



The Road to Copenhagen

UNA-UK climate change event series

Summary paper by Alex Evans

The Road to Copenhagen

UNA-UK climate change event series

Summary paper by Alex Evans



About the author

Alex Evans is a non-resident fellow at the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at New York University, where he runs CIC's work on climate change and global public goods. From 2003 to 2006, Alex worked as Special Adviser to Hilary Benn MP, then Secretary of State for International Development. Prior to joining the Department for International Development in 2003, Alex worked in a range of other climate- and energy-focused roles, including as the head of the climate and energy research programme of the Institute for Public Policy Research (2002-2003), as a specialist on emissions trading at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2002), as communications director at the Global Commons Institute (2000-2002), and as a political consultant on climate and energy policy (1998-1999). He also co-edits GlobalDashboard.org, the global risk and foreign policy blog.

Alex served as rapporteur to UNA-UK's climate change event series.

About UNA-UK

The United Nations Association of the UK (UNA-UK) is the UK's leading independent policy authority on the UN and a grassroots membership organisation. UNA-UK's objectives are to increase knowledge about the UN and stimulate thought and debate about how to make it stronger, more credible and more effective.

One of UNA-UK's priorities is to advance the domestic and international policies necessary to combat climate change. To achieve this aim, we advocate ambitious international diplomacy to hammer out binding global cuts to greenhouse gas emissions; we strive to forge local networks of individuals and groups engaged in accelerating the shift to a low-carbon economy; and we seek to widen engagement in the fight against climate change by emphasising its sweeping implications for human security and prosperity.

For more information, visit www.una.org.uk/climate or contact Natalie Samarasinghe, UNA-UK Head of Communications, on samarasinghe@una.org.uk or 020 7766 3451.

© UNA-UK October 2009

COVER PHOTO: Chinstrap penguins perch on top of an eroded blue iceberg near Candlemas Island. Icebergs are simply fragments of glaciers, and in October 2008, an iceberg half the size of Greater London 'calved' from the vast Pine Island Glacier (Pig). Over the past 20 years, Pig has been thinning at 40 times the previous stable rate.

Contents

1	Introduction.....	5
2	The challenge	8
3	2009 and the countdown to Copenhagen	14
4	Organising for change	18
5	Conclusion: climate change and active citizenship.....	22

If there is one lesson that we must learn from the climate crisis and our great challenges, it is this: we share one planet, one small blue speck in space. As people, as nations, as a species, we sink or swim together.

Let us seize the opportunities that history is giving us today, so that tomorrow's generations can look back and say: 'our leaders rose to the challenge. They did what was right'.

BAN KI-MOON, UN SECRETARY-GENERAL
3 October 2009

Introduction

During 2008-09, UNA-UK held a series of national events entitled 'The climate challenge: a call to action' with financial support from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Allan & Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust and the UNA Trust.¹ The aim of the series was to generate a critical mass of support among the British public ahead of the United Nations (UN) climate change conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009.

This short summary report sets out some of the key findings to emerge from the events, and puts them into the wider context of recent developments on climate change – and what needs to happen next.

UNA-UK's meetings were held at a critical time for global action on climate change. Scientific forecasts about the likely impacts of climate change are already becoming more severe than they were even just two years ago, when the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 4th Assessment Report was published. Policymakers have undertaken to negotiate by the end of 2009 what should follow the first set of targets agreed under the Kyoto Protocol, which will expire at the end of 2012. This is a daunting challenge, especially given the extent to which the credit crunch and the global economic downturn are absorbing policymakers' attention both domestically and internationally.

The need for more active and better-informed civil society engagement is crucial. There is a pressing need to improve awareness of the actions that individual households and communities can take to reduce their emissions and wider environmental impact. At the same time, the need for transformational change at the systemic level underscores that 'doing your bit' is only part of the challenge: more fundamentally, a global mobilisation is needed to open up the political space for a comprehensive, far-reaching deal.

Amidst the sustained economic turbulence of recent months, there are signs of hopeful developments on climate change – principal among them the current surge of interest in the concept of building a 'green new deal' into a globally co-ordinated fiscal stimulus. The risks are increasing too: as policymakers set out on the road to Copenhagen, the stakes are high.

UNA-UK's climate change work

UNA-UK's four events set out to consider three core questions in climate policy: first, what is the role of the UN in finding solutions to climate change and building resilience to its impacts; second, is the UK government doing enough to build a low-carbon economy; and third, what can individuals do to contribute to solutions.

¹ The London event on 30 April 2009 was organised by UNA London & South-East Region. Visit www.unalondonandse.org for more information.

In asking these questions, UNA-UK had five key aims. These were to:

- build support among the public and business community for immediate action by the UK government to promote the shift to a low-carbon, high-growth economy;
- re-configure awareness of climate change so that it is understood as not only an environmental problem but also a threat to security, health and prosperity;
- make the case that climate change needs to be treated as both a significant economic threat and an enormous economic opportunity for small and medium businesses;
- consider ways in which development strategies should be calibrated to encourage low-carbon, high-growth outcomes in developing countries; and
- highlight the changes needed to strengthen international institutional capacity for addressing climate change.

As part of the process of preparing for the events, UNA-UK produced a set of five briefing papers on climate change (all available on UNA-UK's website at www.una.org.uk/climate), setting out:

1. an introduction to climate change,
2. an overview of the architecture of international institutions and policy processes on climate change,
3. an overview of the key elements of the UK's climate change policy,
4. a summary of some of the ways in which climate change links to other issues (in particular energy security, food prices, water scarcity, conflict, trade and international development), and finally
5. an outline of some of the actions that individuals can take to reduce their carbon footprints.

UNA-UK's four climate change events

Held in Birmingham, Belfast, London and Edinburgh, each event had a different focus, audience and impact.

Inspiring local action, Birmingham, 7 June 2008

The first of UNA-UK's meetings was held in Birmingham at the city's Council House. The conference was opened by UNA-UK Chair Lord Hannay of Chiswick and speakers included representatives of Avaaz.org, New York University's Center on International Cooperation, Birmingham City Council, Groundwork West Midlands and the University of Birmingham. With many local government, community and faith leaders in the audience, the emphasis was on showcasing climate projects and schemes in Birmingham. Participants were encouraged to share experiences, including the transferability of successful local initiatives, in order to equip them with ideas to 'take home'.

Multiplying the message, Belfast, 6 November 2008

The second event was held five months later in Belfast, and was opened by the Lord Mayor of Belfast. The conference heard from keynote speaker Dr Bernard Bulkin, one of the UK's Sustainable Development Commissioners, and representatives of EnAct International, Global Action Plan, WWF Northern Ireland, Belfast City Council, Friends of the Earth and Northern Ireland Environment Link. The Belfast conference had a unique impact in terms of its potential to create 'multipliers' of UNA-UK's 'call to action' as the audience consisted mainly of local government and NGO employees, representing thousands across Northern Ireland.

Debating the international context, London, 30 April 2009

The third event in the series was organised by members of the London & South-East Region of UNA. Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate

Change was one of the keynote speakers at the event, which was hosted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Mr de Boer gave an overview of the main factors that will determine the success of the Copenhagen summit in December 2009. He was joined by IMO Secretary-General Efthimios Mitropoulos; UNA-UK Chair Lord Hannay – who outlined the diplomatic challenges in securing agreement at Copenhagen; and representatives from the World Wide Fund for Nature, International Atomic Energy Agency, UK Department for Transport, Carbon Disclosure Project, and other business, civil society and media experts.

Equipping individuals, Edinburgh, 6 June 2009

UNA-UK's final event was held as part of its 2009 Annual Conference in Edinburgh, and the focus was very much on education and individual action. Delegates debated a raft of motions – ranging from climate refugees to new technologies such as solar power supergrids – to decide which would become part of UNA-UK's official policy. Trewin Restorick, one of Al Gore's UK climate change ambassadors, ran workshops on how individuals can combat climate change in their daily lives. The new climate change film 'The Age of Stupid' was also screened.

In all, more than 700 people attended the events, with many more reached via web and media coverage.

This paper draws on discussions at all meetings to give an overview of the scientific and political context for climate change in 2009, together with an assessment of some of the key landmarks on the 'road to Copenhagen'. It concludes with a section discussing the need for active citizenship as a prerequisite for global action on climate change, and sets out some of the ways in which this might be brought about.

The challenge

The scientific context

Climate change is one of the most serious issues on the global agenda today. The most recent (Fourth) Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),² published in 2007, emphasised that climate scientists were now certain that human activities are responsible for altering the climate. Moreover, severe effects are inevitable unless greenhouse gas emissions are curbed dramatically.

The Fourth Assessment Report's 'best estimate' of likely global average warming by the end of the century was three degrees Celsius, up from 2.5°C in the Third Assessment Report (published in 2001). The report also flagged the possibility that temperature increase could be as much as 6.4°C by 2100 – again, significantly higher than the upper estimate of 5.8°C set out in the last IPCC report.

For the first time, the 2007 report included in its analysis 'carbon cycle feedbacks'³ – whereby changes in the climate system lead to ecosystem effects, that in turn lead to still further climate change. These feedback loops represent some of the areas causing greatest concern among both scientists and policymakers.

One example of this is the prospect of emissions from Arctic permafrost, much of which is already in the process of melting. At present, this permafrost holds around a trillion tons of carbon that could otherwise be released into the atmosphere. Scientists warn, however, that as much as 10 per cent of this total could be released over the course of the century ahead.

Another example, which may now be coming into play, is the capacity of oceans to absorb carbon dioxide from the air. As winds become stronger due to the effects of climate change, deeper layers of oceanic water become exposed which are already saturated with carbon and hence less able to absorb carbon dioxide from the air.

As these examples imply, the fact that such feedbacks increase the impacts of climate change are only half the story: the other half is that in the process, they also make it harder to tackle climate change. At present, the climate system absorbs around half of humanity's greenhouse gas emissions, meaning that only half of what we emit actually ends up increasing airborne concentrations of greenhouse gases. As feedbacks kick in though, the capacity of the climate system to act as a 'sink' for our emissions starts to erode, with the effect that a higher proportion of what we emit remains in the air.

This means that in order to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at any given level – whether 450 parts per million, 550ppm, 650ppm or even higher – faster and steeper emissions reductions are needed than would otherwise have been the case. In other words,

² All IPCC Assessment Reports are available from www.ipcc.ch. The next report is due to be finalised in 2014.

³ IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007, Working Group 1 Report: 'The Physical Science Basis'

with every year that the climate system's capacities erode, the task ahead of us gets harder. So what needs to be done?

Scenarios for stabilisation

Much of the current public debate on climate change is centred on the need to limit global average warming to two degrees Celsius. But although it has become a central reference point for policymakers and civil society groups, the 2°C figure is in some ways arbitrary. It reflects a best guess on where a critical threshold for avoiding catastrophic climate change might lie. It is nonetheless a reasonable starting point and the group of eight (G8) leaders agreed on this limit in July 2009.

In terms of what a 2°C limit means for greenhouse gas concentrations and emission levels, the last IPCC Assessment Report stated that limiting average temperature rise to between 2.0 and 2.4°C would involve stabilising greenhouse gas levels in the air at somewhere between 350 and 400 parts per million of carbon dioxide (or 445-490ppm of carbon dioxide equivalent once other greenhouse gases have been included). This translates into global emissions peaking by 2015 at the latest, and then declining to between 50 and 85 per cent below 2000 levels by 2050.

To reverse these trends, a revolution will be needed – and it will need to be most revolutionary of all in developed countries like the UK, which are currently the world's highest per capita emitters

However, that needs assessment remains very much at odds with recent emissions data. The International Energy Agency (IEA),⁴ for example, projected in its 2008 World Energy Outlook report that 'energy-related emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases will rise inexorably', putting average temperatures on track to rise by as much as 6°C in the longer term.

Current atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide are already at just over 385ppm of carbon dioxide – close to the upper limit of the range defined by the IPCC for limiting warming to 2.0-2.4°C – and are growing by around two parts per million each year.

Looking to the future, the 2008 World Energy Outlook forecasts continuing growth in emissions, from 28 Gigatonnes (Gt) a year in 2006 to 41Gt by 2030 – an increase of 45%. A recent study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), meanwhile, produced a median projection of atmospheric CO₂ concentrations reaching 866ppm by 2095, with median surface warming of 5.1 degrees Celsius.⁵

To reverse these trends, a revolution will be needed – and it will need to be most revolutionary of all in developed countries like the UK, which are currently the world's highest per capita emitters.

The political context

Current institutional architecture on climate change

The central reference point in the international response to climate change remains the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)⁶ – which unlike the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, has been ratified by almost all of the world's countries (the exceptions being Iraq, Andorra and Somalia).

The Convention's core objective is defined as 'stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system', although policymakers stopped short of actually quantifying what such a level might be – and indeed have yet to begin serious discussion of a binding global target that would impose an upper limit on airborne greenhouse gas concentrations.

4 The IEA is an intergovernmental organisation which acts as an energy policy advisor (www.iea.org).

5 'Probabilistic Forecast for 21st Century Climate Based on Uncertainties in Emissions (Without Policy) and Climate Parameters' by Sokolov, A.P. et al, *Journal of Climate*, 22 (19): 5175-5204, 2009

6 Both the 1992 Framework Convention and 1997 Kyoto Protocol are available from www.unfccc.int

Instead, policymakers have to date pursued a more 'bottom-up' process, with the most important element so far being the Kyoto Protocol. Under the terms of the Protocol, 37 developed countries (at that stage still including the United States) took on binding targets for the period of 2008-2012, which were supposed to reduce their emissions collectively by 5.2% below 1990 levels.

Kyoto and its shortcomings

Although Kyoto was never intended as more than a first step on the long journey towards climate stabilisation, the agreement nevertheless had two important shortcomings. The first was that two key developed country emitters – the United States and Australia – failed to ratify the treaty (Australia has now done so, following a change of government). The second problem stems from the fact that the treaty included no quantified limits on developing countries' emissions.

The reason for the latter failing was essentially the principle of 'common but differentiated' responsibilities. In other words, the idea that because developing countries have much lower per capita emissions and less historical responsibility for causing climate change, they should be allowed to continue to grow their economies in the short term while developed countries take a lead in tackling the problem they had done most to create.

Whether or not this approach was fair, it resulted in the majority of the world's countries being left out of emission caps. Had developing-country emissions remained low, this may not have mattered. But the astonishingly rapid growth of a number of 'emerging economies', above all China, meant that a quintessentially global problem was being tackled through a fundamentally sub-global approach.

Today, the world has just three years left until the targets agreed at Kyoto expire – and must now urgently agree on what should come after it. Policymakers have set the demanding deadline of forging a deal on this question by the time of the 2009 UN climate summit, due to be held in Copenhagen from 7 to 18 December.

National policy commitments on future action

In advance of the conference, some countries have started to set out their stalls on the scale of emissions reductions that they would be prepared to contemplate (see box below on the UK Government's Low Carbon Transition Plan).

One of the most significant interventions in this debate has been from the European Union (EU), which agreed in late 2008 a far-reaching package of measures after months of tough negotiations between member states.⁷

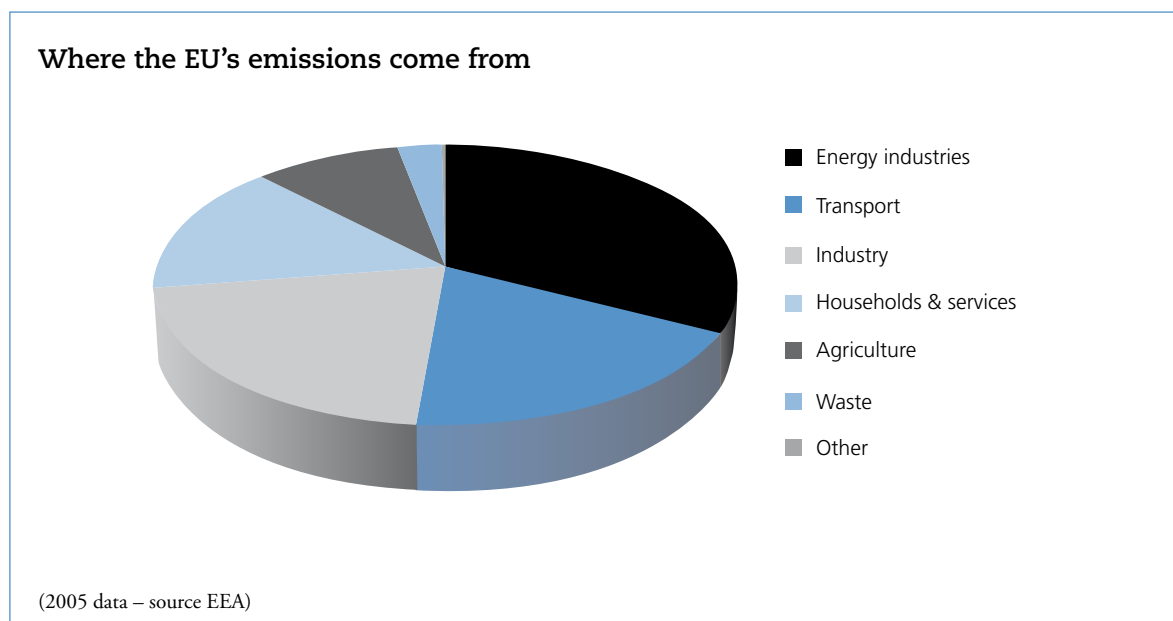
⁷ www.eea.europa.eu

Key elements of the UK Government's Low Carbon Transition Plan (July 2009)

Under this plan, the UK seeks to achieve the following by 2020:

- cut emissions by 34% on 1990 levels by 2020;
- have more than 1.2 million people working in 'green' jobs;
- overhaul 7 million homes and help 1.5 million households to produce their own clean energy;
- source around 40% of electricity from low-carbon sources, renewables, nuclear and clean coal;
- import half the amount of gas than the UK otherwise would; and
- ensure that from 2020, the average new car emits 40% less carbon than now.

The Plan can be downloaded from www.decc.gov.uk



The package's headline commitment centres on a so-called '20-20-20' target, under which the EU has legally committed itself to:

- a 20% cut in emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 (as compared with their 1990 levels);
- 20% of energy to come from renewable sources like wind power, again by 2020; and
- a 20% reduction in overall energy consumption.

A key political objective for the EU in setting out these unilateral commitments was to try to increase pressure on other countries to follow suit – an objective further supported by an additional EU undertaking that if other key emitter countries commit to tough action of their own, the EU would increase its 2020 emissions reduction to 30% below 1990 levels rather than the current 20%.

Inevitably, the country that most observers are now looking to is the United States. Under George W. Bush, climate change was famously not a priority, but President Obama's election has heralded a sea change. Obama has consistently emphasised climate change as one of his top priorities (both before and since his election), and has underscored this by appointing a range of high-profile climate and energy experts to key posts within his Administration, who have been widely welcomed by other climate experts and countries.

However, the challenge that the Obama Administration now faces is daunting, given that during the eight years of Bush administrations, US emissions were allowed to spiral. Although Obama has committed the US to an 80% emissions reduction by 2050, the US's nearer-term targets are more modest. Under Obama's New Energy for America plan,⁸ the US proposes to bring emissions back to their 1990 levels by 2020 – a much more modest target than the EU's reduction of 20% or even 30% by the same date, although one that nonetheless implies a drastic emissions reduction in absolute terms. Obama's energy plan is more ambitious on renewable energy, however, with targets of 10% of electricity to come from renewable sources by 2010, and 25% by 2025.

Another critically important emitter is China. While China has so far remained opposed during international climate negotiations to taking on a binding limit on its absolute emissions, the Chinese government does have an aggressive set of domestic policy measures in place to tackle its emissions.⁹

⁸ www.whitehouse.gov

⁹ www.gov.cn/english

Despite the fact that China's GDP per capita is one tenth of the US level, China has a domestic target of reducing its energy intensity (the amount of energy it takes to produce a given unit of GDP) by 20% by the end of 2010.

Recent developments in multilateral climate policy

How have these developments in the political background played out in the specific context of recent UNFCCC summit meetings?

Before answering that, it is worth pausing to note how multilateral negotiations on climate change are currently structured, given that (confusingly) UNFCCC summits now have not one but two discrete negotiating processes to talk about future action on climate change.

By the time of the Poznan summit in late 2008, the credit crunch and the shadow of a severe global economic downturn had moved to the forefront of media and political attention – leading many climate experts to worry about the risk of climate change being displaced from the top of the global agenda.

The first one – called the 'Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex 1 Parties¹⁰ under the Kyoto Protocol', or 'AWG-KP' – was set up at a UNFCCC summit held in Montreal, Canada in 2005. The second process is more recent, dating from the 2007 UNFCCC summit held in Bali, Indonesia.

At that summit, negotiators agreed the 'Bali Roadmap' – a two-year process designed to achieve agreement on future action at the 2009 Copenhagen summit. Within the Bali Roadmap,¹¹ there are two 'tracks'. The first, designed to build on Kyoto, takes forward the AWG-KP process just mentioned. The second track, on the other hand, follows on

not from Kyoto but from the original 1992 Framework Convention. It therefore includes not only developing countries (all of whom are outside Kyoto's Annex 1 list), but also – crucially – the United States. This second track became known as the 'Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action under the Convention' – or 'AWG-LCA' for short.

Negotiators also agreed the Bali Action Plan at the 2007 UNFCCC summit, which set out the four key areas for discussion during the two years leading up to Copenhagen:

- **Mitigation** (action to reduce emissions and hence mitigate climate change);
- **Adaptation** (supporting developing countries and poor people in coping with the impacts of climate change);
- **Finance** (the financial flows, in particular to developing countries, needed to move to a low-carbon, climate-resilient global economy); and
- **Technology** (the low-carbon technologies needed to drive this process of transition, and ways of ensuring that developing countries have access to them).

The 2008 Poznan summit

The most recent UNFCCC summit was held in Poznan, Poland in December 2008, and marked the half-way point in the Bali Roadmap.

Many observers noted the extent to which the political context had changed since the Bali summit a year earlier. The 2007 summit was held shortly after the publication of the latest IPCC assessment report, with the result that many negotiators shared a sense of purpose and urgency on the need to move forward with far-reaching action to tackle climate change.

¹⁰ 'Annex 1 Parties' refers to the industrialised countries that took on binding emission limits when they signed the Kyoto Protocol. The AWG-KP process was envisaged as being about the need to agree further and more demanding targets for the developed countries that already have emission caps under Kyoto.

¹¹ The Bali Roadmap and Bali Action Plan are available from www.unfccc.int

By the time of the Poznan summit in late 2008 though, the credit crunch and the shadow of a severe global economic downturn had moved to the forefront of media and political attention – leading many climate experts to worry about the risk of climate change being displaced from the top of the global agenda.

On the other hand, many climate negotiators were buoyed by Barack Obama's election as President in the United States – particularly given that Obama's first video message after the election was on the subject of climate change and clean energy, and sent the Poznan summit a direct and unequivocal message of US re-engagement with the multilateral climate process.

However, despite these major shifts in the political context for climate policy, developments at the summit itself were less dramatic. Although the Bali Action Plan had set out the need for an overall global emissions reduction goal, the summit made no attempt to agree on one (confounding the hopeful expectations of some observers). Progress was made on some of the more technical parts of the UNFCCC agenda, though, and an important concrete outcome was agreed in the form of a global Adaptation Fund designed to assist poor countries in meeting the costs of coping with climate change. Nonetheless, a huge amount was left open for the 2009 negotiations leading up to the Copenhagen summit.

2009 and the countdown to Copenhagen

With less than two months to go to the landmark Copenhagen summit, how are prospects looking for a global deal on climate change?

The credit crunch and the global downturn

The credit crunch has had a number of direct and indirect effects on climate change and prospects for action to tackle it. In direct terms, one of the most dramatic impacts of the credit crunch and the downturn that has followed in its wake, has simply been to reduce demand for goods – and hence the energy needed to produce and transport them. During the long boom of recent years, demand for goods and energy reached historically unprecedented levels – a trend seen most dramatically in the case of the oil price, which in July 2008 reached an all-time high of \$147 per barrel. Greenhouse gas emissions rose dramatically in line with economic activity, maintaining their historically close correlation with GDP levels.

As the downturn has gathered pace, however, prices for oil and other commodities have collapsed. At the time of writing, the oil price has fallen back to around \$70 a barrel, and global emissions have also fallen significantly.

A Green New Deal?

A second effect of the global downturn has been to lead to fiscal stimulus packages from many governments, most dramatically in the case of the United States, which has agreed a \$787 billion economic recovery plan. Many advocates of action on climate change have called on policymakers to use these packages as a window of opportunity to invest decisively in low-carbon technologies, in what many have termed a 'green new deal'.

Some US-based climate experts have strongly welcomed the US stimulus package's support for clean technology: the research director of Greenpeace America, for example, commented that "we would never have been able to imagine legislation funding developments on this carte blanche scale". The plan includes provisions to improve energy efficiency in public and domestic buildings, create tax breaks for solar and wind energy companies, invest in upgrading the US's electricity grid, and expand subways and inter-city trains.

Welcome though these developments are, it is not yet clear that the rhetoric matches the reality in either the US or other countries undertaking stimulus packages. The \$100 billion allocated to green measures by President Obama represents 13% of the total US stimulus package – some way short of Nicholas Stern's call on governments to spend 20% of their economic recovery packages on clean energy.¹²

In Europe, meanwhile, the EU-wide recovery plan allocated 14% of its spending to climate-friendly action; national figures range from 19% (Germany) to 8% (France) and virtually

12 'An outline of the case for a 'green' stimulus', Stern, N. et al, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, February 2009 (www.lse.ac.uk/collections/granthaminstitute)

nil in Italy and Poland. Interestingly, China has allocated one of the highest proportions of its recovery package to clean technology: as much as a third of the country's \$580 billion recovery package has been allocated to climate-friendly action, principally in the area of energy efficiency.

Resource scarcity trends and policy coherence

Another important contextual factor amid the economic turmoil has been the evolving context for resource scarcity issues. During 2008 dramatic spikes in the prices of oil and food triggered a wave of global concern as more than 30 countries introduced restrictions on their exports of food. Riots and civil unrest took place all over the world and policymakers put both issues, together with climate change, at the very top of the global agenda (as seen for example in policymakers' priorities at the 2008 G8 summit in Toyako, Japan).

Oil and food prices have now declined (the latter much less markedly than the former). Oil prices currently stand at about half the level they were at during the 2008 peak, and the benchmark UN Food and Agriculture Organisation¹³ food price index had by February 2009 fallen back to its mid-2007 levels. However, a range of multilateral organisations are emphasising that it is too soon for national policymakers to breathe a sigh of relief on these scarcity issues. The UN World Food Programme,¹⁴ for example, has stressed that current food price levels remain acutely problematic for poor people (and especially the almost 1 billion people who are undernourished) even at their somewhat diminished levels.

The International Energy Agency, meanwhile, has warned that as oil prices have fallen, so too has essential investment in new oil production – even though this new production is vital to replacing existing oil fields, many of which are declining faster than anticipated. Consequently, the IEA warns, the world may face the threat of an oil supply crunch as soon as it emerges from the downturn. The issues of food and energy prices matter for climate change because of crucial interconnections between all three areas of policy that are often badly understood by analysts and even less well reflected in policy.

If, for example, additional investment in oil production is essential for global energy security (and for food security too, given that agricultural systems depend on fossil fuels to produce fertiliser, power on-farm energy use, and process, ship, freight and distribute food), this still needs to be squared somehow with the need to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases.

Similarly, while the impacts of climate change represent a serious long-term threat to global food production, the need to reduce emissions is also likely to have a dramatic impact on how the world produces food. Agriculture is itself a major emitter of greenhouse gases, accounting for up to 32% of global emissions depending on how emissions are counted. This implies that agriculture needs to shift from being part of the problem to being part of the solution to climate change.

All in all, then, the overall context for high-level policymaking in 2009 is one in which it is becoming increasingly clear that there are few, if any, 'single issues' left in international relations.

Climate change cannot be separated from wider resource scarcity trends such as food and energy prices; at the same time, neither can climate change be separated from questions about the operation and regulation of the global economy, which is currently under more severe strain than it has been for decades. Multilateral approaches to tackling these global

The issues of food and energy prices matter for climate change because of crucial interconnections between all three areas of policy that are often badly understood by analysts and even less well reflected in policy

¹³ www.fao.org

¹⁴ www.wfp.org

challenges hence need to ensure that they take a highly integrated approach that is capable of understanding how action to tackle one issue will inevitably have consequences for other global issues too.

How is today's multilateral system positioned to cope?

Evolution in global governance

One of the key challenges faced by the multilateral system is its lack of coherence between different issue areas. The 2004 UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change summarised the problem as follows:

"The fragmented sectoral approaches of international institutions mirror the fragmented sectoral approaches of governments: for example, finance ministries tend to work only with the international financial institutions, development ministers only with development programmes, ministers of agriculture only with food programmes and environment ministers only with environmental agencies...."

Existing global economic and social governance structures are woefully inadequate for the challenges ahead. To tackle the challenges of sustainable development countries must negotiate across different sectors and issues, including foreign aid, technology, trade, financial stability and development policy. Such packages are difficult to negotiate and require high-level attention and leadership from those countries that have the largest economic impacts. At the moment, there is no high-level forum which provides leaders from large industrial and developing economies a regular opportunity for frank dialogue, deliberation and problem-solving."¹⁵

To tackle the challenges of sustainable development countries must negotiate across different sectors and issues, including foreign aid, technology, trade, financial stability and development policy

As the Panel's observation implies, one of the most important areas where greater coherence can be brought to climate change and other global challenges is in the context of forums that bring together heads of government.

Until very recently, the G8 was widely recognised as the most important such body – but the G8 was also the focus of widespread criticism given that it includes no developing countries as members. (China, India, Mexico,

Brazil and South Africa are all members of an 'outreach group', but participate in G8 summits as guests rather than as full members.)

The developing role of the G20

However, as the downturn has gathered pace, so the G20 – hitherto a body for finance ministers rather than heads of government – has assumed an increasingly important role in the global system.

In November 2008, US President Bush hosted a summit of G20 countries (plus Spain and the Netherlands, neither of which is technically a member of the G20) in Washington DC. During the summit, leaders primarily looked at collective action to support the banking sector, prevent a slide into tit-for-tat protectionism and support the need for co-ordinated fiscal stimulus to prevent a downturn from evolving into a multi-year recession or depression. The UK hosted a follow-up meeting, the London Summit, in April 2009, and the US again hosted the G20 at Pittsburgh in September 2009.

Almost by accident, then, the G20 has emerged as a complement to the G8, leading some commentators to wonder whether it might in time even replace the G8 – although other voices suggest that a body with 20 members risks being unwieldy, and that even if the G8 is gradually eclipsed, leaders will still want to meet in smaller groups than the G20 would provide opportunities for.

However, a larger question than that of which countries are present at which summits is arguably the question of the issues that particular summits are designed to tackle. While policymakers are naturally focusing heavily on the need for co-ordinated action to support the economy, there is a worrying lack of capacity in either governments or multilateral agencies to look to the future, and plan in advance for how collective action on short-term economic priorities can at the same time prepare the way for long-term, comprehensive action on climate change and resource scarcity.

A related question is how the increasing trend to delegate tough issues upwards to the level of heads of government can be integrated most effectively with the existing UNFCCC summit process on climate change. While the UNFCCC remains universally recognised as the central forum for decision-making on climate change, the UNFCCC is also sometimes criticised for involving only environment ministers (who often have limited political clout) – leading some to suggest that while the UNFCCC may be the best forum for countries to use to sign off a deal on climate change, it may not necessarily be the best forum in which to negotiate such a deal.

Areas of uncertainty

There is no simple answer to either of these questions, and in practice 2009 has been hallmarked by a complex dance between different elements of the international policy agenda.

One area of uncertainty, as discussed above, will be how the credit crunch affects the political context for climate change. In particular, will policymakers use the downturn as an excuse to delay action to reduce emissions, or will they use economic recovery packages as a chance to turn the concept of 'green new deals' into a reality and help to create the conditions for a global deal on climate change? Another question is how UNFCCC talks relate to discussions at the leaders' level, and indeed how countries' efforts to move ahead with domestic legislation on climate change match up with inter-governmental discussions at the global level.

But there is also one other dimension of political uncertainty, and one that could emerge as the most significant variable of all in determining the kind of climate that the world's population is destined for: the variable of public engagement, discussed in the next section.

Organising for change

2008 provided two particularly striking examples of the new power of publics in foreign policy and global issues, both highly relevant to climate change.

One of these was the Irish referendum that rejected the European Union's Lisbon reform treaty. Whilst policymakers had spent months carefully negotiating a compromise deal following rejection of the proposed EU Constitution in 2005, the Irish 'no' illustrated the reality that publics can mobilise to oppose international deals that they perceive as failing to represent their interests. After EU reassurances on specific points of concern the Irish people subsequently voted in favour of the treaty on 2 October 2009, but the original vote served as a 'wake-up call' for policymakers.

For climate negotiators, this tale implies uncomfortable possibilities. It is by no means beyond the realm of possibility that the Copenhagen summit could produce a deal between policymakers, only to see that deal rejected in due course when the time comes for countries to ratify the deal domestically. In many ways, the endgame on climate change at Copenhagen will have the opposite dynamic to chess: whereas in chess the number of pieces on the board shrinks as the game moves towards its conclusion, in the case of climate change the number of actors involved in the policy debate is likely to increase as a deal gets closer, and more and more constituencies realise that their interests are at stake and mobilise to protect them.

A rather different example from 2008 is the extent to which publics mobilised to support Barack Obama's run for the US Presidency. Despite a generally held view among media commentators that US election turnout figures were in a trend of terminal decline, and that this was even more so in the case of political activism, the Obama campaign managed to engage hundreds of thousands of activists, making innovative use of social networking technologies to maximise participation and reach.

As yet, the world has yet to see what such a mobilisation might look like at the global level. While international NGO coalitions (such as the Make Poverty History campaign on aid, debt relief and fair trade in 2005) are nothing new, what was different about the Obama campaign was the extent to which it was self-organised, self-recruiting and self-replicating: a very different model from most NGO campaigns, which by contrast remain highly centralised.

What both of these examples illustrate is the rapidly growing importance – and power – of publics in affecting global issues, particularly given the capacity of new communication tools to enable citizens and civil society groups to co-ordinate their action and maximise their influence.

At the same time, the role of publics is perhaps especially important in the context of climate change, given the extent to which climate change is a decentralised political challenge.

While a global climate deal may be negotiated between a few hundred diplomats and technical experts, the fact remains that what such a deal must ultimately achieve is to affect the investment decisions of millions of companies, and the behavioural decisions of billions of people around the world. It has often been observed of climate change that, as a global problem, it requires a global solution; but at the same time, the other side of the coin is that it is also a challenge at the level of 6.6 billion individuals.

What do publics think about climate change?

Many commentators on climate change argue that public perceptions of the issue reached a kind of 'tipping point' in 2006 – a year during which the Stern Review of the economics of climate change did much to affect policymakers' and business leaders' views of the issue at the same time as Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* brought analysis of climate change to a much wider audience.

The findings of polling firm GlobeScan¹⁶ support the argument that perceptions of the seriousness of climate change have grown significantly over this period. From 2003 to 2006, GlobeScan found that the number of respondents in over a dozen countries around the world regarding climate change as 'serious' rose from 82% to 88%. The figures for 'very serious' rose from 49% to 61% during the same period.

Polling results also show that awareness of the issue of climate change is global, including in developing countries:

- an average of 70% of people around the world classified themselves as having heard or read 'a great deal' or 'some' about global warming;
- 79% of people globally saw human activity as a significant cause of climate change; and
- 65% of people believed that it was 'necessary to take major steps very soon', versus 25% who believe it necessary to take 'modest steps in coming years' and 6% who felt it was 'not necessary to take any steps'.

However, while majorities of people globally see climate change as real, caused by human activity, and urgent, it is also striking that even in countries where climate change has become a significant political issue (such as the UK), there are limits to how much this broad awareness of climate change translates into actual appetite for radical action. A 2007 report by the polling company MORI¹⁷ on public attitudes to climate change in the UK found that:

"The public continues to externalise climate change to other people, places and times. It is increasingly perceived as a major global issue with far-reaching consequences for future generations – 45% say it is the most serious threat facing the world today and 53% believe it will impact significantly on future generations. However, the issue features less prominently nationally and locally, indeed only 9% of people believe climate change will have a significant impact on them personally." (emphasis added)

Moreover, the report also found that most members of the British public perceive themselves as having very limited influence over climate change: only 4% of respondents classified

While majorities of people globally see climate change as real, caused by human activity, and urgent, it is also striking that even in countries where climate change has become a significant political issue (such as the UK), there are limits to how much this broad awareness of climate change translates into actual appetite for radical action

¹⁶ www.globescan.com

¹⁷ www.ipsos-mori.com

themselves as having a large influence in combating climate change, whilst 33% felt they had none at all.

Similarly downbeat findings were set out in a 2006 poll conducted by the Daily Telegraph, which found that although 85% of respondents believed climate change was happening and 71% feared that 'the lives of future generations will be blighted by unchecked climate change':

- 65% of people opposed an increase in tax on petrol and diesel;
- only 27% would 'definitely' be willing to take fewer holidays abroad;
- just 25% were willing to drive less; and
- only 26% were prepared to use fewer electrical appliances around the home.

While a quick scan of public attitudes on climate change suggests a positive outlook, then, more detailed polling often finds that public opinion is rife with contradictions and paradoxes.

Yet public opinion is likely to be of decisive importance in determining what happens: partly because climate change is such a distributed, decentralised issue, and partly because publics will fundamentally determine the political space that negotiators are permitted to use in reaching a global deal – and almost certainly have it within their reach to veto such a deal.

Moreover, the credit crunch, the economic downturn, and widespread fears for job security may well mean that many people are even less ready to consider radical action on climate change than the data quoted above (which were compiled before the credit crunch) suggest.

Towards a deeper public engagement

The outlook on this front is not all bad. A new poll by Globescan, carried out in 19 countries from June to August 2009, indicates that majorities in 14 of these countries believe that government action to address climate change is good for the economy. In the UK, 70% of those polled supported 'government investments to address climate change, even if it hurts the economy'. Over half of the people polled in the US, Russia, India, Germany, Brazil, Chile, Japan, Nigeria, Canada, Australia, Mexico, France, Kenya and China agree, with China – interestingly – having the highest percentage of 89%.

What is needed is for policymakers to move to a much more engaged stance towards publics, and for advocates of comprehensive action on climate change to concurrently shift towards a more proactive, visible and effective posture on climate.

What will this involve in practice?

Part of the answer lies in traditional avenues such as NGO campaigns – where despite ongoing discussion of the need for a campaign of equivalent profile to Make Poverty History, civil society groups have yet to pull together a wide-reaching coalition.

A particularly important part of the challenge for civil society groups is the difficulty in securing agreement on what the headline 'asks' of such a campaign should be. Should NGOs push for a particular approach to structuring future commitments, such as the 'contraction and convergence' approach that would share emissions entitlements out on an equal per capita basis, or should they focus instead on lobbying for a quantified limit on CO₂ concentration (such as 450 parts per million)? Alternatively, should NGOs concentrate their fire on nearer-term actions, such as persuading policymakers to commit to ensuring that global emissions peak by a particular date (such as 2015), or should they push for a particular level of developed country emissions reductions by 2020?

Ultimately, the answer is probably 'both': a global framework to manage climate change over the full term of the issue is indispensable, but at the same time, such a framework must lead to immediate action rather than allowing policymakers to put off implementation until their successors' terms of office.

Another important dimension of moving towards a more aware and active public dimension to climate change lies with policymakers, and the need for them to be more proactive in engaging with publics. However, this task is not an easy one for governments.

Cynicism about politics remains widespread – think of the furore over MPs' expenses in the UK – and governments have considerable work to do to update their 'theory of influence' for an age in which citizens get their information from a wider range of sources than ever before. At the same time, governments must also become adept at using public diplomacy to engage with publics overseas as well as at home, as a central part of influencing the negotiating strategies of other governments. Above all, however, it is with citizens themselves that the real challenge lies. NGOs and governments can go part of the way, and have an indispensable role to play, but they cannot themselves substitute for active citizenship.

Conclusion: climate change and active citizenship

Perhaps the most hopeful aspect of UNA-UK's climate change series was the extent to which the events showcased the diversity and energy of developments already underway in UK civil society that move towards the more active citizenship that is so essential for action to combat climate change.

One example of this kind of active citizenship is provided by new models of civil society campaigning like the approach pioneered by Avaaz.org – whose campaigns director, Paul Hilder, spoke at UNA-UK's Birmingham event. In common with UNA-UK and in contrast

to traditional single issue NGOs, Avaaz campaigns on multiple issues rather than just one area of policy – from the Middle East Peace Process to human rights, and from poverty reduction to climate change (a key priority for both Avaaz and UNA-UK in 2009). Avaaz also presents a different level of participation to its over 3 million members around the world, in that decisions on campaigning priorities are taken on the basis of intensive engagement with members (through polling, web-based participation and other means).

What is still missing from the climate change debate, and indeed from other global issues, is a more hopeful narrative that talks about a process of transition, which may be turbulent in the short term (as for example in the case of the credit crunch), but that nonetheless leads over the medium term towards a new stable state – the nature of which is in the hands of the world's citizens to decide.

UNA-UK's events also discussed innovative policy mechanisms that could allow citizens to tackle their climate footprints with the assurance that others will follow suit. As discussed earlier, polling data shows that individuals are much less likely to take action to reduce their emissions if they

feel that these actions will make no difference, or that others will fail to take equivalent action: the 'I will if you will' test is hence a crucial hurdle for policy to jump.

One way of overcoming this hurdle is the concept of 'Domestic Tradable Quotas' or DTQs. Under DTQs, each citizen would have a personal carbon quota that they use each time they pay their electricity or gas bill, or fill up their car with petrol: an approach that would have two crucial advantages over more traditional proposals for carbon taxes. One is that the proposal would be more equitable: people who use less than their personal quota would be able to sell their permits to people who overshoot their quota, with the effect that people on lower incomes (who tend to be responsible for lower emissions) can benefit financially

from the system and from their low emissions. The other advantage is that the system would leave individuals free to choose where to 'spend' their carbon allowance, rather than micro-managing individuals' choices.

A third important area that can enable greater public engagement with climate change is the need for a compelling narrative about the issue. UNA-UK's events considered the extent to which the current debate about climate change is characterised by strongly negative storylines (ranging from apocalyptic scenarios to the short-term economic costs of climate change) instead of considering the long-term benefits of action and cost savings, in human life as well as economic terms.

What is still missing from the climate change debate, and indeed from other global issues, is a more hopeful narrative that instead talks about a process of transition, which may be turbulent in the short term (as for example in the case of the credit crunch), but that nonetheless leads over the medium term towards a new stable state – the nature of which is in the hands of the world's citizens to decide.

Copenhagen and beyond

It is becoming increasingly clear that the world's people have it well within their means to stabilise the climate: the technology required (on communications and information as well as energy) is for the most part already available, and awareness of the issue appears close to reaching a critical mass. UNA-UK's events will hopefully go some way towards reaching this critical mass, both in the UK and internationally, through dissemination of the outcomes to other UN associations all over the world.

What is needed now is political will – on the part of individuals as well as policymakers – and effective co-ordination to ensure that individual actions add up to the global outcomes that are needed. Both dimensions of the challenge point fundamentally to the need for an effective 21st century multilateralism, at Copenhagen and beyond.