

Chester World Development Forum



Minutes of Forum Meeting held on

Tuesday 9 July 2019 at The Unity Centre

Prior to our regular agenda we welcome Linda & Stewart Shuttleworth, giving a talk and leading a discussion on the theme 'The psychology of apathy about climate change...and what to do about it!'

Both Linda and Stewart were clinical psychologists who have recently retired and they are both active within the Forum.

Taken from "Yawning at the Apocalypse" by Brick and Van der Linden, The Psychologist, Sept 2018:

1. The probability of any behaviour is influenced by cost and benefit trade-offs: The immediate and personal v long-term and socially cooperative. For individuals, behaving unsustainably is often the easier option, less costly, and the default option. For example, young people and travel. We know that if we all behaved cooperatively it would be much better for everyone but looking long term is more difficult.
2. Our brains have evolved to respond to local, experiential, imminent and tangible threats. (think fight, flight or freeze). It is very difficult for us humans to grasp threats perceived as invisible, gradual, distributed and long term (ie, abstract and invisible)...such as climate change and its consequences.
3. Plus, when potential future losses are paired with uncertainty, people become more risk-seeking (think teenage pregnancies)
4. Finally, education and information are not enough for behaviour change. (Think about all the health-related advice we don't follow!) There's even the idea - what's the point in being concerned. We're all doomed anyway!

Challenges we face

1st Challenge

Less than 35% of people see climate change as a moral issue, because it is unintentional, blameless (?!) and invisible. In the absence of one clear villain, there is nobody to blame but ourselves, which leads to defensive biases, rather than activating moral norms and responsibility to drive behaviour change.

So, to establish a moral imperative...

- a) Address the specific values of the audience (typically, harm to nature for liberals, community cohesion and national security for conservatives)
- b) Highlight the villains
- c) Appeal to intrinsically valued long term goals (eg, being a good citizen)

2nd Challenge

Humans tend to conform, do what other people are doing. We pay attention to what other people want us to do. We follow social norms.

But sustainable behaviour is often counter-normative and in the minority (eg, not eating any meat, not going on exotic long haul holidays, not running a car)

And there's little social judgement/disapproval associated with unsustainable behaviour.

So, to promote social norms around sustainable living...

- a) Communicate what (similar, valued) others are doing, eg, in the local community. Give positive feedback (hotel towels example) to promote similar

behaviour. We need to change perceptions of what others are doing. Think about how we communicate eg who would we identify with?

- b) Avoid pairing desired behaviours with unwanted identities, eg a stereotypical Conservative going around with a mother earth reusable bag...
- c) And it's easy to reject the message if it's only coming from 1 group of people. It needs diverse groups so Support climate advocates across diverse social, political and religious groups- so the message is not rejected as having come from an outsider or rival.

3rd Challenge

Because climate change is abstract and invisible, we underestimate it. We bias towards immediate costs and benefits, are unrealistically optimistic about our ability to mitigate harms, and assume that the future will resemble the present. Climate change is portrayed in the media as a future, distant, global, impersonal, faceless risk, with gradual impact (think boil a frog story), and as a loss rather than an opportunity.

So, to make it real and to make solutions desirable...

- a) Highlight local environmental changes to increase emotional and experiential engagement.
- b) Think global, act local (up to a point)
- c) Frame policy options in terms of benefits, not losses (eg, benefits to public health rather than ability to travel independently, more cohesive communities)

Acknowledging that to turn the tide on humans' unsustainable use of the earth's resources, realistically, we urgently need change at all levels:

Individual

Corporate

Local and National Government

International

Recent arguments, explanations and points of view in the media:

- Self-protective, defensive denial (because the reality is overwhelming) and confirmation bias (we seek evidence for what we already believe) help us to avoid unpleasant emotions such as guilt and fear.
- **Radio 4 'The Age of Denial' series**
The record from personal health shows we are not very good at giving up things that are bad for us. 50 years of advice re the environment, yet we drive more, fly more, eat more, heat more, waste more, cool more. Personal sacrifice is not a force for change. Change will come from technology, politics and financial pressure, preferably combined. (Taken from an article by **Tom Heap, Countryfile presenter in Radio Times entitled "Costing the Earth"**).
- George Monbiot blames capitalism for climate breakdown, because of the drive to perpetual growth. But all forms of society focus on GDP, it's just that some (eg, Iron Curtain countries) have been less good at delivering growth. The problem is in how we measure human progress-GDP or Quality of Life? People think technology will bail us out. Eventually, capitalist-fuelled technological progress will produce solutions...after initial environmental degradation...**Oliver Wiseman, environment correspondent for I newspaper**
- And **Guy McPherson (CP Forum)** compares facing individual death with facing the extinction of the human species...wishful thinking and hope do

not produce recovery, and may interfere with the process of coming to terms with one's mortality. Grief is preferable to hope in facing the end!

- **Sir Mark Walport, CE of UK Research and Innovation:**
 - most people in UK (74%) are concerned about climate change research, but policy decisions and actions are difficult because of a 'trilemma'
 - 80% say we should reduce fossil fuel use
 - 82% are concerned about our reliance on energy from other countries
 - 83% are worried that gas and electricity will become unaffordable in 2 decades
- Policy decisions require difficult compromises...

3 comments from those present:

JT: Informed the meeting that, if in London, visit Tate Modern – conceptual artist's work on climate change

BP: CWaC meeting tomorrow about their follow-up to the Climate Emergency Resolution. We need to look out for information and CWaC will be looking for comments

New initiative in Handbridge at "Industry", located on corner of Eaton Road and Overleigh Road, called "Incredible Edible"

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CWDF Business Meeting

- 1 **Welcome:** TG chaired the meeting
Present: Terry Green, Bernard Payne (St Columba's Third World Group), John Tacon, Ann McCarthy (CAFOD), Heather Lannin, Gerald Grant, Lindsay Cussons (Baha'i), Terry Walsh and Mark Rideal (Chester CND), Susan and Tony Flynn, Lucy Haworth, Martin Preston, PJ Preston, Linda and Stewart Shuttleworth, Arnold Wilkes, Sean English, Pam Price (Church Action on Poverty), Margaret Mathershaw and Tom Ormiston (EP J and P Group), Gill Miller, Vicki Jenner
Apologies: Prior apologies from Sue Bownas, Tony Walsh and Katy and Brian Rowe
- 2 **Minutes/ notes of Forum meetings, and matters arising:**
 - Forum AGM of 14th May 2018 (*previously circulated, including note of Shantele Janes' talk about the work of CHAWREC*) – no matters arising
 - Chair to report on key issues covered in Committee meetings held on 3rd June and 1st July 2019: Main issues discussed were organisation of speakers for the coming year and the focus will continue to be climate change. We are looking to engage with other groups such as Transition Chester, Chester Sustainability Forum, Community Energy and Chester Friends of the Earth to promote local actions and also supporting national NGOs' campaigns
- 3 **Treasurer's report:** £384.71 approx
- 4 **Brief review of recent events, including:**
 - **Sustainable Chester Fair 15th June (FoE):** Had planned to have a CWDF stall but not enough people to staff it. VJ went and seemingly was quite well attended. Chester Transition had a stall. BP went for short time. He felt that there could have been a central point for people to go and get information. A good idea would be to have big banner on railings outside the park. Hopefully will

happen again next year and possibly will be more time for Forum to organise a stall.

- **Refugee Week in Chester 18-23 June (City of Sanctuary/Amnesty).** “City of Sanctuary” now spreading across the country. LC and TG attended the lecture at Grosvenor Museum. 2 speakers – one from “Umbrella Organisation” in London - Jonathan Ellis. Are now 120 local groups. Sheffield was first. Some schools signed up. The other speaker told stories about refugees and some of the stories were horrendous.
Seemingly the UK is the worst country in Europe for locking up asylum seekers in detention centres. Tiffy Allen, the Network Coordinator for Ireland, has written a book on history of City of Sanctuary. About 50 people attended.
Food event on Sat at the Unity Centre was well attended. A quiz had been organised and showed how so much misinformation out there. 900 people went through photograph exhibition in Chapter House, Cathedral
- **Climate Lobby, Westminster 26th June (Climate Coalition)**
Catherine Green, Colin Watson, Terry Walsh and AM went to lobby. Marched from Trafalgar Square to Houses of Parliament and then waited for Chris to meet us. Helen Tandy from CFoE and about 3 other people, possibly from CFoE were also there. Unfortunately, we were unable to put some of the issues to him because of time limits. Catherine has emailed him as a follow up with the points we were going to make. At 2pm we all sounded off our alarm clocks to signal a “climate emergency” and Chris was there with a rattle! Reports suggest there were 16T people there (but sadly there was no mention of it on the news) and well over 200 MPs were lobbied. Both CAFOD and Christian Aid have petitions which can be signed online.

5 Arrangements for forthcoming events/ relevant activities, including:

- Consideration of CWDF Diary listings (Diary update tabled):
- Consideration of events/ activities from “around the table” – including information and ideas from member groups regarding themes/ programmes for the 2019/20 season:
Date for the diary - 6th Aug Hiroshima and Nagasaki Flower Memorial – 8pm at The Groves Chester. Meet at the bandstand for readings, silent reflection and dropping of white flowers in the river

6 AOB:

PP: Church Action on Poverty has received 3 years funding and setting up “pantries”. People pay small sum and take what they need
Sean English: (new member) – involved in 30/30 campaign to protect the Oceans
SF: “Chifundo” now trying to sew multinationally. Trying to develop a biodegradable pad for women in Malawi
JT: attended last Transition Chester meeting. Community Energy projects are in the pipeline for Christleton and Neston Sports Centres and at Vicars Cross Community Centre. Also working on LED lighting in community owned buildings
DRAX to capture carbon seems to have petered out
IGas inquiry – seemingly outcome will not be known until Jan. – good news or bad news? Certainly means Fracking will be delayed for longer?

7 Date of next Forum meeting:

Tuesday 10th September, 6.45 for 7.00pm at The Unity Centre