currently high levels of waste – e.g. increased metering of water to help consumers understand how much they are consuming and incentivise them to be less wasteful. However, it was felt that fuel for transport was already too 'marketised' and should not be made even more expensive to reduce wastefulness. <p><i>"Water price needs to be a more important factor so that we take more notice of it."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived opportunity for the private sector to lead on developing greener technologies and encourage uptake of greener choices by employees (e.g. smaller and greener company cars)
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<p>National government and regulators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that currently national regulators do not have sufficient powers to compel big business such as supermarket chains to transition to more sustainable business models. <p><i>"Haven't supermarkets already been allowed to become too powerful to be regulated?"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National level governance should have a strong future role in leading, supporting and enabling more responsible resource consumption (e.g. by making alternative, lower-carbon transport options feasible). However interventions led by the state need to be more innovative than just taxation (e.g. on carbon based fuel). • Need for central regulation of market forces to ensure private sector organisations do not act unfairly or unduly irresponsibly in the pursuit of profits. <p><i>"Someone like the Office for Fair Trading should take a harder line against supermarkets to ensure their practices are sustainable and not wasteful."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In line with their broader political views, some participants are wary of excessive government intervention unless we're in an unequivocal crisis – to this end, many members of the forum reject the idea of rationing as a response to resource limitations (although there is an assumption that should resource limitation turn out to be more severe than expected the government should step in to intervene). <p><i>"Self-rationing is better. If you've got rationing from a body above you, that's different. And I don't see our society working like that."</i></p>
<p>International governing bodies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very mixed levels of awareness of the current role of international governance and markets in determining consumption patterns of globally traded commodities such as food and carbon based fuels – those with higher levels of engagement in environmental issues tend to be more informed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived need for more powerful international governance relating to food production. Members felt that individual countries would be encouraged to switch to more sustainable farming practices if they were part of a global movement. Otherwise countries are prohibited from implementing more cost intensive sustainable farming practices because they lose their competitive price on the global market. • Similarly, perception that some decisions about carbon

		<p>reductions should be made at an international level because carbon emissions affect the biosphere as a whole. Consequently carbon emissions should be regulated by a global partnership and there needs to be an international consensus in order to guarantee a state by state response – individual countries are unlikely to act alone, not least because it may reduce their ability to compete at a global level.</p>
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Ensuring players act together to implement effective responses to climate change

A key conclusion reached through the deliberations was that it will not be sufficient for players in the system to work in isolation, even if they were working to a consistent set of criteria for decision making. It was noted that climate change, its impact and our options for mitigating or adapting to its effects are so complex that no one layer of decision making can be excluded from, or have sole responsibility for our collective response. The following quote illustrates the inter-connectedness between different layers that was identified by members of the forum:

“Even decisions which seem individual – like driving your car in a certain way to be green or whatever need some sort of push. You’d need national government to raise awareness and advise people to do this and educate people about how to do this.”

Indeed, awareness raising and education initiatives reaching out to individuals and led by national government (about why and how to behave sustainably, and how to influence other decision making processes such as transport planning) was raised again and again as a key example of where different levels of influence and decision-making need to connect up. Forum members also called for more state interventions which incentivise and help individuals to make positive choices (i.e. structural rather than direct incentives, such as providing an affordable, convenient and reliable public transport system). They highlighted that a more sophisticated relationship between the state and the individual in supporting behaviour change may be needed. In support of this, members noted how the traditional levers of influence such as price increases as a means to curb our use of carbon emitting vehicles have not worked in changing behaviour thus far.

Members of the forum also recognised that people respond emotionally rather than rationally when making decisions about how far they should change their behaviour to adapt to or mitigate against climate change. As such people naturally look to others to assess whether their own behaviours sit within or outside ‘social norms’, and hold strong beliefs about who should provide leadership and set examples in modelling positive behaviours. This point is illustrated by the following quote:

“Educate the businesses because if they won’t change then we won’t.”

The majority of members agreed that as a society we need to have a continued debate about the relationships between different levels of decision-making and influence, and a continued review of the balance of power across them. This point was raised as part of their conversations around the need to reduce the power of profit-driven markets and private companies over limited resources and access to ‘essentials’ such as food (e.g. through stronger state intervention and regulation).

Carrots vs. sticks in promoting a systemic approach to behaviour change: what type of interventions will promote reductions in CO₂ emissions?

Forum members were introduced to a range of possible interventions which may work to reduce CO₂ emissions from transport, and asked to reflect on which types of interventions are likely to be most effective, including whether the focus be on incentives or penalties, on carrots or sticks?

Given the sensitivity around people’s access to cars and personal transport, many participants

reflected that it may be more politically viable for governments to offer incentives rather than restrictions. Democratically elected organisations may fear losing their mandate by penalising those who fail to reduce their carbon emissions. Also, participants underlined that penalties in terms of price rises are not always effective.

"We have seen the lack of impact of price rises on things like cigarettes and fuel already, they don't work on their own".

However, participants noted that there would need to be a combination of both incentives and penalties.

Where penalties are used transparently, and *"as long as there's a clear argument and reason as to why we're doing it"* they are felt to have a far greater potential to positively influence behaviours.

Forum members' emphasis here links to the broader call for greater levels of information and education for the public on the impetus to address challenges of climate change.

Participants highlighted that at present, it is felt to be too difficult for individuals to make a positive decisions to reduce their carbon emissions from transport. A range of factors including the state of public transport, and the nature of capitalist society which deems time as money, continue to favour use of the car. Therefore government should not focus on penalising car use, or incentivising behaviour change, but on changing infrastructures so as to make behaviour change more feasible for individuals. For example, there needs to be greater investment in transport, and a change in attitudes amongst employers who will be able to offer flexibilities (e.g. in terms of remote working) that make employees less reliant on personal car use.

Criteria for decision making around access to limited resources

Members of the forum felt that the following criteria were important for making decisions about managing access to limited resources and encouraging sustainable behaviours in future climate change scenarios. These are presented below in order of apparent importance to the Forum, starting with the most important.

- Providing a baseline amount of critical resources

All individuals should have access to a baseline amount of critical resources such as food and water – these are essential resources for living and not just resources impacting on lifestyle. Therefore in an extreme scenario where rationing was necessary, it was recommended that everyone should have access to an equal quantity of food.

"You can even go a few days without food, but you need water like you need air. It's critical."

- Aiming for equity and fairness

Although access to carbon based transport was not considered an essential resource in the same way as food and water, participants still felt that principles such as equity and fairness should guide potential resource management schemes such as individual carbon allowances (although questions were raised about the viability of imposing such a scheme). This was because carbon based transport is perceived as 'essential' by many to 'secondary means of living' such as engaging in paid employment.

- Flexibility to accommodate greater needs

While equal access to limited resources is the underpinning principle, within this there should be some flexibility for greater allowances according to need. This should only be so when there is a clear cut case, e.g. disabled people living in rural areas may need a greater carbon allowance because alternative means of travel may be closed to them. Some also suggested that businesses should be given a more flexible carbon allowance to support economic growth, while being expected to adapt working practices to reduce carbon emissions as much as possible. More controversially some noted that larger families may need more water and so should have access to affordable water provision, although some felt that having a large family was a personal choice with consequences attached to it and did not deserve special allowances.

- Protecting personal choice and control

Personal choice and control should be protected as far as possible – e.g. if you are subject to a personal carbon allowance, you should be able to spend your allowance how you wish. Although it was felt people should be encouraged to limit non-essential and recreational travel to reduce carbon emissions before reducing work-related travel. However, at this point in the discussion a number of forum members noted that achieving fairness is almost impossible, since almost everyone could be said to have ‘special circumstances’ in one way or another. One individual made a parallel to the complexities of the benefit system, which does not easily or accurately respond to the needs and circumstances of different people.

“Everyone will have their own reason why they need to use a car more, and it will be a case of whoever shouts the loudest.”

- Rewarding pro-environmental behaviours

There was also some support within one of the group discussions for the idea that individuals who choose pro-environmental behaviours should be rewarded by having a greater allowance to limited resources and should be liberated from some of the restrictions / regulations.

Next steps

- Thank you for reading this report. For further analysis on the deliberations of the Citizens Advisory Forum on governance and decision making in responding to challenges caused by climate change, please refer to the full report of the LWECC Citizens Advisory Forum.