



ROUNDTABLE REPORT

Tuesday 14th & Wednesday 15th

September 2021

Digitally Via Zoom

The Scottish Women's Convention

CLIMATE CHATS

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Women's Convention held two Climate Chats, one in the evening and one at lunchtime, to try to engage as broad a range of women as possible. These were roundtable events for women to share their views and understandings of climate change, discuss their ideas for tackling this issue, and gain more information to take back to their own communities.

WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDINGS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

What do you think climate change is?

Several of the women who attended the climate chats felt that they lacked confidence or knowledge talking about climate change, joining the sessions to learn more. However, they were all able to contribute their own definitions, drawing on different aspects of the issue.

- "It is the emission of greenhouse gases that is causing the earth's atmosphere to warm up. We're trying to avoid getting to 1.5 because if we get over that, **we're in really serious trouble.**"
- "The way **the overall weather pattern has changed adversely** so that the whole nature, agriculture, animals, it's all been adversely affected, and people have caused that. This climate change, as opposed to any other climate change in the history of the world, has been caused by man. **We've done it to ourselves**, and we need to do what we can to get out of it."
- "I was reading about the term 'climate change' and how that has become a bit of a corporate thing to call it because it implies that it's the climate that is changing, and not that it is man (and I say man because we know that women are disproportionately affected by it) causing it... I would be calling it **an irreversible, manmade climate emergency.**"

Women's feelings about climate change

- "I'm a bit scared, **I'm a lot scared actually**... they reckon we've got about ten years left before the damage is irreparable. We really need to get things going now, not leaving it all until nine years and three hundred and sixty something days."
- "It seems so hopeless, but **I don't want it to be hopeless.**"
- "**The planet will not be destroyed, it will survive. It is us that won't.** If we want to survive, we need to do something now because the planet has survived dinosaurs and meteors hitting it. It is not the planet that is the problem, we are."
- "A lot of people feel like 'what can we do?' or 'what's the point of doing anything?' I think **people think that individually there's not much they can do.**"
- "From a trade union point of view, **there ain't no jobs on a dead planet.**"

EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Large-scale concerns

The women we spoke to were very aware of the pressing global effects of climate change.

- “We are beginning to see how the climate is changing with **warmer oceans.**”
- “I also think it is going to cause more health issues, there are **a lot more viruses** coming about because the temperatures are changing.”
- “In time there are going to be **food shortages**, but no one is really talking about that properly.”

Closer to home

Following from this, it was discussed that the climate crisis can often seem like something that is happening very far away. However, women detailed several effects of climate change that they had personally noticed in their own areas.

- “I live on the north coast, and I can see there are so many **fewer seabirds, whales and dolphins** going past, definitely.”
- “I’m definitely seeing **differences in when the plants are ready**, and then you’ve not got the right insects to pollenate them.”
- “Our local museum does the meteorological recording throughout the year... It seemed to be that we were getting the same patterns of weather, but they were shunting up the year. **So the wet times were going later, the hot times were going later, and everything is becoming more extreme.**”

Shifting perspectives during lockdown

The lockdown had a profound effect on the way that all of us live our lives, but also the way in which we engage with our local environment.

- “When we were encouraged to go out for an hour’s walk, that wasn’t something I’d have done before. I found **I did become more aware of the flowers in springtime.**”
- “Being at home during the lockdown, I did really discover my local park... **it was like a wonderful revelation to find a space that was green.** I felt so bad for people who don’t have access to that as it makes such a huge difference being able to appreciate nature. To lose that would be awful.”
- “I’m sure one step in countering climate change can be encouraging creating **green spaces among more built up communities.**”
- “**I didn’t have a bike until lockdown...** I would have been too afraid to cycle into the city centre with all that traffic before the lockdown, so it was nice to be able to access those spaces.”
- “During COVID, people realised you can’t always rely on the supermarkets, so more were turning to farmers markets because they were thinking about their **food security.** I know not everybody can afford that, but farmers markets were doing **veg boxes for more deprived areas.** It’s just about taking some sort of local action and trying to see if that could be **elevated for everybody.**”

CURRENT STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

Awareness of existing work

Among the women we spoke to, there was an extensive knowledge of the strategies that are already being explored and employed to tackle climate change.

- “The government is starting to **plant more trees** and trying to **cut down emissions.**”
- “**All the scientists are working on it,** coming up with various ideas.”
- “Scientists are also working on trying to **remove some of the greenhouse gases** that have already been released into the atmosphere.”
- “I work in social housing and we’re working on **heating systems** which use less carbon and are more fuel efficient, and **fabric first** to try to prevent us from using fuels at all.”

They were particularly enthusiastic about schemes promoting ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’.

- “You can now bring your **soft plastics** in and **recycle them in shops** which I think is great. It’s very positive for businesses to get involved as well.”
- “In Germany and Spain, if you buy a **drink in a can or a bottle,** when you take it back, **you get 5 or 10 cents.** You don’t find litter anywhere because people come and pick them up, even out of the bushes. We need a thing like that.”
- “A lot of local dairies have gone back to **using glass bottles** to make things more sustainable.”
- “At TRNSMT they had a scheme where **if you recycled your cups then you got money off your drinks,** so the young people were enjoying the music, but they were also going round picking up the cups.”
- “I had a friend in London and if there was something they didn’t want, like a piece of furniture, they just **sat it in their wee front garden with a piece of paper saying, ‘please take’**... Apparently, it’s a big thing now. If they’re doing it in London, why can’t we do it up here?”
- “In Rome they have stopped the selling of individual water bottles in the city and provided **water fountains**... perhaps we could trial that in Edinburgh or Glasgow.”

There was also discussion of organisational approaches that women had been involved in.

- “The church movement in Scotland has an **eco-congregation**... during lent, each month a different room in the house was targeted and suggestions made for how you could be more green.”
- “My job is providing training for youth workers who often work in schools, so we’re **training 300 youth workers about basic climate science, climate justice,** and how young people can get their voices heard and be effective in taking climate action.”
- “At YouthLink, we have ten **local champions** in each local authority... it’s about getting young people **involved on a local level in a way that has a global impact,** and champions who act in a way that is an inspiration for other young people and adults as well. It’s that ripple effect of change I hope COP26 will be a catalyst for.”
- “Keep Scotland Beautiful facilitated a series of workshops in my village to collaboratively create this **climate action plan.** People got really stuck into the conversations that they’d not really had before because they were really specific to the local area.”

Individual responses to climate change

Women shared the range of lifestyle changes they are making to do their bit.

- **“I’m starting with the kids in my school** and trying to get them all involved. Talking to them, they don’t really know what’s going on, and you don’t want to scare them.”
- “This year I made a New Year’s resolution that I wasn’t going to buy any clothes this year. It’s actually just made me realise how much stuff I have and there’s absolutely no need to buy any more... I don’t know if that’s how to sell it to people. **Stop buying all the daft wee things because it’s ruining the environment, it’s ruining the planet, and there’s no real pleasure to it.** Instead, you could save up for something that you really want.”
- “I was involved in a **beach clean** one Sunday afternoon and people won’t look you in the eye. They have put more bins out and there has been more activity but come Friday night, it’s madness again.”

Inequalities and contradictions

There were some frustrations that, while many of us are trying to make the right choices as individuals, there are systemic issues that undermine our hard work and add to inequality.

- “There have been a few **kickbacks in social housing**. Why should all the **experimentation** on what might work, with heating systems or fabric first, be done on the **people who can least afford for something to go wrong**? They don’t have a say in what you’re going to do to their house. A lot of it is still quite experimental, and it’s very expensive... but if the system turns out not to be as effective as it looked on paper, it’s very unfair.”
- “There are so many **holiday houses**, and they **don’t have recycling bins**. The visitors want to use them and do the recycling, but the people who own the holiday houses don’t care and don’t supply it... We were told at our work that it is actually illegal for businesses not to do their recycling. Airbnbs are businesses, aren’t they? **Holiday houses are businesses.** It’s just so frustrating.”
- “We had a thing up here where there was a **charity that would upcycle furniture** and furnish homes for people who had become homeless or were having to flee something. At every recycling centre, there were containers for these dedicated charities, but then they took them away because they said the charities were taking business away from the council for bulk uplift charges. You couldn’t make it up.”
- “I’m not sure how transparent it is when you can apply for money to have a windmill on your land and **people then make a lot of money.**”
- “You see the **Tesco van going up and down all day every day.** I wish they would just coordinate it, that they’d do a run out once a day or once a week or something.”

Energy

It was clear that women are in favour of extending existing strategies on renewable energy.

- “No, wind farms are definitely not spoiling the landscape. We definitely need it, and **we need to embrace it.**”
- “I may not love wind farms, but they are **a necessary evil** at this point.”

- “You don’t hear the same outrage about mobile phone masts as you do about wind turbines. I think it’s like **no pain, no gain**. It’s a balance, we’ve just got to suck it up.”
- “I don’t mind seeing windmills but driving about sometimes I do think ‘this is a part of the world where you couldn’t see any signs of humans other than the road’. There was nothing, no pylons or telegraph poles, not even any fences. There’s a wind farm being put up there now and **I do think it’s pretty sad.**”
- “My preference would be the **sea turbines**, putting them in the sea rather than on the land. But that requires the political will to pay more for it.”
- “I was talking to someone who works for a wind farm planning company. They always receive letters of opposition; it’s not huge numbers but they do have to count them. Even though there’s a silent majority of people who want them, so he said a really good thing would be that if you hear of a wind farm proposal, then **write in support rather than staying silent** and them assuming you approve of it.”
- “We need to get those down South to **keep their oil rigs down there or close them down completely**. I think it’s to try to make Scotland look bad that they’re trying to introduce this new oil field with COP26 going on.”

Transport

Women shared fascinating insights on travel strategies from across the world.

- “In Curitiba, Brazil, the Mayor put in a tram system so that everyone was 10 minutes walking distance of a tram and then the trams would take you about 15-20 minutes to get you into the city centre. Within 2 days, he **stopped all cars going into the city centre**. Where we would have this planned out for years, he said if people say they want to get something done, you just have to do it.”
- “A lot of the housing schemes they’re building now are just houses. If we were **building more communities where there were shops, schools and amenities**, there would not be a need for so much transport.”
- “In Finland, they **stopped putting money into roads and started putting money into pavements**... Women would use pavements more, and they tend to walk places, the shops or taking the kids to school, rather than taking the car. They saved millions with this approach, so we need to think about how women travel in their communities.”
- “In Glasgow, we are quite lucky with trains, but more could be done with the buses. I think the push now is **for hydrogen buses or even trams**.”
- “If you look at a family going out, for an all-day pass for all of them it is expensive, so you can understand why they would rather go out in the car. **When I went to Prague, it was £12 to take us on the tram, the bus and on the train, for a whole week**. Say you are a family of 6, think how much it costs here.”
- “I think **transport should be in the public’s hands**. We’ve now got free transport for under 21s, but why not for mothers and children or fathers and children? And then it could get extended on and on and on, hopefully.”
- “I am disabled but before COVID, I had **a travel card** so that I could go all over Scotland with a carer. I just think if it can be done for one group, then maybe slowly it could be expanded so that everyone could get involved in **lower cost transport**.”
- “The downside is **do women feel safe using public transport?**”

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Increasing awareness and understanding

It was felt that a lot of people are still avoiding having conversations about the climate in their daily lives.

- “I don’t know if people are ignorant of what’s going on, or if they are scared to admit that there’s a problem out there, or they just don’t know, but I think we really **need to get the message out.**”
- “Sometimes people don’t realise how important it is. **It’s just something going on in the background** when they’ve got so much else going on in their lives. They just don’t have that conversation.”
- “People often don’t want to talk about it because it scares them, and they have strong emotions about it that they can’t really process because **it’s too big and scary.**”
- “**You don’t want to frighten the very young**, but the teenagers and the young people are already frightened. We should all be frightened, I think.”
- “I don’t think we know enough about it yet; **people are only getting dribs and drabs.**”
- “The movement of people who want climate action can be **quite exclusionary**, especially towards people who are more working class. It can be a very ‘us and them’ situation... We should all be pulling together to **have these conversations in a respectful, meaningful way.**”

One of the biggest barriers women spoke about was the lack of clear, accessible information.

- “Angus Council have released a whole bank of materials for schools to use and it’s a bit overwhelming. Even if you google something, you could be on the internet for hours, and **you can get lost in the amount of resources out there.**... If there was something a bit simpler, it might be easier for people to get the knowledge that they need, rather than trying to cover everything.”
- One woman recommended the Scottish Government’s website, **netzeronation.scot** - “I just happened to come across it when I was reading something else, but it looked very good. It looked very user-friendly.”
- “I’ve found out a lot of things in my area completely by accident. People need to be able to find this stuff out. People used to be able to go to libraries, but no one can go to libraries anymore. We maybe need some sort of **common source of information that people can access easily.**”

Women also shared some thoughts on the importance of climate education for adults.

- “I know that climate change is being taught in schools. **I think the young people are better than we are.** Some more education needs to be done for the adult population.”
- “I think we’ve really got to educate people. Even just telling them they’ve got to do one little thing and then over the weeks add another little thing. **We just need to get people’s attention to get them doing something.**”
- “I think it would be a wonderful idea if in every school there was a particular person who has a lot of knowledge about what’s happening with the climate, and that they have a brief to do **outreach with parents.**”

Accessing the right people

- “There needs to be some consultations with faith groups or communities, **not just the experts.** We need the information to get down to **the common person in the language that they will understand.**”
- “From my work, I know that when you start going into restaurants, into shops, into churches, you are **taking the services to people.** In this world, we are chasing our tails trying to make ends meet, and we forget to go to the important events, so we need to engage people in the planning process. We can’t be on this journey by ourselves.”
- “If you can **get community leaders on board,** they are like gatekeepers. If we can get the message to them, then they will take the message to their communities because we can’t personally get to everyone.”
- “I think trying to **work more collaboratively and putting all those expertise together** to tackle the climate emergency together, and reminding people that everybody has a role to play no matter what sector they’re in.”
- “Sometimes when you’re having these conversations, it feels like you’re **preaching to the choir,** it’s still a bit of an **echo chamber** ... I think we need to be tapping in at a local level and making people realise that the people around them are cutting back on meat, recycling and doing these other great things.”

Women’s representation

There was consensus that women did not know any women who would be attending COP26, and this is part of a broader issue that women are underrepresented in these discussions.

- **“If you don’t see yourself represented in something as big as that, you’re not going to feel engaged.”**
- “Men are such experts on lots of things, and even when they’re not experts, they are still so confident to talk rubbish. I know this is a generalisation, but it seems to me that **women are better at conversations...** You can’t join in with somebody lecturing you.”
- One young woman shared that she was organising a climate summit in Argyll and Bute but had only managed to get **one woman speaker on a panel of nine** – “It’s been very difficult to find people, and they’re all white as well.”
- During COVID, one woman had joined many online meetings with women speakers from across the world, including Africa and Polynesia - “While it’s great to get them to speak at events, **it’s not the leaders here in Scotland.**”
- “Certain communities in the West of Scotland represent **attitudes from about thirty years ago...** It’s hard to break down those barriers alongside all the other things.”

Changing attitudes towards climate change

There was a consensus that many people are unwilling to accept the necessary sacrifices to tackle the climate crisis and there needs to be a fundamental cultural shift.

- “It seems like everybody still wants everything they expected to be allowed to have, well certainly in the UK, but **they don’t want to give anything up.**”
- “You go out and there’s bins everywhere and **people are complaining,** and I’m saying I’d rather have a bin and not having the aesthetics just to make sure there’s more effort going into **people taking action.**”

- “There’s something about how **we all reward ourselves with things**, whether it’s clothes or books, instead of just recycling. People don’t want to be seen in the same clothes or are always wanting to go on holidays. We all want to see people and places, **but it’s just not possible anymore, is it?**”
- “We need to ask **why people aren’t bothering**. Just because something is written on a bin doesn’t mean people read it. You see people putting cardboard where there should be food and so they’ve taken those bins away from us.”
- “People don’t like change and unfortunately at the moment, I think **people are sort of sleepwalking into this crisis without realising it.**”
- “When people ask, ‘What can I do?’, it has got to be about **act locally, think globally.**”
- “I think when we see other people doing stuff, it helps us do stuff because it lets you think it’s alright to do that and **I’m not being too radical and unusual.**”

Personal responsibility

There was a real passion to encourage everyone to play their part in this fight, however small.

- “I think it is our responsibility. A lot of the time we blame the government, or we blame others, but **we have to look at what we are doing in our own capacity.**”
- “It boils down to the fact that **as individuals we have to be responsible.**”
- “It’s our responsibility to take that on board. It’s not nature’s fault, it’s our fault. I think the message needs to go out to everybody that even doing something small like not using a single use plastic bottle can make a big difference. When you see the number of plastic bottles in the ocean, it’s shocking. **We need to do something now.**”

However, it was acknowledged that there need to be more incentives for people to do this.

- “Yes, we all care about our fellow man, and it’s terrible when you see it on TV, countries under water and people having nowhere to live. But if you want to sustain an interest, I think people will have to be incentivised to do it. They have to see it is of benefit to them.”

Affordability

However, the flip side of this is that putting too much responsibility on individuals is not feasible and will deepen existing social inequality.

- “I’m concerned about the justice of everybody being able to go forward and not be deprived because it’s actually quite **costly to individually go green**. For instance, changing your soap; it’s tricky to know the right products, and it’s inevitably more expensive. Then you move up to changing your fuel. It’ll be a really expensive step up for people and there are a lot of people who are already struggling with fuel costs.”
- “That’s where the government needs to step up, in **making things affordable**. They need to **make it the default**, so people aren’t having to actively try to be greener. There need to be laws so that when you go to the supermarket, there won’t be plastic wrapped round everything, so you won’t have to go to a farmer’s market and spend ten times more. It needs to be **built into our everyday lives.**”
- “My son is having an air source heat pump installed, and it’s actually going to cost more than my income for a year. **These things are phenomenally expensive.**”

Jobs

There was also concern that, without a just transition, many jobs will be negatively affected.

- “If we’re going to move away from oil to renewables, the infrastructure has to be in place because people are frightened of not having a job. They’re **frightened for their own job and don’t think beyond that about the bigger picture**, totally understandably.”
- “In Scotland, a lot of people just don’t trust that their job’s not just going to be taken away from them like it was in the past when areas of shipbuilding or car manufacturing just went with no thought for the people losing their jobs. **People have been used to getting let down.**”

Scottish Government

Women discussed their feelings on the success of the Scottish Government’s work to date on tackling the climate crisis and made suggestions for improvement.

- “I do see some positive things in what the Scottish Government is doing, but **we do need to do more, a lot more.**”
- We asked the women at both sessions whether they had seen the Scottish Government’s ‘Let’s Do Net Zero’ adverts, but none of them had seen them.
 - “I never watch live TV because I avoid all adverts, I just don’t watch adverts because I can’t stand them, so I wouldn’t know from an advert.”
- “With COP26 coming up, it’s such a **fantastic springboard** for the Scottish Government to get the message out there, and I really hope they do!”
- “It needs to be explained **exactly how that will happen**, not just saying it will happen, as very often politicians do that. They need to provide some more detail, so people feel more secure in the knowledge that someone’s really thought about it.”
- “So much is still controlled from England, and we can’t make our own decisions... There is an element of **we can make all the best decisions in the world and then be told that well actually we’re going to do the opposite.**”
- “I think in Scotland, in about thirty years, the really big problem is going to be water. The Government is allowing so much more sewage into the water, they’re just **opening the floodgates and letting more sewage into the rivers** which will then go into the sea. What’s more these decisions are being made without consultation.”

Local Government

There were also actions that women believed should be taken at a council level.

- “I can only talk for my own local authority, but the **cuts** they’re making all the time are **always hitting recycling, refuse collection, garden and parks provision**. They’re all being axed.”
- “One thing I’ve noticed is the **lack of bike lanes** in Edinburgh and how it isn’t cycle friendly at all... I think my local authority could be doing something to encourage people to cycle more.”

CONCLUSION

The SWC would like to thank all of the women who attended the Climate Chat sessions. We appreciate all of your contributions on this pertinent topic ahead of the COP26 conference in Glasgow and our online climate conference. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission paper provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to women's equality.

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