

# Climate Change — Who's Carrying the Burden?

The chilly climates of the  
global environmental dilemma

Edited by L. Anders Sandberg  
and Tor Sandberg



The Canadian Centre  
for Policy Alternatives

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Third volume in the  
*Our Schools/Our Selves* book series  
2010





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# Preface

**T**his book is dedicated to those that suffer the most from climate change yet are the least responsible for it. We hope the message and insights we provide may make a contribution, however small, to the recognition of their situation and to give a voice to their concerns.

Climate change is typically about the devastating impact of global climate change in the form of rising temperatures, more extreme weather, melting polar ice caps, drowning polar bears, rising sea levels, floods and droughts. Climate change is also seen to affect everybody and, therefore, calls for global solutions. The international Kyoto Agreement on carbon emissions constitutes one such global measure. The trade in carbon-emissions permits constitutes another measure; so does the investment in new technologies, ranging from giant mirrors in space that deflect the sun's rays to burying carbon emissions in the ground. At the same time, we are all asked to take individual responsibility for climate change by practicing the three Rs: reuse, reduce, and recycle.

*Climate Change — Who's Carrying the Burden?* questions these developments by focusing on the distributional impact and visions of climate change and the connection of climate change to

wider systemic forces. We join a group of climate justice advocates who are critical of markets, new technologies, and international agreements as solutions to the climate change dilemma. We share their call for exploring the origins of climate change and the places where its impacts are felt the most, such as the Tar Sands of Alberta, the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, the Canadian North, the coastal regions of Bangladesh, and the island states of the Pacific.

We also propose that the concept of climate change itself can be an oppressive force in not only hiding the historical connections of the carbon economy to colonialism, capitalism, and a rampant and exploitative resource extraction, but also the resiliencies, possibilities and alternatives articulated by groups who fight and stand outside the carbon economy. There are, we argue, chilly climates that surround the discussions on climate change that erase, exclude and marginalize alternative views and possibilities.

The artwork of sculptor and activist Jens Galschiøt that graces the cover and the first page of each chapter of this book illustrates the connection between climate and system change. His sculpture “Justitia, Western Goddess of Justice” was a prominent symbol in Copenhagen during the COP15 Climate Change Conference in December 2009. It was accompanied by the following inscription: “I’m sitting on the back of a man — he is sinking under the burden — I will do everything to help him — except to step down from his back.” The inscription refers to the heavy climate change burden carried by the Global South, and the climate debt owed it by a recalcitrant and conspicuously consuming Global North.

What is interesting about the Justitia sculpture, however, is that it was not made for the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference but for the Social Forum in London in 2004 (an offshoot of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre). At the Forum, Justitia represented the harsh impact imposed by First World agricultural policies on Third World farmers. Galschiøt understands and calls attention to climate change as one phenomenon among many that is contributing to a more unequal and more environmentally devastated world.

Jens Galschiøt’s work has been a great inspiration for us in the completion of this book. He has generously shared his art-



work for the illustrations, and on a visit by Anders Sandberg to the Galschiøt Gallery in June 2010 he also shared his time and ideas in conversation. We would like to thank Jens and all the staff at the Gallery for their generosity and hospitality.

In the process of compiling this book, we are indebted to several other organizations and people. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has generously and enthusiastically supported the project from start to finish. Erika Shaker has edited all the chapters in spite of being on parental leave and then vacation. Nancy Reid has speedily put the manuscript in order in a hot and humid Toronto. Erika and Nancy have also provided valuable input on the title, the writing and the cover of the book.

The authors who ultimately made this book a reality have been wonderful in their response to hurried requests for submission and revisions of their chapters. The fact that this book took a mere three months to conceive of and produce is a testament to their dedication and compassion for one of the greatest environmental dilemmas of our time.

Anders Sandberg would like to thank his colleagues in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University for their support as well as York's Institute for Research and Innovation in Sustainability for working so hard to obtain observer status for him and Tor Sandberg at the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. He is also indebted to the undergraduate students and Teaching Assistants (some of whom have contributed chapters to the book) in "ENVS 1200: Taking Action: Engaging People and the Environment" who inspired the compilation of this book in the first place. They will now have a chance to read and discuss it.

Tor Sandberg would like to thank the alternative news media outlet *rabble.ca* which has inspired and assisted him in delving into the depths and crevices of climate change.

Finally we are grateful to Maria Legerstee, mother and wife, who is not only a Professor who edits her own books but also a capable and generous manager of our complicated and busy lives. Thank you Maria. Thank you mom. We love you.

*L. Anders Sandberg and Tor Sandberg, Toronto, July 8, 2010.*



## Introduction

# Climate change – who’s carrying the burden?

L. ANDERS SANDBERG and TOR SANDBERG

Climate change refers to the increasing temperatures and changing weather patterns created by carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions and their negative consequences for humankind and the more the human world. Those who debate climate change often refer to it as global warming. The term global is telling. It suggests that climate change is a global phenomenon that is experienced by everybody. This is undeniably true, but it often follows that the same observers see the prescriptions as global too. An international community of experts, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is considered to be a reliable source of information on the problem, and a collective of nation states, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, are considered the major agents for change.

The main strategic measures to combat climate change are often referred to as mitigation and adaptation. The two terms are clean, simple and seemingly value neutral. Nation states and their citizens have to mitigate climate change by reducing their carbon emissions. But they also have to adapt to climate change when the impact is already felt. Of the two, mitigation is clearly the main strategy advocated.

Mitigation through technological innovation, promoting electric cars, alternative energies, and energy efficiency, constitutes one of the major concrete measures to fight climate change. Another mitigation measure is the promotion of carbon markets, which includes concepts such as cap and trade and carbon offsets. Cap and trade is based on the idea that a progressively lower cap be set on carbon emissions within a specific area. Carbon emitters then trade emissions permits competitively in that space, giving them an incentive to innovate to reduce their emissions over time. Carbon offsets, on the other hand, allow companies and individuals to compensate for carbon emissions in different ways, such as the planting of trees or the establishment of an alleged green business in one place, which offsets a polluting behaviour in another place. The Norwegian Nobel Committee's choice of Al Gore for its Peace Prize in 2007 for his fight against climate change is a good example of the general acceptance of the green technologies and carbon markets options for dealing with climate change. Gore has made heavy investments in techno-fixes and carbon emissions exchanges in both the United States and Europe. He now makes handsome profits from these investments, a situation he is unapologetic about; after all, he claims, he is merely putting his money where his mouth is.

There are of course skeptics in the climate change debate. One of the most prominent is Bjørn Lomborg, the author of *The Skeptical Environmentalist* and *Cool It*. Lomborg is not a climate change denier; he concedes that climate change is occurring but that there is little anybody can do about it. He therefore advises that the money spent on climate change mitigation could be better spent elsewhere. Gore and Lomborg hold opposite positions on climate change mitigation measures (Lomborg, 2009). However, they are both market and technology enthusiasts who believe that the very economic structures, political systems, and technology networks that plunged the world into the climate change crisis in the first place, now have the ability to get us out of there. They thus obscure and marginalize the presence and possibilities of alternatives (Figure 1).

Climate justice advocates distance themselves from the prescriptions of Lomborg and Gore. Some of them, though, buy into the global discourse of markets in defining the climate change problem and its potential solutions. Most leaders of the developing



**Figure 1:** The climate change ruse. Former Vice President Al Gore and Bjørn Lomborg testify to the joint meeting of the Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality and the Subcommittee on Energy and Environment, United States House of Representatives, March 21 2007. Though Lomborg and Gore hold contrasting views on climate change mitigation, they both advocate free market and technological solutions to the world's problems, be they climate change or world poverty (photo courtesy Bjørn Lomborg, [www.lomborg.com](http://www.lomborg.com)).

world fall into this category and argue for massive transfers of financial and technological resources to compensate for the social and environmental costs incurred by their nations as a result of the climate change emanating from the massive carbon emissions in the Global North. Specific programs, such as the United Nations' Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation program, or the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Agreement, fall into these measures. They either seek to put a market value on the ecological services provided by the world's rainforests as carbon sequesters (and then call for a commensurate financial compensation from First World nations to the Third World), or bring new clean industries to poor nations.

Some prominent individual climate justice advocates also appeal or access global institutions in an attempt to remedy climate change. Canadian Inuit leader Sheila Watt Cloutier, a First

Nations rights activist, has worked tirelessly through international institutions to address the climate change issue. Watt Cloutier was *co-nominated* with Al Gore by Norwegian Parliamentarians Børge Brende and Heidi Sørensen for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007, though only Gore received the prize together with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Stephen Lewis, in this book, represents a human rights advocate who is open to market mechanisms as one measure to fight climate change in light of its devastating effects on the poor countries of the world. Lewis' account of climate change in this book provides a dystopic and pessimistic view of the future, based on his work in Africa with the United Nations, human rights groups and local non-government organizations.

Many climate justice adherents, including most of the contributors to this book, are highly critical of the ability of modern global institutions to deal with the climate change situation. They join powerful critiques and add empirical support for the failures of the market mechanism and the techno-fix to deal with climate change (Gilbertson and Reyes, 2009; Leonard, 2010). They also unite with others who argue for local control of local resources, even where such control may mean leaving the oil in the soil (Angus, 2010; *Climate and Capitalism*).

Anders Sandberg and Tor Sandberg point to the content and bankruptcy of the official deliberations and proposals at COP15 in Copenhagen in December 2009, based on a first-hand account of their experiences at the Bella Centre, the official venue for COP15. They instead pin their hopes on the grassroots activists and transition movements at the people's Klimaforum and the streets of Copenhagen where participants worked to build different governance structures and livelihoods to create alternatives to the carbon economy.

Naomi Klein, also a participant at the Bella Centre and Klimaforum in Copenhagen, provides a powerful statement on climate debt, the debt owed to Third World countries for the devastation caused by carbon use and emissions in the developed world. Not only does she call for the developed countries to pay compensation to the Third World countries who are now unable to use the same carbon-development path, but she points to the necessity of drastic cuts in carbon exploitation and carbon emissions in the developed world. Klein, as elsewhere, calls for the

formation of a grassroots transnational community to come together to pressure governments and world leaders to take action to deal both with social justice and climate change issues.

Vandana Shiva, in an interview with Tor Sandberg at the G8/G20 deliberations on financial debt in Toronto in June 2010, echoes the sentiments on climate debt by Klein. Shiva also provides telling connections between the climate change deliberations in Copenhagen and the formation of the G8. She argues that when the power of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the many Third World nations represented on it threatened to put teeth in climate change policy, the initiative was thwarted by the power of the G8 and its involvement in climate change policy.

Sonja Killoran-McKibbin writes about the recent alternative people's conference on climate change in Cochabamba as a meeting of First Nations peoples and climate justice activists critical of the United Nations world summits on climate change. Initiated by the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, the Cochabamba conference was all about building a new society that strives for extra-market solutions based on respect, reparations, and redistribution. But like its counterpart in Copenhagen, the delegates at the People's Conference also proposed global institutions to remedy the climate change crisis, among them the development of a Universal Declaration for the Rights of Mother Earth, a commitment of future COP meetings to tackle climate debt and climate refugees, a global people's referendum on climate change, and a Climate Justice Tribunal. Killoran-McKibbin notes the immense practical obstacles to conducting, let alone implementing, such global measures. In addition, she notes that the Bolivian government continues to depend on the revenue from extractive activities to finance social spending. She also comments that workers' conditions and regulations in the Bolivian mining sector remain more accommodating to mining capital than miners and the natural environment. Workers were in fact poorly represented at the Cochabamba conference.

Jacqueline Medalye elaborates on Killoran-McKibbin's point on the power of corporate interests in compromising the democratic pluralist assumption that all stakeholders have an equal voice in global institutions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. She instead points to the close

connection between carbon business ventures and nation states, and the millions of dollars corporations spend on lobbying governments and other decision-makers to accommodate carbon-based industrial growth. She also points to the increasing police presence at COP15 which served to both exclude and punish the environmentalist groups at the conference.

Aaron Saad concludes the first part of the book with a chapter on climate refugees, those growing number of people who are impacted by climate change (and related factors) to the point where they feel compelled or are forced to move elsewhere. Saad notes that the several attempts on the part of concerned individuals and organizations to include climate refugees in international agreements and conventions have been repeatedly scuttled. He also points to the iniquitous historical foundations of climate change in colonialism but concludes that raising such issues typically falls on deaf ears in international negotiations.

In the first part of this book, the contributors take climate change and climate justice and the various deliberations surrounding and radiating from them at the recent global venues in Copenhagen and Cochabamba as their starting point. The chapters, whether they are more or less critical of the negotiations at these conferences, suggest that the pressures and alternatives articulated by climate justice advocates can make a difference. But there is also a profound sense of pessimism permeating these deliberations given the continued political and economic power of the large oil corporations and the support they receive from national governments both financially and in suppressing dissent.

In the second part of the book, we change the focus from the global prism of Copenhagen and Cochabamba to the conceptual and local levels of climate change. We challenge the monopoly of corporations, nation states, experts and environmentalists in defining, identifying the terms for discussion, and framing of the solutions to climate change. We turn to some of the communities that suffer the most from the impacts of climate change. Many communities, we argue, live in the chilly climates created by the various discourses, living patterns and ideologies that go along with climate change. Feminists originally coined the term chilly climate to describe the chilly reception women have faced in historically male-dominated occupations. But the concept can also convey a situation where an individual or various groups face



discrimination or unfair treatment or where alternatives positions and ways of knowing, thinking and living are marginalized by the climate change dilemma.

Neil Adger et al. (2001) have argued that there are two general discourses in the climate change debate. One they call a global environmental management discourse which represents the technofix and market solutions referred to in the above. The other they refer to as a populist profligacy discourse. The profligacy discourse refers to the “over-consumption” of resources in the Global North as the problem and solution to the climate change situation. It also portrays local actors as victims of external interventions that bring about degradation and exploitation. Adger et al. (2001) argue, however, that aspects of vulnerability and adaptability are made illegible in the profligacy discourse. On the one hand, the restructuring of the ownership patterns and the control of resources in a particular locale may cause the area to be more vulnerable to climate change. On the other hand, a change in the local social structure may lead to a collective effort to rehabilitate the local environment to make it more resistant to climate change. There are thus direct connections between climate change and seemingly separate political, social, and economic conditions.

One group of climate justice advocates and analysts focus precisely on those that suffer the most from climate change, both at the points of extraction of the carbon, and at the sites where the impact of carbon emissions are felt the most. These include communities such as First Nations living near the Tar Sands development in Alberta (Clarke, 2008), the Indigenous people expelled from their oil-rich lands in Iraq, and the people and First Nations residing in the midst of the refineries in Sarnia, all who pay a high price socially and environmentally.

In their telling title, “Framing Problems, Finding Solutions”, Stephanie Rutherford and Jocelyn Thorpe argue that the way we frame problems determines their perceived solutions. They note that while the Canadian federal government has taken some responsibility for the problems experienced by Canada’s First Nations people, it has not acknowledged fully the appropriation of First Nations’ lands. Instead, the government embraces the concept of wilderness as worthy of protection (nature and national parks), though such concepts are social constructions that

erase First Nations' perceptions of the very same areas as home. Similarly, they argue, problems and alleged solutions to climate change are seen as universal, and First Nations lands are often seen as a prescription (as carbon sinks, for example), while First Nations visions and claims to the very same lands are obscured.

Noël Sturgeon also calls attention to how dominant popular stories about climate change normalize the very social structures that are part of it. In North America, the so-called nuclear family, based on the heterosexual union between a man and a woman, both normalizes the destructive suburban consumer society that is responsible for climate change while pathologising and marginalizing other forms of family formations that may tread more lightly on the Earth. Sturgeon shows that popular culture is often solicited by different positions on what constitutes normal family values. Fundamentalist Christians, based on the award-winning documentary film *The March of the Penguins*, have claimed penguins as the "normal" and archetypical representation of the nuclear heterosexual family, while the gay community, based on the frequent occurrence of homosexuality among penguins, has done the exact opposite, arguing that penguins represent the normality of gay marriage. Penguins, on the other hand, refuse to stick to any category. Sturgeon draws on the different penguin family values to distinguish between reproductive rights and reproductive justice. The former recognize the rights of women to determine the fate of their bodies (though legal and technological means), while the latter expands the concept of reproductive rights to all people (and sometimes animals) to form different family, productive, consumptive and other forms of unions.

Jelena Vesic elaborates on the theme of inclusion and exclusion in the climate change debate. She shows how the Ice Bear Project by sculptor Mark Coreth, sponsored by WWF World Wide Fund for Nature and Polar Bears International at COP15 in Copenhagen, idealizes, romanticizes and puts into prime focus the polar bear as a victim and point of action against climate change. This image neglects the resiliency of both polar bears and Inuit people. She shows how polar bear management since the 1960s has contributed to an increase in the population; that some populations are stable in spite of climate change; that the hunt, even the trophy hunt, which is led by the Inuit, is respectful of the bear and contributes to the cultural survival of the

Inuit; and that most natural scientists are in favour of the hunt. Such a partnership between the Inuit and the polar bear that has lasted for generations in the North is obscured and marginalized by the construction of the polar bear as the symbol of the fight against global climate change.

Isaac 'Asume' Osuoka provides an analysis of Operation Climate Change in the Niger Delta of Nigeria where local people have fought the destruction and social devastation resulting from oil exploration and exploitation for decades. Operation Climate Change is a telling term for the protest movement in the Niger Delta, because it reveals the interconnection between extraction and emissions of carbon. Osuoka takes the reader on a toxic tour of the Niger Delta showing how the crude exploitation of oil for export, combined with a rusty and corroding infrastructure and the flaring of natural gas (considered uneconomical to use), results in a polluted environment. He also brings into stark relief the state violence that is used to maintain the carbon economy. The situation in the Delta is clearly and disturbingly connected to colonial exploits, both historical as well as current.

Tanya Gulliver looks at the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, seen by some as emblematic of the consequences of climate change, as more a function of the vulnerabilities built up in New Orleans where the natural (wetlands) and human-made (levees) barriers to hurricanes have been degraded, and a human population, primarily Black and/or poor, has suffered the effects of Katrina to an extent greater than others. As in the Niger Delta, this is because of the vulnerabilities built up in Louisiana as result of the practices of the petro-chemical industry in the area. Gulliver's chapter, echoing Osuoka, shows the linkages and inter-relationships between the environmental devastation in both time and place, between Louisiana and the Niger Delta, and between the long-term environmental pollution in New Orleans and the Gulf of Guinea, and the sudden and drastic effects of the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The very same corporations have been active in the same areas over a long period of time.

Jay Pitter suggests that it is not only the voices of subjugated communities, such as those of the Inuit, Ogoni, and New Orleanians that can and should be given voice, but also those of individuals within or connected to such communities. Pitter shows how a casual inquiry inviting friends and family to a conversation

about environmental narratives can lead to powerful insights. Her chapter uses a narrative tracing the travels of young woman and her mother from Toronto to Africa as a touchstone in the process of unearthing a subjugated narrative grounded in the environmental and social conditions of everyday life. Pitter's account invites all of us to conduct similar inquiries with people in our immediate environments.

Personal stories and social justice concerns and positions are often marginalized, obscured and forgotten in the chilly climates that surround the climate change discourse. The contributors to Part 2 of the book insist that climate change needs to be seen in context, as part of a larger system that despoils and exploits, and that contains different vantage points and perspectives on the lived experiences and imagined solutions for atmospheric climate change. They suggest that imaginary thinking, alternative solutions, and other voices are crowded out in the chilly climates of dominant discourses.

In the third part of the book, we explore some of the experiences and actions that directly challenge the carbon economy and its associated capitalist economy to propose alternatives or at least the elements of alternatives and positive actions for change.

Elizabeth May provides an account of how environmental education curricula fail the current young and future generations by passing on environmental stewardship responsibilities to them, adopting environmental lesson plans from corporations, and paralyzing students with fear. She argues for a more inclusive and socially aware environmental agenda that incorporates green issues in all disciplines of educational curricula, reacquaints students with the non-human world through experiential learning, and builds active environmental citizens that are engaged in community actions.

First Nations peoples, as the Cochabamba conference showed, are often the first in line to bear the burden of climate change. This is certainly true of the First Nations in Canada, whose living standards and general health are well below that of the Canadian average. Lakhani et al. point in particular to the high HIV/AIDS epidemic among First Nations youth in Canada, and describes an action to use of hip hop to fight the disease. Hip hop, which originated among Black Americans, they show, has become the voice of oppressed youth globally, and constitutes one

means to de-colonize the chilly climate that surrounds climate change discourse and development.

Anders Lund Hansen explores the largest and longest standing squatter settlement in Europe, Christiania in Copenhagen, as an inspiration for alternative living. Christiania, Lund Hansen suggests, is facing enormous challenges in Denmark where a right-wing government is seeking to promote or ‘normalize’ (what Sturgeon call ‘naturalize’) a business-friendly urban environment where private property reigns supreme in the land and housing markets. Christianites, by contrast, have lived under 40 years of communal ownership of housing and land, as well as promoted a life of accommodation of difference, which has included a less carbon-intensive and less polluting urban environment. Lund Hansen recalls one of many struggles where Christianites have successfully fought the state to maintain their alternative vision of society.

Adrina Bardekjian Ambrosii investigates the Transition Town movements and Climate Camps in the United Kingdom as opposition strategies and alternatives to the carbon economy. She argues that both the Transition Towns, which are long-term reformist attempts to reduce carbon dependence within existing governance structures, and the short-term protest Climate Camps that call attention to particularly dirty carbon emitters, and challenging the fundamentals of capitalism, contain valuable lessons and personal stories in the overall scheme to move beyond climate to system change.

Deborah Barndt concludes the book by pointing to an initiative in the Greater Toronto Area that seeks to build so-called foodsheds that integrate local sustainable food production with local consumers, keeping in mind social justice issues that make food available to all. Calling her essay “Digging Where You Stand,” Barndt emphasizes the importance of building local networks that include the university, non-government organizations, farmers and local residents to build food systems that are socially equitable, environmentally sustainable and civically engaged.

The contributors to this book, then, first point to the entrenched problems associated with the current dominant strategies to deal with climate change. They acknowledge the devastating effects of climate change and the failure of modernist institutions grounded in the market, the technological fix,

expertise, the nation state, and the international negotiation framework. They instead point to several politics at different scales that provide alternative ways of seeing and acting. These include the pursuit of what Saad calls global social justice, putting continued pressure on conventional modernist institutions to act, respond, and modify their policies along climate justice lines. But they also direct us to re-conceptualize and re-localize the climate change debate so that it focuses on those who suffer the most from climate change, yet may hold the key to powerful alternative ways of thinking and acting. Finally, the contributors urge support for grassroots initiatives, be they in the classrooms of Canadian elementary schools, First Nations communities in Ontario and the North, the freetown of Christiania in Copenhagen, the Transition Towns and Climate Camps in the United Kingdom, or the community-formed foodsheds promoting organic and accessible foods in the Greater Toronto Area.

\* \* \*

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