

Climate change - it's everyone's problem and we all need to be part of the solution

Matthew Smerdon, Deputy Director of the Baring Foundation, describes how this generalist funder has developed its thinking and grantmaking on the topic of climate change.

The stark conclusion of the Stern Report published in October 2006, that 'climate change presents very serious global risks and it demands an urgent global response', prompted the trustees of the Baring Foundation to explore what the Foundation could contribute to this response.

Since 2001, the Foundation's international grants programme (run as a joint programme with the John Ellerman Foundation since 2004) has focused on forced migration and internal displacement. In that time, some of the causes of forced migration being dealt with by the organisations we have funded have been climate-related. However, the Foundation had never had any specific focus on this issue.

By 2006, the Foundation had been regularly attending the excellent Environmental Funders Network meetings and, thanks to this, we had a ready made network to access of other trusts and environmental voluntary organisations already experienced in the issues. This helped us to think through our plans.

We began in 2007, following the lead of the City Bridge Trust, by offering organisations that we have funded in the past free environmental audits. This is where an environmental expert visits an organisation to assess its environmental performance across a range of areas such as energy use, waste, transport and procurement and makes recommendations for ways to reduce environmental impact. These audits provided a useful route into the issues for us and we saw how organisations could easily and cheaply reduce their emissions, in some cases by significant amounts. We began to see, however, that firstly the environmental impact of voluntary organisations, whilst not irrelevant, is certainly relatively small and so reducing carbon emissions in these organisations is valuable but not the whole story. Secondly, we saw how some voluntary organisations remained unconvinced that climate change was really much of an issue for them when set against the immediate and urgent needs of their beneficiaries and, therefore, they

saw no role for themselves in adding to the pressure on government to take urgent action on climate change.

In his recent pamphlet 'The New Politics of Climate Change' Stephen Hale, Director of Green Alliance, presents an analysis of why we have failed to tackle climate change and how we might succeed. He describes the deep structural reasons why governments do not deliver the sort 'urgent response' that Stern called for and suggests that what is needed is the power of individuals to influence governments through political mobilisation, public attitudes and behaviour. He writes, 'to achieve this, we must establish a widespread understanding of the connections between climate change and issues of poverty, housing, health, security and well-being that are the concerns of so many.' As such he sees the role to be played by the *whole* voluntary sector, and not just the *environmental* voluntary sector, as absolutely fundamental. This view has had an important influence on the work that the Baring Foundation launched in July 2008.

We developed our approach to look beyond organisations' own carbon footprints to explore the wider impacts of climate change on organisations and their beneficiaries. So, if your organisation supports refugees or vulnerable older people why should you be concerned about climate change? What might you be expected to do about it? In September 2008, we made four grants totalling £276,000 to a group of organisations to work with *non-environmental* voluntary organisations to explore the impact of climate change on their charitable purpose. This is being done in a variety of ways including round table meetings and scenario planning but important to the approach is that it will be a very detailed process carried out over some time. The participation of the non-environmental groups will also be funded in order to help ensure they can engage deeply and seriously with the work. The results will then be shared with practitioners and policy makers with the aim of influencing wider practice and policy on tackling climate change. Crucially, we hope that this process of bringing together climate experts with experts in the non-environmental voluntary sector will generate new perspectives about the impacts of climate change on vulnerable people and make a contribution to action at organisational, political, economic and social levels to address climate change.

The organisations leading the work are:

- Climate Outreach and Information Network (COIN) working with refugee organisations;
- Community Development Foundation, New Economics Foundation and Groundwork working with ‘community anchor organisations’ (i.e. local, multi-purpose community organisations);
- National Children’s Bureau and the Institute for Development Studies working with children and youth organisations;
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Global Action Plan and Green Alliance working with organisations that support vulnerable communities.

It is early days, but we can already see two particularly interesting developments. The first is that we began the work with an assumption that the new knowledge created would be harnessed to put pressure on government to mitigate the effects of climate change i.e. to take action that eliminates or reduces the long-term risk and hazards of climate change. In fact, we are seeing that by focusing the work on the impacts on beneficiaries, the project may help to develop adaptation strategies i.e. it will help organisations to improve their ability to moderate the effects of climate change and to increase the resilience of their beneficiaries to cope with its consequences.

The second development is that even though it seems obvious that the goal of human survival should be shared by non-environmental voluntary organisations and climate action advocates, integrating aims and objectives is immensely complex. Establishing a genuine understanding of each other’s issues and priorities is crucial to this work. If not, goals may become diluted or even end up in conflict. However, where both sides engage with the substance of what each is trying to achieve, we hope powerful and timely new coalitions will be formed.

Matthew Smerdon