



HeadsUp Forum # 32

[www.HeadsUp.org.uk](http://www.HeadsUp.org.uk)

## **Climate Change... How should the world summit tackle the problem?**

This forum took place between 28 September – 16 October 2009, supported by the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC), to find out what young people thought about the issue of climate change in advance of the UN summit taking place in Copenhagen, December 2009. This summit is responsible for setting the next round of emissions targets for all the countries involved and also deciding global strategies for how the world can tackle the challenge of climate change in the coming decades.

The forum introduced basic scientific information about climate change to allow informed debate, but it also required the young people involved to think about global structures of governance and how we should work together to tackle problems that effect the whole world. Looking at the impact we can have as individuals - and what should be done at a societal, national or international level - introduced an additional dimension to this challenging subject for HeadsUp users.

**There were many ideas to help everyone reduce their environmental impact, individually and nationally. Here are the HeadsUp top ten:**

1. People should be rewarded if their energy bill decreases
2. Councils should give every household a small water butt to use for irrigation and washing your car to stop using so much water
3. There should be stylish bins to keep in the kitchen, they should not let out smells and should look majorly up to date
4. There should be cycling training sessions available to a wide range of people
5. More people should do house swaps in the UK...less plane trips means less pollution
6. Schools should make their own 'mini governments' for global warming... and come up with activities and projects for their school to do!
7. The government should provide school children with the option to rent bikes from their school for a term so they can ride to school in the morning
8. Stop running aeroplanes once a month
9. The government should pay people for recycling then more people would do it
10. In between popular TV programmes...there should be ads or short programmes encouraging people constantly to be GREEN!

**\* see pg. 10 for the full list**

Joan Ruddock MP, Minister of State for the Department of Energy and Climate Change, took part in the debate and was charged with feeding young peoples' views on climate change back to her colleagues who will attend the world summit in Copenhagen. Linking this issue with the global institutions put in place to tackle climate change, gives young people the opportunity of finding out more about how the process of international cooperation works, as well as the chance to have a voice that extends beyond the boundaries of the UK.

Thirteen decision-makers pledged their support for the *Climate Change* forum and were involved in providing a statement for the Backup materials or took part in the debate. Their involvement and support was, as always, crucial to the success of the forum.

They decision-makers involved in this forum were:

- **Joan Ruddock MP** – Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change
- **Jo Swinson MP** – Member, Environmental Audit Committee
- **Joan Walley MP** - Member, Environmental Audit Committee
- **Linda Gilroy MP**
- **Caroline Lucas MEP** - Leader, Green Party
- **Linda McAvan MEP**
- **Stewart Stevenson MSP** – Minister for Climate Change, Scottish Parliament
- **Elaine Murray MSP**
- **Peter Lilley MP**
- **Jim Mather MSP** – Minister for Energy, Scottish Parliament
- **Roseanna Cunningham MSP** – Minister for the Environment, Scottish Parliament
- **Margaret Gardener** – Practical Action
- **Professor John Beddington** - UK Government's Chief Scientific Adviser

#### What is HeadsUp?

[www.headsup.org.uk](http://www.headsup.org.uk) is a safe, online space for under 18s to debate the political issues important to them. **Young people** share viewpoints with their peers and **decision-makers** up and down the country. Through the forums, HeadsUp develops **young people's** political awareness and promotes active citizenship so they can play an effective part in the democratic processes that affect them.

HeadsUp enables **politicians** to consult with **young people**, to find out their ideas, experiences and opinions. There is ample background information to prepare **young people** for the debates, as well as **teachers'** notes and activities.

# Climate Change... How should the world summit tackle the problem?

## Forum Summary

There were 1,056 posts<sup>∞</sup> made in the forum from 138 student HeadsUp users - with an average of 193 unique daily visits to the site over the course of the forum. These figures show just how engaged the students were with the subject matter and how passionate they felt about the issues - the number of posts received in this forum was three or four times the usual number – a HeadsUp record.

The discussions on the forum were broad but the general themes and directions of the debate are highlighted in the pages below, along with practical suggestions given by forum users. The debate was split into four different forum threads addressing the significant issues to be discussed at the UN summit on Climate Change in Copenhagen. These were:

- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions** - How can global agreement aim to reduce pollution from cars, factories and homes being released into the atmosphere?
- **Minimising the effects of climate change on poorer countries** - How can we help the poorest countries that are worst hit by extreme weather that results from climate change?
- **The science of climate change** - Do you think the scientists' predictions are right about the threat of climate change?
- **What will you do?** - Encourage your parents to make energy saving measures in your home? Join in a campaign about climate change? Holiday more in the UK? Eat less meat?

The over-riding theme of the forum was just how seriously the young people on the forum took the issue of climate change. Many of those posting comments took this debate as a call to action and wanted to see much more of a commitment to reducing the impact of climate change by adults. They felt that small actions by many individuals could have a big impact on the severity of climate change and that it was everyone's duty to think about their impact on the planet and put energy saving ideas into practice. They made clear that this group also included politicians

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<sup>∞</sup> Includes: young people, moderators, teachers and decision-makers.

and the wealthy who it was felt did not always make a large enough contribution to addressing the problem of climate change.~

*mp's and especilly Gorden Brown should set about using less energy*

*Dear Mr Brown...People respect you and look up to you so if you do even a tiny little bit then it might encourage other people to do the same and I believe that if everyone does something then we could have our amazing world feeling better in no time!!!!*

*The whole world all need to work together. From nurseries to governments*

*Have you ever thought that everyone always says "Make sure you recycle" and "You should always go on buses or walk and cycle" but have you ever thought that maybe you don't do them yourselves as you have private jets and other private things... I'm not somebody in charge or somebody who needs to set an example*

*Loads of people in power say they will help the environment, but they never do. They don't care a bit, and only say it so that people think that they are really good and kind*

Some of their comments below show their passion and the sense of urgency that they felt was required from the decision-makers going to the UN summit in Copenhagen:

*SAVE THIS PLANET DON'T LET GLOBAL WARMING ENGULF THE PLANET!!!!  
ACT NOW. NOT LATER BUT **NOW!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!***

*Everyone can make a difference no matter what they do they can make a tiny or HUGE contribution to saving the world*

*Don't just take the 'I can't be bothered' attitude. Get involved. Find out where you can recycle plastic, paper, tins, glass and garden rubbish. There are so many ways!*

*Looking after the earth is EVERYBODIES responsibility! It doesn't matter who you are, if you are blessed with a great life, then you should be looking after the earth!*

*we should never assume that just cause everyone else is doing something we don't have to do anything ourselves. If everyone assumed this then nobody would be helping anything. Any way, I think that as it isn't only the UK that is polluting, the message should be spread to others in other countries so they do their bit too. And EVERY LITTLE HELPS/MAKES A DIFFERENCE!!!!*

*if everyone worked to make their own town a better place and a greener place then every town in Britain could reduce their carbon emissions!*

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~ Throughout this report comments in italics are direct quotations from student users and have not been altered.

*we should do as much as we can to save the earth. we should always recycle , walk to school or work, maybe catch the bus instead of going by car, just do whatever you can!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

It was clear from the passion on the forum that messages about climate change had really affected the young people posting comments and that they were well aware of the things that they could do as individuals to make a difference - particularly the 3 Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle). Recycling was seen as a duty that everyone should take part in along with being more careful not to waste energy by leaving lights on or taps running. They were also keen to spread the word to their families, friends and communities about the need to combat climate change.

## **Action**

The young people discussing climate change on the forum were very keen that their passion for this issue didn't stop there – they wanted to encourage people to take action to reduce their environmental impact on the planet. Campaigning and spreading the word to friends and family was one way that they proposed to do this.

*organise an event on Club Penguin, Bebo, Facebook or your blog. Get more people to be green*

*Everybody should do their best to be green and not use too much energy and should also talk to the people they know about it (eg. family and friends) and get them to be greener*

They also thought that helping the environment needed to be seen as more cool, with celebrities endorsing a green lifestyle, more adverts highlighting the consequences of climate change and better looking electric cars.

*A lot of the population like to follow role models like celebrities or other famous people. Perhaps they might inspire lots of people to be green!*

*I think the reason people don't recycle is because it's considered geeky or stupid...So what WE ALL NEED TO DO (so listen here people) is MAKE RECYCLING COOL.*

*Celebs and Popstars should write songs and things about climate change. If people listen to celebs maybe they will make a change. Also adverts should be more frequent about global warming*

There was also a lot of concern that the majority of people were not active enough or spent too much of their time entertaining themselves with electrical items such as computers, televisions and mobile phones. Trying to combat the laziness that gadgets and some forms of transport perpetuate was a priority for the young people on the forum due to the negative impact these lifestyle choices can have on the environment. Ways to encourage people to change their behaviour included highlighting the health benefits of walking or cycling and also the amount of money that could be saved.

*We have been given feet to use to walk, not sit in a car and drive. Walking is also a lot healthier so give it a go.*

*think about whether you really need to drive. Are you just going round the corner or are you going over a mile. Are you just being lazy or is it necessary.*

*I saw a man once who got on the bus, turned the corner, and got off! he could have walked for two minutes! I know you cant always walk because it could be a long journey but when you have the chance, WALK!*

*turn the tv off when rubbish programs are on!*

*You know you use energy alot, well ever realised that all this actually costs money...playing outside instead of computer, PS's, T.V. These are all free so why not do these more instead of wasting money and wasting energy.*

There was a lot of advice shared between forum users about how to reduce energy consumption on an individual level. Most of these reflected the campaigns run by the Government to inform the public about how to cut their carbon emissions and save energy.

## **Education**

Although most of the young people taking part in the forum were very aware of their impact on the environment some were unsure about how much adults knew regarding climate change and whether they understood what they could do to stop it. Further education on climate change, its impacts and what individuals could do to stop it was suggested. Advertising was seen to be an effective way to inform people about the effects of climate change (as mentioned above).

*it seems to me that children know way more about climate change than adults do, because they learn about it at school. The problem is that there is lots more that adults can do than children can. Maybe a special "Adult school" should be set up, so that adults know about it too*

*Scientists should go around schools and do one off talks about science to help children to understand what we are doing to the world*

Schools were seen as particularly good places for young people to start having an impact and a voice on environmental matters. Some had already encouraged teachers to switch lights and computers off, increase recycling in the classroom or set up committees to look at how the school could reduce its environmental impact.

*starting a club at school would be a good idea*

*At school council, I got the head to make the caretakers turn off computers which had been running overnight, over week end, and so on.*

*my A Level Citizenship class is involved in the Comenius project; where we are working with students from around Europe to combat climate change...Our task is to create a booklet on what the effects are of climate change in our countries - England, Spain, Germany, Turkey, Norway and France.*

## **Science**

Overall the scientific community was very well respected and trusted by those using the forum. Most of those commenting believed that there was good evidence to support climate change and that humans had played a role in causing it.

*A few people, it seems, think that scientists just "guess" how bad climate change is. This is not true, they look at the planets past climate changes, research the effects of CO2 and other greenhouse gases, and then after some times years of study/experiments etc. they form a well educated estimation. They don't just guess!!!!*

*SCIENTISTS DO STUFF TO TRY AND HELP AND WHAT DO WE DO, SIT ON OUR BUMS AND MOANING, THAT'S NOT HELPFUL, WE NEED TO START TRYING TO HELP THE SCIENTISTS*

*Sometime Scientists can be wrong but they do know what they are doing otherwise they wouldnt be working as that job*

*scientists are the ones who tell us how to reduce climate change whereas other people just sit around saying how terrible it is and how it's a crisis which will really affect us. scientists tell us that if that's the way we feel we should try our hardest and do as much as we can to reduce it instead of just saying how bad it is*

*Overall I think they are right , i don't understand why people dont take it more seriously. Scientists have been saying there is a problem for years.They don't always get things right but generally they do.*

However the forum users did accept that scientists are only human and that there were occasions when they could be wrong or their predictions for how climate change would continue may not be able to be completely accurate.

*they do so much researching and they dedicate their lives 2 it and they have 2 get degrees on it but.. THEY AREN'T ALWAYS RIGHT!!!!!! They are STILL human and they STILL make mistakes!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

*I think that some of the scientists predictions are right, and some of them are just guesses which might be right or wrong*

*I think that the scientists might be right because they spend lots of time working on their ideas. But they may be slightly out- maybe to make us do something by exaggerating and making it sound worse, or they also may not think it is going to bad as it ends up being....I'm not sure. But I think that their predictions are a good guideline*

*It doesn't matter if the scientists are wrong **OR** right, it is a possibility that they are right so we should do all we can to help the enviroment anyway.*

Most did think though that they would give scientists the benefit of the doubt as they were well trained and trying to help us deal with climate change. Although they accepted the scientists' predictions may not always be accurate they didn't think doing nothing to tackle climate change was an option.

Improving scientific knowledge, as well as supporting and training more scientists to come up with technological innovations to deal with climate change, was suggested.

*CALL me a geek, but the more you know about the sciencey stuff, the better.*

*I think they're right, if we aren't going to listen to the scientists, who can we listen to? However, I do think there should be more correct information available to the public so that there is more trust in science.*

*I agree, we do need more scientist... think of all the things they have discovered that have helped us... maybe they can discover new things about Climate Change that can help us reduce global warming further!!*

## **Technology**

Technology is often assumed to be a major part of the solution to climate change as people are hopeful that new innovations and inventions can solve our energy problems and reduce the changes that we have to make to our lifestyles. However the debates on the forum were much more sceptical about the role technology might play in tackling climate change. Some of the users in fact suggested that technology was the problem, giving us more gadgets, that consume more energy, that we then feel we can't do without.

*technology has made climate change in the first place. Is technology the way forward or simplicity?*

*We need more inventors. That is the problem. If we had more inventors, then we would be able to invent more machines etc to help reduce emissions.*

*the scientistists bought computers, mobiles and televisions to this world we could of lived without them but now we have them they cant take them away.*

The short lifetime of a lot of the products available in the shops was also criticised, with suggestions that scientists and businesses should focus more on creating environmentally useful inventions rather than driving a desire for new gadgets and the latest versions of what is effectively the same product. Making sure that new products were designed to help us deal with climate change was also seen as important.

*Instead of making 3 types of ipod, for example, they could gather all the surveys and information to create just one- it could be alit greener- making 1 ipod rather than 3.*

*I strongly believe the scientists should start running tests to see if we can make Eco-friendly cars or factories that produce less pollution.*

*the scientists should be working out how to save our planet not how to improve the unimprovable phone!!!!*

*the companies are the source of our problems but not all of them. we are to blame too some people blame the big manufacturers for the recent climate change but the truth is we do as much for it as them.*

There was debate about who was really to blame for this 'throw away culture' – the scientists, businesses or the public? Some users suggested that the Government should regulate the products that were produced to make them more environmentally friendly. Reducing our dependence on energy by using less in the

first place was the most popular strategy for the users on the forum rather than relying on future technological changes to solve our problems.

### **Climate change and the developing world**

The forum users were really concerned about the impact of climate change on those in poorer countries. They were very aware of the direct impact of their actions on the countries in the world that are least able to cope with the challenges that climate change imposes. They also had a well-developed sense of the injustice of the situation – that developed countries had created this situation and became wealthy through using unsustainable energy – and that it would be poorer countries that would feel the effects most, as well as having to try and develop in a more sustainable way.

*I think that because the poorer countries do not have the money to prevent climate change and to prevent the effects it would have on their country than that leaves it to the richer countries to sort out, which means we can pay the price of our extravagant lifestyles which are the reason that this is happening.*

*why should people from poorer countries have to suffer from the effects of climate change. they haven't done anything wrong.*

*we should ALL act on climate change, for the sake of poorer countries, as their temperatures are rising because of us*

*Think how lucky we are to have all this luxury that we may not consider to be luxury at all. People in poorer countries don't have all of this clean water and have to resort to drinking unsafe water from the bottoms of ponds and rivers.*

They were very passionate about the West helping poorer countries and wanted more redistribution of funds to help developing countries deal with climate change. They also felt that some developed countries were being greedy and should sacrifice some of their luxuries to help reduce the problems suffered in the developing world.

*If politicians are reading my comments, please take notice and give poor countries equal rights and equal FOOD.*

*We can use less TV and computers so they can have standard things like food and drink.*

*Richer countries can help poorer countries easily because they can donate a lot of money.*

*I think that we could really help people in poorer countries by not wasting all of your money on plasma screen T.V.'s or video games!! I'm am pretty sure that you could give some things to the charity through school!!*

There was an understanding that although charity donations were important to help in the short-term there must be other policies in place that help developing countries to become more independent in the long-term and cope with the changes of climate in their different regions. Needing to donate equipment and advice was seen as an important way to give effective help to poorer countries, but there was

an acceptance that they also had more immediate and demanding problems in addition to climate change. A more equal redistribution of wealth and improved human rights was seen as a way of making countries more independent and able to cope better with the challenges themselves.

*more needs to be done to help them economically develop. This can be used to improve their predictions and defense against these hazards (climate change). Donations and aid will help but are they really long term solutions? These countries need to be able to help themselves by becoming more independent.*

*For years we, in the west, have been pumping aid money into Africa, and sadly some of it has ended up in corrupt officials pockets. Therefore more needs to be done by western governments, they need to send over trained workers to build wells for clean water, to build schools and to keep a close eye on where money is spent.*

*In poor countries they tend to suffer from climate change the most, as it gets hotter disease could spread more easily. The warmer the weather the faster the diseases grow. People should raise money so they can have tablets and injections to protect themselves from diseases.*

*They need food, water etc!!! Once they have the things to live with, then we can think about that (climate change)... Maybe, when it comes to the time of building them homes, put some sort of cheap, green design into the building.*

## Ideas

The HeadsUp users proved their passion for the environmental issues on the forum but they also put forward some practical ideas about how to tackle the problems related to climate change. Below are some of their suggestions for the policy-makers and politicians to feed into their debates and decisions.

What governments or local councils should do:

- *I think councils should give every household a small water butt to use for irrigation and washing your car to stop using so much water*
- *Make lots of bus transport free, it would reduce the amount of cars on the roads and would help to save the environment*
- *The Government should buy (or at least pay half of the price) for a solar panel for every house*
- *People should be rewarded if their energy bill decreases*
- *How much are the government really doing to help make recycling easier for everyone. Lots of recycling schemes are quite confusing and not everyone is able to recycle everything*
- *The government should pay people for recycling. then more people would do it*
- *Make people give 10 % of their profit to charities*
- *Help poorer countries by sending them money...and telling them how to be greener with the money we've given them*
- *Give poor countries equal rights and equal FOOD*
- *Give them (developing countries) useful things like equipment, so that they can make a living for themselves and not rely on charities for money*
- *In between popular TV programmes that a wide range of people might watch, there should be ads or short programmes encouraging people constantly to be GREEN!*
- *The government should provide school children with the option to rent bikes from their school for a term so they can ride to school in the morning*
- *The council could come round each house leaflets and tell them about recycling*

- *Make restrictions on new products so everything we buy is environmentally friendly*
- *Stop running aeroplanes once a month*
- *Make sure that the new buildings that will be built from now on do use sustainable energy*
- *Global agreements about reducing gas emissions should be made sure that every country involved meets their goals in order for progress to continue*
- *We should change our street lights to solar powered street lights*
- *Giving families limits of how much energy they can use everyday*
- *Provide incentives for electric car manufacturers to set up shop in the UK*
- *More nuclear power plants rather than those that run on coal*
- *The government should give a certain amount of money (vouchers) to a family so that they could purchase a bike or more than one*
- *If you don't recycle you should get fined*
- *You and other mp's, Prime ministers, Presidents ect.. Are always going off to other countries to hold meetings. Why can't you just use a web cam to speak to each other?*

What businesses and other organisations, such as schools, should do:

- *Newspapers should be made from recycled paper rather than new paper*
- *the price of solar panels should be brought down-ALOT so that more people can afford them*
- *I think schools should arrange busses for all ages so not as many cars travel*
- *Why not try making Light Bulbs that can be charged*
- *Try and create a car run by recycled gases like poo and methane*
- *If we made Elektrik powered cars look cool and a bit cheaper, people will buy them*
- *Schools should make their own 'mini governments' for global warming. Like an eco-committee. in each meeting they should discuss global warming and come up with activities and projects for their school to do!*
- *There should be stylish Bins too keep in the kitchen, they should not let out smells and should look majourly up to date*
- *Make an easy to read energy usage meter for in houses so that you can see how much energy is being used by each household appliance*
- *If we had more inventors, then we would be able to invent more machines etc to help reduce emissions*

What communities should do:

- *Small towns and villages, or even big cities should start to take matters into their own hands instead of leaving it to the government. Start a green group! work on ways that you could make YOUR home and YOUR village eco-friendly*
- *There should be cycling training sessions available to a wide range of people*

What we all should do:

- *A week without electricity to see what you can live without*
- *We should have a limit for how much energy we use even if it is not a law just do it in your family*
- *Shopping is a waste of material just go to an charity shop and find some clothes that way you won't be wasting any material or the factory won't be using any chemicals!!!*
- *Walk to the shops or jump on your bike! Stay healthy and help the world stay healthy!*
- *We need to start reducing here. Only watch one television, write out your homework don't type it, go out and be active even if you don't feel like it, it will make you feel better*
- *More people should do house swaps in the UK as it is cheaper and less plane trips means less pollution*

- *We should spend our money on something that will make a difference to the earth, not expensive houses, dresses or other objects that aren't needed*
  - *Use products that haven't been imported*
  - *If you grow your own food it is much more fun than going to the supermarket*
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### **Political Context**

This forum took place at a time when climate change policy was high on the agenda of both politicians and the media, in the run up to the UN summit in Copenhagen. Around the time of the forum events took place that were relevant to the debate, for example a destructive year long drought in Kenya, protests against climate change at the 'Climate Camp' and during the period of the forum, activists from Greenpeace scaling the Houses of Parliament to highlight environmental issues. This forum shows how successful HeadsUp can be in providing young people with a platform to engage with important, current issues and the opportunity to feed their views into policy debates and decisions. This is particularly the case when supported by a Government department, and in the context of international talks, as the popularity of this forum with both students and decision-makers shows.

HeadsUp makes sure that young people's views on the environment and climate change are sent to the appropriate policy-makers, journalists and politicians so they can take into account young people's views on the issues.

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**The HeadsUp team would like to convey our thanks** and appreciation to the decision-makers, young people and teachers that got involved in this important debate. We would also like to extend an invitation to interested parties, particularly legislators and government, interested NGOs, academics and journalists to respond to the findings. Responses and requests for further information should be directed to:

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