

Needed: a worldwide popular movement demanding equity and the observance of ecological limits

Achieving a global solution for climate stabilisation is like doing a jigsaw: no grand international agreement is going to be handed down. The jigsaw makers need four things at present: legitimisation, good underlying principles, pilot schemes and the support of a popular movement.

1: Legitimation

The 2007 reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, have provided adequate legitimisation. They show that climate change is happening, that it is man-made and that it can be solved with enough political will.

2: Principles

The underlying principles that can unite everyone in the world in the effort to halt climate change have still to be agreed. Cap and Share believes they are, first, that each of us has, as our human right, an entitlement to an equal share in the world's limited capacity to absorb ghg emissions and, second, that a contracting cap on ghg emissions to stabilise the climate has to be put in place. These two principles are at the heart of Cap and Share. Together they can provide the framework for the radical changes that a rapid emissions reduction programme will require.

3: Pilot projects

Good pilot emissions reduction schemes are needed. If the UK commits itself to making a legally-binding 3% year-on-year reduction in emissions, that will give the world its first 100% emissions cap, but one which has yet to incorporate the equal shares principle. The EU ETS is the world's first significant capped carbon trading system but almost everything about the way it was set up is wrong. Unfortunately some US states are thinking of copying it in almost its present form.

4: Popular support

A popular movement strong enough to convince politicians that the public would support drastic action to control emissions has yet to emerge. Schemes that involve individuals in their implementation such as Cap and Share have the greatest potential for mobilising worldwide popular support.

A big advantage of Cap and Share is that it is not an all-or-nothing solution. It does not need to be adopted internationally to bring emissions down. It can be used by individual countries to meet a range of goals, such as speeding their switch from imported fossil fuels to indigenous renewable energy, or reducing their road transport emissions.

At present some 29 billion tonnes of CO₂ are emitted from burning fossil fuels in a world with 4.8 billion adults. This means that the average adult is responsible for the release of about 6 tonnes of CO₂. EU citizens presently emit 10.9 tCO₂/adult on average from fossil fuels. In addition, about 5 billion tonnes are released by changes in land use, such as forest clearance, and 1 billion tonnes from cement production.

If we could stop the loss of carbon from the land, and if the sinks absorbing carbon dioxide continue to function as at present, each of the 7.5 billion adults expected to be alive in 2050 would be able to release about a tonne of carbon dioxide a year without causing further warming. This means that fossil fuel emissions need to be cut by near to 90% by 2050, starting now.