

Social Equity and Climate Change

The rich contribute far more to global heating than the poor.

In fact household emissions roughly correlate with income and wealth levels. The poor cannot afford property, expensive vehicles and aviation. They also can't afford some of the means of mitigating climate change such as well-insulated houses.

Paradoxically, the poor suffer the first and worst impacts of climate change, both in New Zealand and elsewhere.

Poor communities have fewer resources to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise and extreme weather events. In the sequential weather events that battered the North Island in early 2023, it was the poorer people living in low-lying areas that suffered the most and were the least able to manage their loss.

This pattern prevails globally, particularly affecting marginalised and indigenous communities, and exacerbating other inequalities. For example, in floods in Bangladesh in May 2022, ten times as many women died as men. In this culture, women are not taught to swim, have less access to cell-phone warnings than men, and are more likely to be engaged in caring for elderly and young whom they are unwilling to leave to drown.

Social inequality damages social cohesion.

We are at a time when rapid social transformation is required if we are to respond to our last slender chance of remaining under 1.5 degrees of global heating. Rapid social transformation causes social strains. We need the highest possible social cohesion to hold together under these circumstances.

A range of measures to improve Aotearoa's serious social inequity is available.

- Free education and health care
- A more progressive income tax profile
- Inheritance, wealth and capital gains tax.
- Radical reform of financial support for political parties
- Expand participation in governance – Citizens' Assemblies
- Guaranteed basic income
- Regulation and assistance for families living in geographical areas of risk

No one left behind.

In the course of the rapid and large scale social transformation which must occur if we are to make our contribution to reduce over 1.5 degrees of warming, some people will lose jobs, some businesses will fail, some will suffer the impacts of climate change much more than others. We need, as a society, to devise ways to share both the costs and the benefits of both climate change and our social response to climate change so that the burdens and benefits fall more equally on all. Among responses that will be helpful, at community, regional and national levels, are:

- Income support where needed to allow basic needs and a life of dignity for everyone
- Shorter working week
- Easily accessible job retraining schemes
- Support for community level design of appropriate response to difficult transitions.

We propose to form a group within the Nelson Tasman Climate Forum to work on these matters.

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