



From the Ground up gathering - some reflections!

Take a breath.

That's how the first workshop started. Reminding us to breath, to notice breath in our own body - helping us to be present in the here and now as we gathered on zoom to see and hear people from across the planet. Noticing our interconnectedness with each other and other beings including the plants & trees breathing out oxygen we need to breath in.

So maybe you too want to pause to notice your breath as you read this?!

In breath... Out breath.... From the Ground up was indeed an inspiring and breath-taking experience for me! As COP 26 in Glasgow had been postponed till next year, grassroots social justice and environmental organisations - which would otherwise have been there to lobby and campaign - instead took this time together to build solidarity and experience. Hard to know what to convey from my own dip into ten or so of the 53 on line workshops. Some of those mentioned below, marked * are amongst others you can view at <https://www.facebook.com/cop26coalition/videos>

This international conference-from-home wove itself into the fabric of daily life, set amongst the backdrop of nature on my own doorstep and a timely thread from a Devon Quaker Area Meeting session reflecting on ways we respond to the politics of our times.

So to begin with one "From the ground up" workshop strand, titled - " **Holding Up half the sky - Feminism during the climate emergency***". Women from Latin America spoke of being at the forefront of the impact of increasing debt and poverty. In Brazil that's exacerbated by government austerity policies and responses to the pandemic. Hunger is on the rise, so are home evictions due to debt. Argentina had for 4 years the highest IMF debt and although Ecuador may have moved somewhat politically, poverty nevertheless persisted and was being normalised. Women had campaigned for reproductive rights ; human rights and justice- including for a murdered activist (Mariella Franco) in Brazil and for indigenous land rights in the face of increasing extractivism.

The Kurdish Women's Movement faced particular problems due to shifting alliances of support for/against Kurds; their role in their region in relation to IS and the other Powers and militarisation shifts. In last 2 years, Women activists had been targeted by the Turkish state. Women's organising structures and liberation drew on community, ecology and radical democracy. Hope lay in connecting with women's organisations across the globe and alliances were being woven with women's networks in Latin America. They spoke of a new feminist internationalism building from the ground up - sharing experience and finding common language yet respecting agency and

different ways of working based on the land and challenges each face. Feminists from Europe & US were exploring how a history of witch hunts, colonialism and capitalism continues to affect our assumptions. A challenge that needs to be faced for effective solidarity with women worldwide.

" **Nothing About us without us - Indigenous rights Global alliance of territorial communities***": A session with Indigenous people of Brazil, Amazon, Panama and Indonesia highlighted an immense struggle to have their way of life and wisdom of land guardianship respected. Yet it also brought seeds of hope. Indonesia's Homecoming Movement helps manage the sacred forest. It has 55 indigenous schools and young people learn with their Elders about medicines, farming, culture and rituals of their land. Tradition mixes with new as the youngsters use smart phones to convey stories and the truth of their community's situation. In Brazil too, links with academics bring new tech and leadership training to support younger leaders in continuing guardianship of the forest.

"**Tipping Points and Border Crossings**" -(organised by www.rosalux.org): Migrant workers and their advocates illustrated the connection of land grabbed, its value extracted and people exploited. A chain of impact leaving people marginalised and prey to climate effects and social injustice. Those needing to migrate not welcomed by the people now benefitting from those very resources. In response to this challenge, any aid and climate solutions shouldn't just be about wealthier places offering technical fixes and colonial attitudes. Instead they need to give people at the margins space. For instance farmers on the flood plains of Bangladesh would have their own solutions if heeded and given respect and resource.

Three more workshops brought further perspectives on the interlocking systems of climate, economy and social justice-: "**Climate, Covid and Capitalism***" ; "**What is system change*?**" and "**Health justice means climate justice**". One recounted that many a wry activist has said it can feel easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism(!) Nevertheless they pointed gracefully to lessons from the margins - of people living the question and reframing "What is a good life?" within the carrying capacity of our environment.

We learnt of the potential and pitfalls of Green New Deals plus the awakening power of Covid crisis to draw attention to putting health, wellbeing, care and environment at the heart of recovery. An Ecuadorian view of Green New deal is somewhat different to that in North America since expansion of Climate technology has significant implications for mining resources in Ecuador. Campaigners lobbied to ensure a Canada/ Ecuador government "Green" deal to reciprocate with health facilities, had them located in a region close enough to be accessible for affected mining communities.



Perhaps more people now see climate crisis through a health lens and are becoming more mobilised, personally and politically. A walk in woods can calm cortisol, one speaker revealed. I found myself happy to be able to weave a woodland walk into the web of the conference. Leaving Zoom for a while to zoom in on nature! How inspiring seeing, sensing, feeling the layers and cycles of woodland life. A sensory demonstration that seeped into me about how we each have a unique, creative yet interlinked part in the whole of this rich tapestry of environmental response .

As the conference progressed, I found myself musing how on earth a provocative political analysis could translate into a personal response or relate to Quakers or to wider UK action? How to convey the complexity and sharp political critique into something that would create public change? A few workshops opened the door on that:

"Framing Climate Justice": Presenting research about how to communicate around issues. How can beliefs activists may discuss about climate justice be expressed in terms that relate to more mainstream views? For instance, using a generic term Global South is less relatable than giving stories of specific places and an issues (eg conditions of those who make T shirts we buy from Bangladesh). Can we also find ways to reframe attitudes that it is a "zero sum game" (i.e. thinking helping others overseas means less for themselves)? Relating and including people's own concerns not only helps someone feel seen, but also draws out a sense of common cause people-to-people rather than guilt. For more fascinating detail see their presentation material or workshop video at <https://framingclimatejustice.org/>

"Grassroots to Global assemblies": Their initiative and enquiry is towards a Global Citizen Assembly - at first aiming to engage with COP26 but seeing potential beyond that. One building block is engaged listening - Individual conversations across difference. Starting (in individual conversations and in people's assemblies) from current concerns rather than arriving with a climate agenda. <https://www.grassroots2global.org/engaged-listening>

"The Path of Hope" - Olivia Hanks of Quaker Peace and Social Witness hosted Bee Moorhead speaking about a Texan study of climate action in faith communities. They realised a way to engage church members was to build on their heart-felt faith based response to offer care and charity in their communities. It was their way in towards becoming advocates for climate concerns. More on this at <https://texasimpact.org/2020/10/path-of-hope-training-video-for-congressional-visits>

<https://cop26coalition.org/resource/statement-2> was signed before the finale "**Building Power for systems change***" brought together MPs Caroline Lucas, John Macdonald with reps from War on Want & Black Lives Matter to reflect on the 5 days, rounding off with "Artivista" artist/activist videos from Chile. So we breathed our breadth and depth: - Gathering inspiration of people all across the UK and worldwide working towards COP26. Seeing beyond it and maybe in spite of it, towards system change and a people and planet-centred, just transition. People whose deep roots, passions and practical love in action called us to remember that we can all have agency. Maybe that's not in the ways we've been conditioned and constrained to think about things thus far. We can become part of "politics" even if, when or because we feel estranged from its power games.



More than one person connected us with a saying from Arundhati Roy. I have heard it quoted at the end of a Quaker Yearly Meeting too - a seed of hope in chaotic times.

So why not take a breath and hear your own breath as you read it now :

*" Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day I can hear her breathing."*