

## International responses to the challenge of climate change

### Introduction

Year by year, as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) moves from one Conference of the Parties (COP) to the next, the issues highlighted in the debate about climate change evolve. Our attempts to devise an activity to simulate international decision-making about climate change have become out of date before we could finish and publish them on this web site.

This activity is designed to be timeless by introducing climate change as an international issue through a study of media reports in on-line newspapers in English.

### The activity

Students, working individually or in small groups, choose a country and find out how the issue of climate change is reported in that country. Students then share their findings to get an impression of the range of responses to climate change in different parts of the world.

At the start, help students to choose, from the list of UNFCCC signatories, a variety of countries across the world, large and small, differing in their natural environment, resources, stage of economic development and internal politics

### How Science Works

**Fb** The popular media play a part in providing information, setting the agenda and influencing opinion on issues involving science and technology.

**Fc** Media reports of scientific developments are always simplified, and sometimes inaccurate. A newspaper report of a new development has not been through the stringent peer review process that articles in scientific journals must undergo (though it may be reporting on work that has).

**Hd** Some decisions about science and technology may need to comply with national and international agreements, legislation and agreed principles such as sustainable development.

**He** In practice much of the evidence available to decision makers is often uncertain. It is not possible to make accurate predictions about the future. The system may be too complex; some issues may not yet be well understood.

**Hf** Decision makers are influenced by the mass media, by special interest groups and by public opinion as well as by expert evidence. Decisions about science and technology may be influenced by decision makers' prior beliefs or vested interests, which can affect their interpretation and evaluation of the evidence.

**Hg** Many decisions about new technologies involve economic considerations, and raise social and political issues (e.g. increased mechanisation of a process may result in fewer jobs of some kinds; new farming methods may change patterns of employment in rural communities).

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### Introduction

Climate Change is a global issue. Responding to climate change is hugely contentious because attempts to cut greenhouse gases are technically difficult, very expensive and have major implications for people's lives. Tackling global problems requires international agreements but reaching agreement is very hard when countries differ greatly in their natural resources, stage of economic development and internal politics.

The United Nations is taking a lead in trying to achieve international action to deal with climate change based on the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#).

### Background briefing

- UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol

Start by reading pages 130-1 in the A2 Science in Society textbook to find out about the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol.

- Years of international debate

The parties to the UNFCCC have met annually since 1995 to assess progress in dealing with climate change. The meetings are called Conferences of the Parties (COP). The meetings are numbered COP 1, COP 2 and so on.

Scan the brief timeline that runs from 1712 to 2009 on the [BBC web site](#). This highlights key milestones leading up to the fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP15). The milestones cover population growth, technological developments, scientific discoveries, natural events and political interventions.

### International reporting of climate change

Your task in this activity is to find out how the issue of climate change is reported in one country of the world. You will pay particular attention to the reporting of the Kyoto Protocol and the attempts to reach international agreements at the series of COP meetings. You will compare your findings with those of others in your class who have chosen to study other countries.

1. Refer to the Wikipedia summary of the [COP meetings to date](#).

At the bottom of the Wikipedia page you will find a list of UNFCCC members. Choose one country of interest to you. Check with others in your class that together you are covering a range of different countries across the world.

2. Now use the Wikipedia 'search' with the search term 'list of newspapers in <country>' to find on-line reporting in English in the country of your choice. Restrict your choice to articles published in the last year.

Visit the web sites for a number of newspapers on the list. Find out how the issue of climate change is reported by searching the newspaper web sites with terms such as 'Kyoto Protocol' and 'Climate Change'.

Aim to answer some of these topics for the country you have chosen:

- the impacts of climate change on the country
  - the extent to which climate change is recognised by people as a serious issue
  - the political response to climate change and the actions being taken by government (locally or nationally)
  - the extent to which the government thinks it should support, or be supported by, action on climate change in other countries
  - the attitudes and response of other organisations, including industry, agriculture and pressure groups to the challenges of climate change
  - the degree of support for implementing the Kyoto Protocol as shown, for example, by reports on recent COP meetings
  - the quality of media reporting of the issue of climate change and the extent to which this suggests that the issue is controversial..
3. Summarise your findings and prepare to give a short report to the rest of your class about the attitudes and responses to climate change in the country you have chosen to study.