

Trócaire Submission to the Citizens Assembly

How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change



An emergency food distribution funded by Trócaire near the centre of Lodwar town in northern Kenya, where drought – exacerbated by climate change, is causing widespread food insecurity. This vital aid was targeting particularly vulnerable groups including the elderly, people with disabilities and those living with HIV. Some of the people had walked for hours in the burning sun to get to the distribution point. There they waited patiently to receive a ration of maize and beans. The people living with HIV received some fruit as well – without it their drugs would make them violently sick. Photo: David O'Hare, Trócaire

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‘When I go to these communities that I work with, they just don’t understand why after all the commitment and passion they have shown, why they still face these problems. They say to me, “we plant trees, we make tremendous efforts with sustainable agricultural practices, why does this not shield us from the floods? How does this not shield us from the drought”, and it has been so hard for me to explain to them – that the problem is just way bigger than you. It is because other countries still continue to use development pathways that are not sustainable’.

Heather Maseko, Malawi¹

1. Why we are involved

Trócaire welcomes the inclusion of climate change as one of the issues for consideration by the Citizens Assembly, and the opportunity to make a submission. Climate change has been one of Trócaire’s top priority issues for more than ten years now. Throughout this period we have integrated climate change planning and response across all our programme countries and conducted extensive research to best understand how we can support communities in the face of increasingly unpredictable and intense weather. We have brought climate change into our work in schools and in parishes during Lent, and have been campaigning consistently with our partners both in our programme countries – and in Ireland – for effective government action. As an organisation we are placing such a priority on climate change because **it is a game changer; it is affecting the women, men and children across all the regions where we work, threatening to make the goal of poverty eradication impossible.**

Climate change is a major global injustice because its impacts are being felt first and most profoundly by communities in poor countries who have contributed least to the problem. It is not a future issue; climate change is happening now and it is already at crisis levels in many of the countries where Trócaire works.

This submission highlights the devastating impacts of climate change on the communities that we work with and outlines some of the ways that Trócaire is responding to this challenge. The submission then draws attention to Ireland’s commitments under international and EU agreements and how we are currently failing to meet them. We highlight two ways forward for the consideration of the Citizen’s Assembly – Ireland meeting its commitments as a minimum, and Ireland taking a leadership role by divesting from fossil fuels. We conclude with a summary of our recommendations on how Ireland can become a leader in tackling climate change.

2. The impacts of climate change

Members of the Assembly may be aware of the crisis currently unfolding in East Africa, where almost **25 million people – five times the population of Ireland - are in urgent need of food aid** as the drought there continues. Three consecutive years of poor rains have exhausted people’s coping capacities. The UN has deemed it the worst humanitarian emergency since World War II. Sadly, this is the latest of an ever increasing record of the devastating impacts of climate change. Trócaire and other agencies are supporting these families, providing urgently needed humanitarian aid while our long-term development programming is supporting them to adapt to ongoing changes in the climate. These efforts are essential and must be scaled up. But we can see the very real prospect of reaching a point beyond which these communities cannot adapt. That is why we are campaigning for climate action and ambition in Ireland, and why we are making this submission to the Assembly.

Feeling the Heat: How Climate Change is impacting on the Developing World



Eliyeta Muyeye and her sister Fortune Kalolo (18) at the family's crops in Dedza, Malawi, 2013. Photo: Jeannie O'Brien/Trocaire.

In 2014 Trócaire worked with Maynooth University to review the latest scientific information on the current and projected impacts of climate change in five countries where Trócaire is working and published a major research report, 'Feeling the Heat' aimed at raising awareness of the implications of climate change for global poverty. The report highlights:

- Developing countries are much more dependent on subsistence agriculture (where farmers focus on growing enough food to feed themselves and their families) and have far fewer resources with which to adapt to climate change.
- In many developing countries crops are failing with increasing frequency due to climate change and huge risks are posed to global and regional food security by climate change.
- In many countries where access to water is already a struggle, there will be less water to drink, to grow crops, and to power electricity. When rain does fall, it will be erratic, falling more heavily and causing flooding.
- The World Health Organisation predicts 250,000 additional deaths a year due to climate change as a result of increased childhood undernutrition, heat exposure, diarrhoea and malaria.
- Women and groups with less power in society are hit hardest, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.
- The current and projected effects of climate change impacts on national incomes in poor countries are significant. In the Philippines the cost of adaptation for agriculture and coastal zones is expected to be about €5bn a year by 2020. In Kenya, net economic costs of climate change, including health burdens, energy demand and infrastructure could be equivalent to a loss of almost 3% of GDP each year by 2030.

See the full report at: <https://www.trocaire.org/resources/policyandadvocacy/feeling-the-heat>

3. How Trócaire is responding

In line with our mandate, Trócaire works with communities overseas to tackle the underlying causes of poverty as well as in Ireland to increase awareness and action on issues that have global impact.

Responding to the impacts of climate change overseas

Supporting communities to adapt to the impact of climate change is a core strategy in our work across Africa, Asia and Latin America. For example in 2016 we supported 105,000 families in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Pakistan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Rwanda to enhance their resilience to climate change by adopting improved on-farm agricultural practices, diversifying production and engaging in environmental management. Providing long-term support to communities to access resources and to make them productive is key to helping those who are most vulnerable. Responding to those affected by disasters and crises that are both natural and man-made is also a core part of Trócaire's mandate. For example in 2016 in response to the impacts of El Nino, exacerbated by climate change, which caused severe drought in East and Southern Africa, as well as affecting Central America, Trócaire provided 90,000 people in Ethiopia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Honduras and Guatemala with cash transfers, nutritional support and drought resistant seeds.

Mobilising people in Ireland to tackle climate change

Trócaire has been campaigning on climate justice issues since 2008. We mobilised thousands of people to campaign for a binding climate law for Ireland - which was finally passed in December 2015 - the Climate and Low Carbon Development Act. This now provides a framework for Ireland to work within to reduce its emissions within its international commitments. Thousands of supporters marched on the streets of Dublin, Cork and Galway in advance of the global climate negotiations in Paris in December 2015, to tell the government they wanted a strong global agreement to tackle the climate crisis once and for all. We continue to campaign for Ireland to take a more ambitious approach to climate action. In 2016, over ten thousand supporters told government ministers they want to see Ireland withdrawing its investments from the fossil fuel industry, which is the main contributor to the climate crisis and reinvest in clean, renewable technologies to ensure we can meet our commitments under the Paris Accord. The Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill is currently at Committee Stage in Dáil Eireann.

Trócaire's Development Education Team work with young people, their educators, and educational policy makers to develop climate conscious global citizens through transformational educational processes. Our overall aim in all the work that we do is to support young people in Ireland to bring about the change our planet needs. Our 'Schools for a Just World' cluster events for Primary and Post Primary students provide an opportunity for young people from different schools to investigate the issue together, and collaborate on potential ways that they can take action. Our 'Action for a Just World' programme lasts for eight months, and takes a group of young people from different parts of the country on a journey of exploration, resulting in coordinated and meaningful action on an issue linked to climate change.

We work with educators and youth work practitioners to support them to introduce climate change into their programmes and lessons. We provide this support through our educational resources, online website, and through training opportunities at both the pre and post qualification stage. In recent years we have made contributions to consultations on the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, and other consultations from the NCCA on changes to the national curriculum. We have seen the positive results of this work in recent developments in education, for example the introduction of the new Leaving Certificate subject 'Politics and Society'.

4. Ireland's global commitments

'Ireland has been a champion of efforts to conquer hunger. But today, one cannot be a leader on hunger without also being a leader on climate change. The rise in extreme weather associated with climate change could drastically reduce harvests and degrade arable land. I encourage Ireland to align its climate efforts with its admirable work against hunger'.

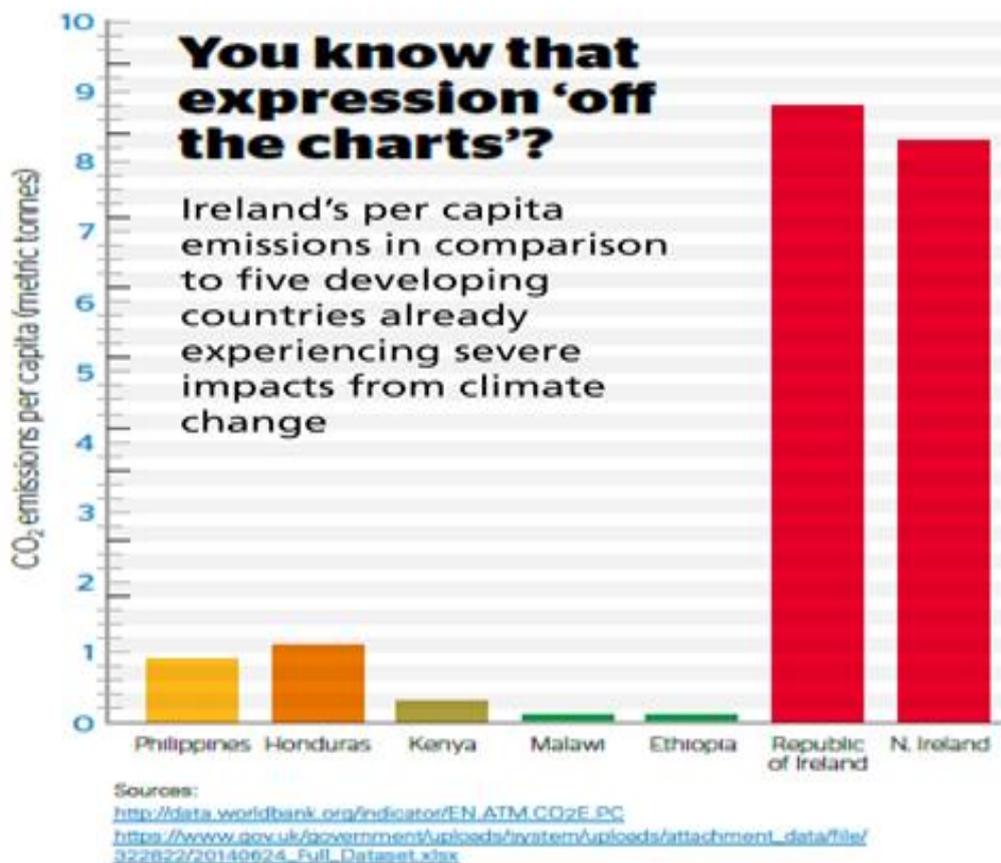
Then Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki Moon, speaking in Dublin Castle in 2015.

Climate change is a systemic global risk from which no country is immune. This is why global leaders signed the Paris Agreement in 2015 to aim to keep global temperatures rises as far below 2°C as possible, and why the EU has committed to climate action by setting targets for emissions reductions by 2020 and 2030. Failing to fulfil our commitments on climate change is not only having a negative impact overseas, but is also not in the interest of the Irish State or the Irish public. **Compliance fines for unmet EU targets will be a significant cost to taxpayers, but these financial penalties for inaction pale in comparison with the potential direct and indirect effects of unchecked climate change on Ireland.** Climate change is already impacting on Ireland's environment, society, economic and natural resources. Future expected impacts include sea level rise; more intense storms and rainfall; increased likelihood and magnitude of river and coastal flooding; water shortages in summer; increased risk of new pests and diseases; adverse impacts on water quality; and changes to plant and animal species². While the direct effects of climate change are environmental, the indirect impacts are widespread, diverse and are felt across society. European countries are vulnerable to spill-over effects from climate change impacts occurring outside the EU, especially in relation to trade, infrastructure and transport, geopolitics and security risks, human migration and finance.³ Evidence of the systemic implications of climate change on the global financial system specifically is also increasingly significantly⁴.

The focus of the topic for consideration by the Assembly is an important one. The transformation of our societies to a sustainable development pathway calls for engagement and innovation from all of us. The State has a fundamental role to play. Mandated with the solemn obligation to act decisively to defend and protect the common good of its citizens⁵, and in possession of the information on the serious implications of climate change, **the State must ensure Ireland acts at the scale and pace required to deliver effectively and fairly on the global agreement on climate action, adopted in Paris in 2015.** In countries at all levels of development it is the poorest and most marginalised women and men who are hit hardest⁶. Therefore, the State also has a key role to play in ensuring particular attention to those likely to be affected most both by the impacts of climate change itself, and as a result of the policies enacted to tackle it.

Delivering on the Paris Agreement is our lifeline to a safe future for all of us, and it is the best chance we have of ensuring global poverty eradication remains possible. **It is deeply concerning therefore that Ireland, with a strong reputation on international development, is not acting at the scale and pace required to deliver on this global agreement.** The texts adopted in Paris explicitly call for an increase in action and ambition from all States if the temperature limits it set are to be achieved. While the Irish Government has signed and ratified the Paris Agreement, the State has shown no sign of intent to increase ambition and Ireland is set to miss even its existing 2020 climate action targets under the EU. The Environmental Protection Agency continues to warn that current policies and plans will not deliver on Ireland's climate commitments⁷. Increasing national and EU ambition in line with the global effort required to deliver on the Paris Agreement, and delivering on existing and

forthcoming national emissions reduction targets, **is a minimum requirement for the State to ensure Ireland fulfils its basic responsibilities on climate change.**



While Ireland is a small country, our greenhouse gas emissions per person are among the highest in the world⁸. The gains being made on global poverty eradication through the generosity of the Irish public are being undermined by our unsustainable development. **Sadly, this poor track record means Ireland is currently far from being a leader on climate change. But it doesn't have to be this way.**

Ireland has a proud, longstanding commitment to the eradication of global poverty and hunger. It is our hope therefore that Ireland can show leadership in demonstrating the potential for a society that is sustainable as well as prosperous, and that is equitable nationally as well as responsible globally.

5. The way forward: at a minimum meeting Ireland's commitments

'Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems (...) We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world.'

Pope Francis, 'Laudato Si; on Care for our Common Home', Papal Encyclical 2015.

There is a significant opportunity now to build a new development path for Ireland that ensures that everyone has healthy, connected ways of living, of getting around and earning a living. Many of the actions that need to be taken in Ireland are already known, **what is needed now is the political will to take decisions and prioritise their implementation.** Further debate and decisions will be needed on this agenda and so political focus on delivering on our climate commitments must continue. It would be naive to assume that all the actions that are needed will be acceptable to all, and so it is critical that

there be ongoing spaces for public and political debate, to ensure that policies are fair as well as effective. Vulnerable rural and urban communities, those living in energy poverty, and workers whose jobs must inevitably be phased out as we decarbonise, are some of the groups in Ireland that must be placed at centre of concern in domestic policy development as we decarbonise. The Citizens Assembly, and the planned National Dialogue on Climate Action are therefore very welcome initiatives by the State to provide spaces for dialogue and the development of proposals for the kind of society we want to live in in a climate-changed world.

What is required is a **radical turn-around from where we are currently, including an increase in national climate action ambition, the elimination of incoherent policies and investments, and a robust plan of action to meet current commitments and get on a path to a zero-emissions society** as soon as possible. It also requires ensuring that the principle of equity is consistently applied to policy development in order to minimize potential negative outcomes and maximize potential positive outcomes for the poorest and most vulnerable people in Ireland and internationally.

The global solidarity that is so rooted in Irish society, reflected in Ireland's internationally recognised overseas development programme, should be built on given the implications of climate change. There will be more humanitarian disasters, more forced migrations, and potentially more conflicts as a result of rising temperatures.⁹ **The greater the action we take now, the lesser these future impacts will be.** Unfortunately, regardless of what we do now, because of emissions to date, a level of further impacts are already inevitable and States must respond.

The implications of unchecked climate change are such that we do not have a choice on whether to act on climate change. **The critical question is whether we will act quickly enough, and whether we will act justly.** It is our sincere hope that this Citizens Assembly can mark a turning point in Ireland; that the recommendations that the Assembly will make will issue a clear mandate – and petition – to the State, to urgently and significantly step up both ambition and action on climate change. This will be in all our interests, and is an urgent imperative given the scale of the impacts of climate change already today on the poorest communities in the world.

We offer a number of specific recommendations for State action for the Assembly to consider. Importantly, given that Ireland is currently not yet meeting the basic requirement of fulfilling its existing climate commitments, the majority of our recommendations relate to what the State should do in order to achieve this minimal requirement. However, we also wish to highlight a particular recommendation which offers the State the opportunity to show genuine global leadership in tackling climate change – divesting the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund from fossil fuels.

6. The way forward: Ireland's opportunity to lead: Divestment from Fossil Fuels

'As for the youth in my country and the communities in my country, we will not stop working hard. We will always be committed to action to help us adapt to climate change. And when I move across the world and meet communities like you it gives me faith, to know that there are groups of people out there who understand how big the impacts of climate change are, and have made the decision to join us in addressing the impacts and making their governments commit to better investments'.

Heather Maseko, Malawi¹⁰.

The burning of fossil fuels is responsible for the majority of the global Greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change, as well as being increasingly recognised as a public health hazard¹¹. Analysis by financial experts in the city of London has shown that the vast majority, around 80%, of remaining fossil fuel reserves cannot be burned if we are to deliver on the upper temperature limit of 'well below 2°C' set out in the Paris Agreement¹². However the global fossil fuel industry plans to

extract and burn its reserves, and indeed it continues to explore for more. If fossil fuel companies are allowed to pursue their current business plans the hard won Paris Agreement will become meaningless and the social, environmental and economic implications will be devastating.

Action to keep the majority of fossil fuels from being burned has become a fundamental test of whether or not we will deliver on the Paris Agreement. This situation sparked the emergence of a 'global fossil fuel divestment movement' that has become the fastest growing movement of its kind in history over the last few short years. Major universities in the US and Europe – including a number of Irish universities (Trinity College Dublin, National University of Ireland Galway, Maynooth University), major cities and towns – including Berkeley California, Berlin, Copenhagen, Oslo, Paris and Sydney, and also pension funds and individuals are publically committing to offload and avoid investments in fossil fuel companies. L&P Investment Services, an Irish company advising charities in Ireland and abroad, has recently advised clients to divest fully from fossil fuel companies for both moral and investment reasons, noting the risk of stranded assets. The movement also has the support of moral international figures such as former President and UN Special Envoy on El Nino and Climate Mary Robinson, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu¹³.

The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, a State investment vehicle funded by taxpayer money (formerly the National Pension Reserve Fund), currently has around €300mn invested in global fossil fuel companies¹⁴. While this is a very small portion of the Fund's overall investments, it is public money being invested against the public interest and in contradiction with the States' obligations under the Paris Agreement.

Trócaire and many others, including student campaigners, many local groups and the Stop Climate Chaos coalition, have been campaigning for the State to divest the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund from fossil fuels given the moral and scientific imperative to avoid overshooting the temperature limits adopted in the Paris Agreement. In January this year the majority of elected representatives in the Dáil supported a proposal for a Private Members Bill by Independent TD Thomas Pringle that would make this happen. The Bill is currently being considered by the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform.

Divestment is a socially motivated action. It is a way of demonstrating commitment to climate action, and most importantly, it sends a signal of expectation that States, companies and investors will phase out fossil fuels in time to deliver on the Paris Agreement. Historical evidence of divestment movements shows that divestment will not result in a disruption to fossil fuel activities globally or domestically. The evidence shows that what divestment does achieve is that it increases public, political and investor understanding of the issue, and increases commitment to action. The capacity for renewable energy to replace fossil fuels is increasing rapidly, and while fossil fuel usage cannot and should not stop overnight, there is an urgent need to speed up the pace of phasing them out. Expert analysis also shows that divesting from fossil fuels is a rational investor decision because the value of fossil fuel companies is set to decline given both the scientific imperative to phase out fossil fuels, coupled with the rapidly decreasing prices of renewable energy¹⁵.

While Norway has already divested its equivalent national pension fund from a number of fossil fuel businesses, enactment of this Bill would mark the first State to divest from all fossil fuel companies. There is, furthermore, a precedent for this action. The State adopted an Act in 2008 to divest the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (then the National Pension Reserve Fund) from Cluster Munitions for ethical reasons. The level of international media interest in the vote in the Dáil on the Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill in January was significant, with more than 150 articles globally with thousands of views of online articles¹⁶. Passing the Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill is an opportunity for Ireland to show genuine global leadership on climate action.

7. Recommendations

1. Divest the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund from Fossil Fuels

- The Oireachtas should pass the Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill, and do so as soon as possible.

2. Ensure Ireland acts at the scale and pace required to deliver effectively and fairly on the commitments it made in the Paris Agreement

- The State should increase the level of ambition of domestic action on climate change, and support an increase in ambition of the EU in line with its fair share of the global effort required to deliver on the temperature limits set out the Paris Climate Agreement.
- Each 5 year National Mitigation Plan should set out clearly how, and by how much, Ireland will reduce emissions over the time-frame of that plan (the recently published Plan is vague on these points). The State should ensure the first National Mitigation Plan significantly closes the gap between Ireland's current emissions projections and the State's 2020 targets (it is unclear whether and by how much the recently published Plan will do this).
- Each National Mitigation Plan should explicitly state the scientific and moral basis on which this effort can be considered a fair contribution to the global effort required to deliver on the temperature limits set out the Paris Climate Agreement (the recently published Plan does not do this).
- To ensure meaningful democratic and public scrutiny, each plan should be informed by public consultation, and should be debated and voted on by the Dáil.

3. Ensure climate action contributes to a more just and sustainable society

- The State should ensure all climate policy is equity-proofed and establish a Just Transition¹⁷ Fund to support workers who will be affected by changes to economic sectors.
- Domestic policy to tackle climate change must also be examined to understand and prevent unintended negative impacts on poor communities in poor countries¹⁸.
- The National Dialogue on Climate Action and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals¹⁹ must be harnessed as major opportunities to establish meaningful channels for the public to contribute to developing and delivering a new vision for a just and sustainable society.

4. Strengthen measures for international cooperation and solidarity

- The State should establish mechanisms to ensure regular contributions to the UN Green Climate Fund in line with Ireland's fair share of the commitment by developed countries in the Paris Agreement to supporting climate action in developing countries.
- The State should publish a multiannual plan with year on year percentage increases in the Irish Overseas Development Aid (ODA) budget to support the fulfilment of the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As the longstanding 2015 deadline to reach the UN target of 0.7% of GNI to ODA has already passed, at a minimum the Irish Government should demonstrate its commitment to now meet this historical commitment by 2025 at the latest and outline a clear pathway to achieve this.

¹ Heather Maseko was in Ireland with Trócaire in 2016, speaking at a number of public events on behalf of the Civil Society Network on Climate Change of Malawi, a partner organisation in Trócaire's Malawi programme.

² 'National Mitigation Plan', Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (2017). Page 7.

³ 'Climate change, impacts and vulnerability in Europe 2016: An indicator-based report', European Environment Agency.

⁴ Climate change and directly connected issues of extreme weather and resource crises have consistently featured among the top-ranked risks in the World Economic Forum's [Global Risks Report](#) since 2011. See also 'Too late, too sudden; Transition to a low carbon economy and systemic risk'. Report No.6 of the Scientific Advisory Committee to the European Systemic Risk Board (2016); 'The Costs of Inaction: recognising the value at risk from climate change' (2015) The Economist Intelligence Unit; and 'Breaking the tragedy of the horizon - climate change and financial stability' - [speech](#) by Bank of England Governor, Mark Carney (2015).

⁵ "All powers of government, legislative, executive and judicial, derive, under God, from the people, whose right it is to designate the rulers of the State and, in final appeal, to decide all questions of national policy, according to the requirements of the common good." Constitution of Ireland, Article 6, 1.

⁶ 'Even in the US disaster hits the most vulnerable the hardest' Oxfam America Blog (2015).

⁷ 'Greenhouse gas emissions projected to increase strongly as economic growth takes hold'. EPA Press Release April 2017.

⁸ 'Our Sustainable Future; a framework for sustainable development for Ireland'(2012) P. 31; and EPA [website](#).

⁹ 'Emissions Gap Report', Foreword; Erik Solheim, head of United Nations Environment Programme, and Jacqueline McGlade, UNEP's chief scientist (2016).

¹⁰ Heather Maseko was in Ireland with Trócaire in 2016, speaking at a number of public events on behalf of the Civil Society Network on Climate Change of Malawi, a partner organisation in Trócaire's Malawi programme.

¹¹ 'Four people die every day in Ireland from air pollution' Irish Examiner Article (2016).

¹² 'Unburnable Carbon – Are the world's financial markets carrying a carbon bubble?' Carbon Tracker Initiative (2009, 2014)

¹³ See <https://gofossilfree.org/commitments/>.

¹⁴ See evidence given at [Pre-legislative Scrutiny Hearing](#) on the Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill on 27th June 2017.

¹⁵ See [Submission](#) to the Pre-legislative Scrutiny Hearing from Mr. Kingsmill Bond on the Fossil Fuel Divestment Bill; and 'Oil-majors-risk-wasting-2-3-trillion-as-climate-goals-take-toll' Bloomberg (2017).

¹⁶ More than 150 articles globally, many with 1000s of 'views' on social media.

¹⁷ A *Just Transition* means that no one will be left behind. Governments must co-operate with unions, industry and local communities to ensure that good quality jobs are available to workers in the new economy. For more details see Irish Congress of Trade Unions [briefing](#).

¹⁸ For example, policies have been elaborated at national or in the EU case at regional level that have led to trade and investment in biofuels on a global scale. This biofuels 'rush' is leading to significant additional pressure on scarce natural resources in poor countries, affecting peoples' access to land and their ability to grow or purchase food. For more information see Trócaire [briefing](#) 'Biofuels: Fuelling poverty and Environmental Degradation'.

¹⁹ The Sustainable Development Goals are globally agreed goals for progress across social, environmental and economic issues that are to be applied at national and international levels. Government leaders signed up to these goals in 2015. Ireland played a key role in their negotiation. For more information see UN SDG [website](#).