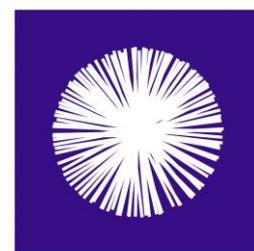


Understanding Environmental Poverty, Promoting Environmental Justice - A contribution from Scottish Environment LINK to the Scottish Government's conversation about 'Creating a Fairer Scotland'

Date: 21 January 2016



Scottish
Environment

LINK

Scottish Environment LINK, the network for Scotland's third sector environmental organisations, is pleased to see this national discussion about how the country can be a fairer and more equal place to live. LINK believes it's important that an environmental perspective is introduced into the discussions about a Fairer Scotland, which have so far paid little attention to environmental dimensions of injustice and poverty.

Poverty and injustice are not just about the distribution of wealth and income, central though those economic dimensions are. The social dimension is also widely recognised but a vision of a fair society which omits our environment is inadequate. This has been recognised in the formulation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Environmental injustices happen when economic decision-making seeks the cheapest way to shift the cost onto the environment. Put most simply, the people who live in the worst environments tend to be the people with the least power and income and who are the most disadvantaged. The rich can always pay to enjoy high quality surroundings while the health and wellbeing of the poor suffers from pollution and poor local environment. The rich always have the ability to enjoy a pleasant environment and good food: the same is not true for poor people.

Scottish Environment LINK therefore suggests that the discussion needs to incorporate a set of environmental considerations to this discourse on fairness. For example:-

- *Scotland's climate change avoidance targets are claimed to be world leading YET climate change will most heavily affect the poorest here, just as, across the planet, it is the least developed countries with the smallest emissions which will be hit hardest.*
- *A beautiful environment is considered to be a major part of our identity and heritage, known to be important to people's health and wellbeing, and STILL the poorest people live with the greatest levels of pollution in the soil, water and air and live in areas most blighted by graffiti, litter, dumping.*
- *We share our space with amazing wildlife BUT people living in areas of deprivation have by far the least contact with nature and wildlife and the worst access to quality landscapes and green space.*
- *We have vast resources of natural energy BUT the poorest people live with the worst energy poverty, often resulting in cold and damp housing, and ill-health.*

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- *We live in a fertile, well-watered country YET the poorest often have difficulty in achieving well-balanced nutrition or accessing land on which to grow food.*

Where the '**Creating a Fairer Scotland**' discussion document asks 'WHERE WE'D LIKE TO BE IN 2030' LINK suggests that it could be improved radically if additions were made to the list of outcomes we want to achieve by 2030. LINK would like to add:

- *Scotland's contribution to tackling climate change includes a full understanding of the huge disparities and poverty it would create;*
- *All our communities are encouraged and helped to value, look after and improve their local landscapes, especially those with poor surroundings often blighted by graffiti, litter, dumping and anti-social behaviour;*
- *Pollution in the soil, water and air are being prevented effectively and clear programmes to clean up the wastes left by previous generations are in place;*
- *Everyone has fair access to quality green space for recreation, contemplation and understanding of the natural world;*
- *Action is being taken to halt declines in wildlife and everyone, wherever they live, has the opportunity for contact with nature;*
- *Communities and individuals are creating their own clean, green renewable energy with widely dispersed generation of electricity from renewable sources; and*
- *Everyone can have well-balanced nutrition and has access to land on which to grow food if they so wish.*

We applaud the integration of social and environmental aims in the Sustainable Development Goals and hope that this emphasis will be carried through into thinking across government and across Scotland. Our understanding of sustainable development tells us that the success of a society can only be measured by weighing up and balancing all of the economic, social and environmental factors and their impacts on people and the planet on which we live.

Within the underlying assumption that creating fairness will be approached, primarily, by tackling the uneven distribution of wealth, it is vital that the environmental consequences as experienced by the individual are included in the assessment of new policies.

Environmental protection and improvement is a public benefit but often the better-off get most enjoyment from it. When we improve the state of Scotland's environment and reduce the footprints which our lifestyle make across the world we benefit everyone but we should make sure that we always consider the impacts on justice and injustice as well.

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In making this argument, LINK is not seeking to criticise or undermine the **'Creating a Fairer Scotland'** conversation, but to improve it and to make it whole. We believe that sustainability is a key element in tackling the unfairness within our country and the world. LINK and its members will actively assist the fight against environmental poverty and in the fleshing out of the aspirations for fairness set out here.

This submission is supported by the following member organisations of LINK:

Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland

Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group

Butterfly Conservation Scotland

Friends of the Earth Scotland

Froglife

Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust

National Trust for Scotland

Nourish Scotland

Planning Democracy

Ramblers Scotland

RSPB Scotland

Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society

Scottish Campaign for National Parks

Scottish Countryside Rangers Association

Scottish Wild Land Group

Scottish Wildlife Trust

Soil Association Scotland

Whale and Dolphin Conservation

Woodland Trust Scotland

WWF Scotland

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