



CONFERENCE REPORT
Wednesday 6th October 2021
Digitally Via Zoom

The Scottish Women's Convention

CLIMATE & COP26



Agnes Tolmie

Chair, Scottish Women's Convention

With the COP26 conference coming up in Glasgow, this is a very important debate. One of the things that has become obvious to a lot of women in Scotland, and around the world, is that women are missing in this debate. Whatever we change our world to look like after this conference, it is going to take a lot of women to help deliver on that, in terms of the jobs that need to be done, and in terms of new ways of making family life more sustainable.

What I'm learning is that this change has to be ground up. We have seen the attitudes of many of our world leaders, and we cannot rely on them. We need the groundswell of people to force these changes, and I know I am already planning the wee changes that I am going to make to do my bit. With COP26 happening in Glasgow, we need to make sure that there is a real legacy, and part of that must be our commitment to bringing women's voices into decision-making processes.

Our speakers at this conference have shared a lot of really useful information, and I hope that will prove to be valuable ammunition for women when they are having conversations with other people.

5 Key Points

- Women are currently under-represented in climate discussions, but we will not find effective solutions without their voices, experiences, and ideas.
- Information needs to be made more easily available and in more accessible formats to facilitate more meaningful conversations.
- Climate strategies need to be developed at a local level by meaningfully engaging with communities and thinking beyond the stereotypical 'green' industries.
- Becoming more engaged and taking small, practical steps towards a more sustainable lifestyle can help to alleviate eco-anxiety.
- World leaders must be held to account, and there needs to be systemic change as a result of COP26.



Laura Young

Known as 'Less Waste Laura', Laura lives an environmentally conscious and close to zero-waste lifestyle. She advocates environmental education around the steps we can all take to tackle the big issues together. Her current position is with the international development charity, Tearfund, as their Scotland COP26 Advocacy Events Coordinator.

Laura began by explaining how studying Environmental Sciences and completing her Masters in Environmental Protection Management inspired her to tackle climate change.

- “I have always had a passion for environmental issues, and it was at university that I started to think, ‘okay, I’m learning about climate change, I’m learning about the impacts on the world and people, but I feel like I need to do something about it as an individual’.”
- “I’ve not really been impacted by climate change in a way that we often see on the telly, but that doesn’t mean that climate change isn’t having an impact on my life. Climate change impacted what I chose to do as a career, and the fact is that climate change brought me to work to somehow help and play my part in the campaign.”

Through her work with the Climate Coalition, she has been fortunate enough to speak to other climate activists all over the world. A particularly inspirational young woman was Priyanka Lalla, a 15-year-old from Trinidad and Tobago.

- “She’s really passionate talking about how climate change is affecting young people, people from countries like Trinidad and Tobago, island nations, nations far away from the UK, and how climate change is also impacting women and girls.”

Priyanka had shared her insights on how a lot of progress that has made globally for women’s rights, such as improving access to education for women and girls, “is being put in jeopardy because of the climate crisis.”

- “As people are struggling to farm efficiently because of the climate crisis, or as people are having to move home because of climate change, often the women are the most marginalised in these situations, having to go back to working for their families rather than going to school, or being put at risk because they’re moving around.”

Discussing the term ‘eco-anxiety’, she explained how the rational fear of climate change is having a profound impact on people’s lives.

- “I’m worried about the climate changing, and I know that with lots of other young people, especially our kids who are coming up through school, I am joined with thousands and millions of others who are worried about climate change.”
- “This is a real thing that is happening with our young people. They’re really worried.”

However, she was emphatic that the situation is not hopeless, encouraging women to play their part in building up the collective action that is needed.

- “I started this journey to try to live a bit more of an environmental lifestyle, not just because I’m going to save the planet as one person. That won’t happen. But when all of us come together as a group of people, as a group of women on this call, or as Scotland, the UK, or the world, we can really start to make the big changes.”
- “Individuals changing habits and talking about things is how we get business to move, industry to move, and politicians to move. All of these things are really important.”
- “When I think about climate change, I think about how women around the world are one of the biggest forces for change. We are some of the most resilient groups of people, but we are also at the front of the climate crisis.”
- “One of the things I’m really passionate about is individuals engaging with their sphere of influence, their local communities, and their local groups. One thing we know is that when we engage with those around us and encourage other people along, we can have a huge ripple effect.”

She shared a range of ideas for how women can make small, everyday changes towards living a more environmentally conscious lifestyle.

- Energy
 - Choose 100% renewable energy at home and argue for it in our workplaces.
 - Support local initiatives like community energy co-operatives.
 - Improve energy-efficiency with insulation and double-glazing.
 - Try to be mindful of the energy we do use – smart metres can help.
 - Hold the Government to account on their commitment to ensure 100% of our electricity comes from renewables by 2035.
- Transport
 - Try more active travel, like cycling or walking, wherever possible.
 - Engage with initiatives to make public transport greener.
 - Encourage more bike racks in our communities.
 - Reduce the number of flights we take.
- Waste
 - Zero Waste Scotland have reported that 80% of Scotland’s carbon footprint comes from products and services that we consume.
 - Try to be conscious of buying things that are plastic-free or close to zero-waste.
 - Buy second-hand or try to rent and thrift where possible.
- Learn more about the climate and get inspired.
 - She specifically recommended watching Katharine Hayhoe’s Ted Talk - “She is leading the way by making climate change and climate science really accessible to everyone.”
- “The most important thing we can do to fight climate change is to talk about it.”

Esther O'Hara

Based at the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow, Esther is a speech and language therapist specialising in cancers of the head and neck. She has been a staff side rep for 29 years across three health boards and is also the convenor for the Unite the Union Glasgow and Greater Clyde Health Branch.



Her contribution focused on the relationship between climate change and health.

- “You might think that the NHS is a service industry and not a heavy industry so it doesn’t have a large carbon footprint, but nothing could be further from the truth.”
- “The NHS needs to give itself a shake and get on board with the climate agenda.”

She shared an extensive list of the ways the NHS is contributing to the climate crisis.

- The NHS is responsible for 5.4% of all UK emissions and, in England alone, 20 million tonnes of CO2 emissions are generated each year.
- An hour of using anaesthetic gases in an operating theatre has the same effect on the environment as driving 230 miles in a petrol car.
- The by-products of one patient’s renal dialysis per year is equivalent to seven return flights from London to New York.
- All healthcare workers use disposable gloves but some of them are not biodegradable and end up in landfill – “There are alternatives available but sadly it’s often driven by cost, and biodegradable ones aren’t the cheapest. In the context of cuts to the health service, health care providers may be under pressure to purchase what is cheapest, rather than what is environmentally friendly.”
- NHS staff are expressly told to leave their computers switched on 24 hours a day in case of IT updates.
- Many older hospital buildings still rely on coal or oil-fired generators and heating.
- 20% of NHS emissions come from disposing of unused drugs, and £50million is spent annually on carbon permits, which include covering the use of incinerators.

Detailing the many negative impacts of climate change on health, Esther explained why it would be in the interests of the NHS to be more environmentally conscious.

- Global warming is set to contribute to an increase in mortality of 45% by 2025, and of 157% by 2050.
- Ambulance callouts go up by 25-30% in extreme temperatures.
- There is speculation that the COVID pandemic may have been worsened by global warming as increased temperatures enabled it to spread more quickly.
- Food poisoning cases rocket in heatwaves, and hospital admissions increase.
- Extreme cold weather leads to more fractures, more traffic accidents, and decreased attendance at work.

However, she acknowledged the positive steps that are already being taken.

- Charging points are being installed in NHS car parks, and they are increasing the number of electric and hybrid vehicles in their fleet.
- They are embracing flexible and home working to reduce staff travel, and they have adopted schemes to incentivise staff to take public transport or cycle to work.
- They are developing strategies for patients to attend appointments remotely.
- Canteens offer discounts to staff who bring reusable cups or food receptacles to encourage them not to use polystyrene.
- Uniforms are now ethically sourced and made from fabric designed for coolness in summer and warmth in winter.

She concluded by emphasising why women must be at the front of climate discussions.

- “Women need to contribute to this agenda. We are the educators and it’s really important that we make the change.”
- “The climate crisis affects the poor and the socially marginalised more than it affects anyone else, and the WHO tells us 70% of the world’s poor are women so it’s really important that we grow our voice.”



Cllr Eva Murray

Eva is a Labour and Co-operative councillor for the Garscadden/Scotstounhill ward in Glasgow and serves as the Glasgow Labour group’s Depute Leader. She has used her position as the group’s spokesperson on Environment and Sustainability to push for a plan to tackle climate change that empowers workers and communities in a just transition.

She began by discussing COP26 and how important it is for us as women in Scotland.

- “COP26 has been dubbed the most important climate conference the world has ever seen and whatever the Glasgow Agreement becomes is our very last chance. This must be a success; our world is depending on it.”

However, she also acknowledged some of the hypocrisy surrounding it.

- “There are lots of things we can say about the disruption it will cause to the city, for instance, we shouldn’t be restricting access to cycle lanes and championing active travel at the same time.”
- “We’re forcing people into cars because we know the buses are facing major diversions and giving travel passes to delegates but not to our own citizens, so we have to question our commitment to public transport.”
- “It’s not going to be the targets that we never meet, it is only with systemic changes that we can make a difference.”

Transport is a topic she is particularly passionate about changing.

- “We know transport emissions in Scotland are one of our highest, so it is something we should all be prioritising.”
- An EU27 report showed that women use public transport more than men.
- “We continue to see failed private bus companies letting down communities with rocketing fares and cutting socially necessary routes, reducing the reliability of public transport. There is absolutely no incentive for people to take public transport.”

There were also a range of other areas where she felt improvements needed to be made.

- Food sustainability
 - “Over the last twelve months, I have learned a lot about food growing strategies and having locally grown food in different parts of communities, The list if you want an allotment is growing because people have been stuck in during the pandemic, so there is a real want and a real need there.”
 - “Food growing helps with people’s mental health and eco-anxiety too.”
- Energy
 - “I’ve worked quite closely with Glasgow Community Energy who work to provide solar panels for a number of our council buildings, and I would love to see that extended. There’s a real opportunity there because any money that is generated is put back in, so that is not only tackling climate change, but it is also empowering communities.”
- Recycling
 - “We need to invest in recycling facilities. At the moment we do not have the capacity for a lot of it.”
 - “We shouldn’t be penalising people for not using the recycling bins or the compost bins the way they should be. We should be reaching out and finding out why they’re finding it difficult and supporting them if there are any issues.”
- Jobs
 - “I think there are a lot of careers that we’re not talking about that will be forced to change the way they work.”
 - “There’s been talk recently about we make the care sector greener, and we know the majority of these women workers use personal vehicles to get around to the people they’re visiting. A lot of the time that is for safety, so we need to listen to these workers.”

She emphasised that any climate change solutions need to bring everyone along with us.

- “It’s about what we do locally and what is the legacy of COP26 after all the leaders have gone back to their countries, what that looks like for us.”
- “Scotstoun had huge shipbuilding communities and we can still see today what the decimation of that industry meant for those communities. We absolutely cannot let

that happen again. We must fight for a truly just transition that takes people with us, invests in them and, crucially, listens to them.”

- “Community has to be consulted at every opportunity. The best way we find solutions at a local level is to actually go out there and engage. There is brilliant work going on in communities in Scotland, but most of us don’t even know what’s happening. I think we need to have those conversations now and link that into the wider climate plan.”

She urged women that we need to act urgently.

- “For too long, our voices weren’t part of the debate and I think even now women are hit the hardest, but their voices are just not heard. We’ve got a duty to speak up for the women who are hardest to reach.”
- “So many things weren’t working for people before COVID. Climate change was already impacting people too. I think we need to shake up how things are done and create a more equal society. Take what we’ve learned over the last 18 months about resilience and celebrate when our communities engage with us.”

Discussion

Following up on Laura’s point about eco-anxiety, one woman who works with children in schools raised her concerns that a lot of teenagers are now talking about not having children as they are so worried about the planet. She asked what the biggest change would be to make a noticeable difference quickly, and how we can alleviate their anxiety.

- **Laura** responded, “solving the climate crisis is going to be a slow burner, we are not going to fix this overnight.”
- However, she implored young people to focus on the things that they can do – “One of the things I have found which has helped other climate activists is just getting stuck in. Ultimately if you’re getting engaged in your local community and local school raising awareness, this is influencing local politics and getting the message out... Even getting any young people along to stand with other young people who care and have their voices heard would help.”

One woman shared that her workplace is setting up a ‘Green Team’ who are trying to change attitudes within the workplace and encourage more responsible purchasing.

Agnes asked about whether it is still the case that richer countries were paying less developed countries to offset their emissions.

- Giving the example of the UN Red Scheme, **Laura** clarified that this practice is still happening.
- “We need to stop richer countries getting away with continually pumping out emissions and not making those big commitments, and also make them pay up not to offset, but to support other countries to adapt and mitigate from climate change.”

Multiple women referenced the fact that they had been struggling to find relevant and accessible information.

- “I am really passionate about it, but there is so much information out there, I can go on the internet and be on there for 5 hours. Is there something that the Scottish Government could produce just to direct people or to say this is what we are doing as a government?”
- “It would be good to produce something to make life easier for an ordinary person out there who just wants to know what they can recycle, just at a low level, and one for kids too.”

An East Renfrewshire councillor who is also a Non-Executive Director for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde expanded on some of the environmental progress being made.

- Anaesthetists from the Queen Elizabeth have come up with a new method of delivering anaesthetic that uses less of the fluorocarbons.
- “I am defending the NHS, that is not to say that I don’t think they should be doing more, but I do think we have to acknowledge that we are all trying.”
- “In East Renfrewshire council, we’re the top in Scotland for recycling.”
- “We’re also doing a lot of participation and Citizens’ Panels... I’m just here to encourage all women to come and have their say and please participate.”

A councillor in the Highlands also shared some of the work they have been engaged in.

- “We’ve been doing some work up here with the chair of the climate change working group who is a woman. She’s done a lot of work over the years, but even she feels sometimes that not everybody on the council is on board.”
- She suggested following up on the meeting by building a network of women to discuss climate change strategies - “There are a lot of likeminded people here, some of us are councillors and some are working in other organisations... We could share ideas because there’s no point reinventing the wheel.”

A woman joined the meeting from California and relayed some of the campaigning that women have been leading there.

- “The hold that big oil has on the world is just not to be trifled with. This is going to be such a battle going forward.”
- She has been fighting against a new oil pipeline in Mississippi which has just been passed, coming together with other women to send weekly letters to the President and keeping the issue in the media.
 - “It has to be an all-out demand by all of us that we keep the oil in the ground, there’s no safe way to use this. It has to all be coordinated.”

The speakers were asked whether they thought people are taking the climate emergency seriously enough.

- **Eva** expressed her frustration that “there are still some people who don’t get it and aren’t willing to make even the small changes. There is even still a small minority of people within our society who don’t believe that climate change is real. There’s still a level of denial there.”
 - “It’s conversation by conversation, that’s how we take people with us.”
- **Esther** was similarly annoyed that “some people think it’s not really happening, other people think it’s happening but it’s not going to affect me, and I think there are also some people who are quite selfish about it who might acknowledge it’s happening but don’t think it’s their job to do anything about it.”
 - “I think women have a huge role to play because we’re more motivated to do something as the nurturers and the carers. We see our planet being decimated in front of us, we’re more inclined to say enough is enough.”
- She also informed women about the Small Change Matters scheme that is being run by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.
 - “While the original motivation was to save money, loads of the suggestions that have come forward are actually things that will help the environment as well.”

Finally, several women conveyed how enthused they felt by what they had heard.

- “I have definitely been inspired by this meeting. Tomorrow I am going to do a little bit of research on what goes on in my local community to see what I can get involved in.”
- “I am really more than inspired. I have been interested in climate change for a long time, but it is not something that I felt I should be talking about a lot in the work I do with my community, so I am now thinking about mobilising my community.”

Thank You!

The Scottish Women's Convention would like to thank all of those who attended our conference, as well as those who contributed via email. We would also like to thank our speakers for providing their wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as brilliantly contributing to our broader discussion. The SWC will use all the voices gathered to feed back to policy makers regarding this timely and vitally important subject.

SWC CONTACT DETAILS

2nd Floor, The Albany Centre
44 Ashley Street, Glasgow
G3 6DS

Tel: 0141 339 4797

Please note our staff are in the office Tuesday to Thursday
and working from home on Mondays and Fridays.

www.scottishwomensconvention.org

Facebook, Instagram & Twitter: @SWCWomen



Scottish Women's Convention is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered in Scotland No. SC0327308. Registered office The Albany Centre, 2nd Floor, 44 Ashley Street, Glasgow G3 6DS.
The Scottish Women's Convention is a Charity Registered in Scotland, No. SC0398525