

Climate change, development and COP26

About us:

Students for Global Health UK (SfGH) is a youth led network in the based UK which advocates for a world in which health equity is a reality for all people. SfGH has over 30 branches across the UK and over 3000 members. We are the UK representative for medical students as part of the international federation of medical students.

Introduction to you or your organisation and your reason for submitting evidence

Students for Global Health UK (SfGH) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to help shape the inquiry into the progress the Government has made in putting climate change at the centre of aid policy ahead of COP26. Climate change poses one of the biggest risks to current and future generations. As a youth organisation, we at SfGH believe it is vital to put the health and lives of future generations at the centre, including addressing the devastating impacts of climate change. Changes to climate are likely to result in increased deaths due to rising temperatures, increase in vector-borne diseases and natural disasters ¹ these effects are likely to result in widening inequalities, with those in vulnerable communities and low-and-middle income countries facing greater impacts ². As the host of COP26 this year, it is therefore vital that the UK government establish itself as a global leader and address the gaps that remain to ensure that the goal of limiting global warming to below 2 degrees.

This submission sets out a number of questions which we feel will help give an understanding of the gaps that remain in the UK's approach to putting climate change at the centre of aid, more specifically its decision to support fossil fuel financing, the UK's role in ensuring a green transition and the importance of putting health at the forefront of climate change policies. Finally we emphasise the importance of COP26 and the points made by the health community on the UK's role to COP26.

Question 1: The extent to which the Government has made progress on implementing the Committee's recommendations, particularly those on climate finance, climate justice, the use of ODA to support fossil fuels and making climate change a strategic priority in all aid spending.

Since the previous report the Government has taken positive action towards tackling climate change. In December 2020 the UK announced it would increase its Nationally Declared contribution (NDC) to 68% in its 6th Carbon Budget, one of the highest globally. The government has continued to make progress domestically and in April 2021 the UK

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

² <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

announced it would commit to reducing emissions by 78% by 2035. As well as this, the UK's commitment to protect climate financing demonstrates its commitment to tackling climate change.

Despite its progress, the government's continued use of ODA to support fossil fuels continues to greatly undermine its efforts both domestically and internationally. In December 2020 the Prime Minister announced an end to UK public financing of fossil fuels through the aid budget, however further details of this policy announced in March 2021 suggests that this may not be true with a number of 'exclusions' identified that mean the UK-aid funded institutions are able to continue to finance fossil fuels, with no sign of this coming to an end. These 'exclusions' will allow continued support of gas-burning power generation projects, support of the UK development bank CDC group in which 90% of their portfolio of direct fossil fuel investments would be allowed and the support of gas power investments made by institutions who receive UK aid. This announcement, and the subsequent details greatly undermine the UK's role as a global leader in climate, the lack of commitment to divestment must be addressed now. As the only shareholder to the CDC the UK has a large influence. In December 2019, the CDC had a portfolio of fossil fuel investments worth approximately \$988 million. It is therefore vital that the UK utilise their influence to call on the CDC to divest. The government has argued that these 'exclusions' will be used sparingly however it has been shown that the use of gas power will result in breaking the carbon budget and result in higher levels of global warming³.

The lack of commitment to divesting in fossil fuels is also greatly contradictory. One example of this is seen in Mozambique, a country that has faced extreme weather events and that was ranked 14th in the climate risk index in 1999-2018⁴. The UK government has previously provided aid, following events including Cyclone Idai and Cyclone Kenneth, to support programmes responding to these events and seeking to build resilient infrastructure. Despite this, the policies 'exclusions will mean investments made by the CDC into Globeleg will continue. Globeleg is the largest private developer, owner and operator of independent power plants in sub-Saharan Africa and is the lead developer of a new gas power plant in Temane in the Cabo Delgado region of Mozambique. This has also been linked to fuelling local conflict⁵. The UK cannot commit to provide aid whilst simultaneously continuing to support fossil fuels and subsequently contributing to the growing inequalities that arise due to climate change.

³ <http://priceofoil.org/2019/05/30/gas-is-not-a-bridge-fuel>.

⁴ https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/20-2-01e%20Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202020_14.pdf

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/apr/15/uk-support-mozambique-gas-project-cabo-delgado-fuelling-isis-conflict-foe>

Question 3: The extent to which the Government's work to date on climate change and development has taken the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the needs of low-and-middle income countries and vulnerable groups into account.

Climate and Health

In response to the committee's recommendations the government had said 'The Government recognises that both adaptation and mitigation are critical. Helping countries anticipate and manage the impact of climate change is essential if we are to see sustained development progress and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals'. It is true that adaptation and mitigation are critical, however whilst efforts have been made there remain large gaps. One particular gap is the inclusion of health on the climate change agenda which also undermines the governments 'leave no one behind' commitment.

Recommendations released in 2020, to inform the 6th carbon budget, by the Climate change committee and the institute of health equity demonstrate the impact of climate of widening health inequalities. The report warned that if health equity wasn't considered when developing policies, the benefits of health would be unequally distributed. The report made a number of recommendations for actions that should be taken to address this, including the transition to clean energy and reduced dependency on fossil fuels, highlighting once again the importance of divestment ⁶. As well as this research suggested that emissions may be causing around 10 million air pollution-related deaths each year ⁷. If the government does not take action the government is unlikely to make progress towards the sustainable development goals. The UK must work to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of health on climate change. One way to do this is to commit to the recommendations for rapidly decarbonising both through its national and international policies by ceasing all support of fossil fuels. As well as this, ensuring to continue to support the health system strengthening globally, to ensure healthcare systems are resilient to the effects of climate change is essential. It should be noted that whilst the UK has committed to protecting climate financing its decision to cut ODA from 0.7 to 0.5% will also be detrimental to its efforts to reach sustainable development goals.

A just green transition

If the UK truly wishes to build back it is important that climate justice remains at the forefront of its agenda. This not only includes divesting from fossil fuels but ensuring a just green transition. This should be both a domestic commitment and one that uses the UK's influence to create a just green transition globally. Tackling climate change domestically is not enough, as one of the largest contributors the UK has a responsibility to support countering climate change globally especially in some of the worst affected countries. A just transition should include recognising its historical role as one of the biggest contributors to emissions and to repay 'climate debt' owed to low- and middle- income countries who have

⁶ <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/in-the-news/press-releases-and-briefings-/health-inequalities-climate-change-assessed-together-to-inform-sixth-carbon-budget>

⁷ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0013935121000487?via%3Dihub>

been disproportionately affected and contributed the least to climate change through reparations that take into account colonialism and industrialisation ⁸.

Question 4: The potential of COP26 to address these remaining challenges effectively and the steps the Government needs to take if COP26 is to succeed in tackling them.

The upcoming COP26 offers an opportunity for the UK to continue to establish itself as a global leader in climate change. Despite the government's announcements of its aims to 'build back greener' evidence from the green alliance suggests that without changes to current policies the UK may not achieve its target to reach net zero by 2050 ⁹. The UK must lead by example and address the gaps that remain. The UK has a role to play. It must not only divest itself but call on countries globally to commit to divesting from fossil fuels in order to ensure that the target of getting global warming below 2 degrees is reached. COP26 also serves as an opportunity for the UK to call on governments of high-income countries to invest further in climate action. More specifically, to support countries globally in both mitigation and adaptation.

Finally, if the world is to achieve the SDG's health must be at the forefront of conversations in COP26. The Lancet countdown's 2019 demonstrated the continued and future impacts of climate change on communities globally with an increase in the occurrence of extreme weather events, a growing scarcity of resources and changing patterns of infectious disease.¹⁰ It is also estimated that between 2030-2050 climate change will cause an additional 250,000 deaths annually¹¹ demonstrating the clear relationship between climate change and health. As set out in the UK Health Community Letter on COP26 the UK should use COP26 as an opportunity to:

- **Commit to an ambitious and historically accurate Nationally Determined Contribution.**

Whilst the UK has one of the highest NDCs globally, they are still not on track to reach net-zero by 2050. Now is the time for the UK government to commit to a transformative NDC by decarbonising at a rapid rate, committing to a Green new deal and addressing health inequalities.

- **Permanently cancel all new fossil fuel extractive projects and ceasing funding of fossil fuels.**

The Government must commit to cancelling all new fossil fuel extraction plans and prioritise projects that invest in safe, well-paid green jobs. If the UK wants to be a

⁸ <https://stat.medact.org/uploads/2021/04/The-public-health-case-for-a-Green-New-Deal-MEDACT-April-2021.pdf>

⁹ https://green-alliance.org.uk/resources/Net_zero_policy_tracker_April_2021.pdf

¹⁰ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)32596-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)32596-6/fulltext)

¹¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

global leader, it must not only cease funding of fossil fuels but call on countries globally to follow suit. As well as support countries in reducing their carbon emissions and in a green transition.

- **Guarantee a Fossil Free COP26.**

The presence of the fossil fuel industry represents a conflict of interest. The government should work to ensure that fossil fuel companies are not able to influence talks, therefore should not accept sponsorship agreements with fossil fuel companies and ensure that no lobbyists working on behalf of the fossil fuel industry are able to access the talks.