Main findings from the Climate Change Behaviours Research Programme

Environment Social Research

Between 2010 and 2012, a programme of research into climate change relevant behaviours has been taken forward by the Scottish Government. This has comprised commissioned research, inhouse analysis, reviews of evidence, seminars and conferences. This report summarises findings from across the research programme to date.

Main Findings

- Influencing what households do is crucial to meeting climate change targets. Taking a consumption perspective, households account for around 70% of Scottish emissions.

- Leading by example by key players remains a critical starting point for developing new social norms around sustainable lifestyles.

- Any 'behaviour change' intervention is most likely to be successful when it works in an integrated way. This means doing more than simply targeting individuals and households on the one hand, or rolling out infrastructure and simply expecting change to occur on the other. Programmes that bring together individual, social and material elements in a coherent way, to create new and lasting social norms, are more likely to be successful.

- There are genuine opportunities for influencing behaviour via 'moments of change'. These are major life events – for example, having a first child; moving to a new area; buying or renting a property for the first time; starting a new job – where people are looking for social cues as to how best to adapt to new circumstances. Engagement with these has to date been limited.

- It is important to frame engagement and communications using intrinsic values to drive meaningful change. Appealing to self interest – for example, saving money – may be useful in grabbing attention initially, and may have some short-term success. However, ultimately this message will not address 'rebound' (where people spend money saved on high carbon products or services) or encourage broader sustainability thinking.

- There is a need to test out behavioural thinking in a systematic way in order to help drive more sustainable lifestyles. Experimenting via innovation pilots would be a sensible approach.

- Without robust monitoring and evaluation, it is very difficult to prioritise those programmes that offer best value for money, and equally difficult to improve programmes so as to maximise value for money. Every major programme needs evaluation.

The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Introduction

The Climate Change Behaviours Research Programme (CCBRP) was established by the Scottish Government in 2010. Comprising commissioned research, inhouse analysis, and a range of conferences and expert seminars, the CCBRP has sought to bring thinking on influencing behaviours into the mainstream of climate change work. This Research Findings summary draws learning from across the programme to argue that influencing behaviour is crucial, and to offer some thinking about how this might be done.

Influencing household behaviours is crucial

Around 70% of Scotland's emissions are associated with consumption by households*. Meeting Scotland's ambitious climate change targets of 80% reductions in carbon emissions by 2050 will therefore require patterns of household consumption to change radically from the current baseline. Influencing behaviour is a key part of this.

*Calculated from data in Scottish Consumer-based emissions 1998-2009

Identify the behaviour areas that matter

There has been longstanding public uncertainty about which areas of individual and household behaviours are most important in terms of reducing emissions. To address this, the team identified a set of ten behaviour areas, oriented around the themes of home energy, personal travel, food and consumption. These became known as the 'key behaviour areas' (KBAs) for climate change, and were published in the Scottish Government's *Public Engagement Strategy* (2010).

These KBAs are **not** a 'to do' list for people in Scotland; instead they are intended to guide policy makers and other stakeholders on where public engagement activities are more and less worthwhile.

Leading by example is key

So what are the most effective ways to influence these behaviour areas? The first CCBRP national conference in 2010 asked delegates for feedback on 'What works in Behaviour Change?' to help develop a set of principles for future work. Leading by example was seen by participants to be absolutely key to moving the agenda forwards and convincing

people that action was important and already taking place. Independent research supports this, finding that where policy is seen as inconsistent, or where the behaviour of lead players (government and the wider public sector, employers, business and the third sector) does not match the message, the public remain sceptical and unwilling to act.

Read more on the conference here:

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research/by-topic/environment/social-research/Remit/events/Behaviour-Change

Information on its own does not change behaviour

There has been a long history of governments and others seeking to change behaviours simply by providing information. This does not work. Indeed, there's a range of evidence suggesting that simply giving information can have adverse effects. This is not to say that information is not important, but to have a significant impact it must be part of a package of interventions.

Understand what (really) drives behaviour

Climate change programmes and campaigns have tended to reflect the perceived importance of "money-saving" in influencing behaviours and indeed there are good reasons why saving money may appear highly salient to (grab the attention of) households, particularly in the current economic climate. Indeed, when focus groups are asked which is the biggest driver of pro-environmental action, 'saving-money' tends to emerge as the key factor. This is understandable – saving money is of course a rational thing to do.

However, a raft of interventions suggest that when it comes to it, people don't always behave in the way that a simple take on 'rationality' suggests they should. Some insulation programmes have found it very difficult to give their products away, even when it is widely recognised that insulating the loft can save households lots of money on their energy bills. Avoiding the immediate hassle involved appears to be worth more to many householders than the longer-term cash savings on offer.

At the same time, people now spend a lot of time and effort recycling, including cleaning, sorting and putting out and retrieving boxes and bins to an increasingly complex timetable. Yet this offers the

individual no personal financial benefit whatsoever. Two important points can be taken from this. First, the key motivators of behaviour are not always what they appear to be, or even what people themselves believe them to be: other factors and influences are often at work. Second, people **will** behave differently, and in substantive ways, if the right conditions are in place.

We won't 'Nudge' our way to a low carbon society

The influential behavioural economics text 'Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness' (Thaler and Sunstein 2008) suggests that behaviours can be successfully changed by nudging people. This means changing the 'choice architecture' – how / in which order choices are presented – in such a way that the sustainable or healthy choice is seen as the more obvious choice. This could mean getting the 'default choice' right, for example: so automatic enrolment in staff pension schemes leads to much better long-term sign-up levels than schemes where staff have to opt in.

It is certainly true that, despite the sniffiness of some behavioural theorists, there are lots of good ideas in 'Nudge', some of which are substantial. These include commitments and personalised feedback, for example. And it is certainly not the case that we cannot influence some behaviours via relatively low cost and simple interventions. Indeed, it often makes sense, in behaviour terms, to start with what is simple to implement, particularly where nudging causes little or no problem for anyone.

What it is crucial to recognise, however, is that nudging in the main offers small individual-level changes that on their own, are likely to lead to individual-level results. In other words, we will not be able to nudge our way to the low carbon future that needs to be created.

It would be sensible to test some of *Nudge's* immediately accessible ideas in an environmental context, to examine whether they can make a contribution at least to driving sustainable lifestyles, even if on their own they will not make the change required. Experimenting via innovation pilots would be a sensible approach.

Many of *Nudge's* most useful ideas, along with ideas from psychologist Robert Cialdini, have been interpreted for government in the *MINDSPACE report*, written by the Institute for Government. You can access this here:

http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/our-work/better-policy-making/mindspace-behavioural-economics

Thaler and Sunstein (2008) *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Penguin: London.

Building sustainability into the fabric of everyday life

So, if money doesn't always drive real change, and people can't simply be nudged into low carbon lifestyles, what could work? Coming back to the example given earlier, why do people recycle? It's not for financial gain and for many it's not because of concern for the environment: a major Scottish Government survey found that those who were 'disengaged' from environmental issues were just as likely to recycle on-street as the greenest households (Davidson, 2009).

A wealth of evidence suggests that social norms drive behaviour; that, actually, the power of 'what other people do' is under-estimated in campaign and programme planning. After all, if you were asked, would you say that the key driver of how you behave is what everyone else is doing? Most of us understandably prefer to think that our behaviour is arrived at by us, via a rational and understandable process of self-determination (Griskevicius et al, 2008). A wealth of work by Cialdini, amongst others, has found strong evidence for the centrality of social norms in determining behaviour in many contexts.

So if social norms are so important, how do they get established? Not by information giving, individual interventions or isolated awareness raising campaigns. They tend to become embedded over time by a mixture of changes to the practices of everyday life. That sounds rather vague, but we can return to recycling to illustrate this point. So, how did Scotland become a place where recycling became increasingly 'the thing that everyone does'? Although the arrangements are different in each local authority area, some aspects of the service provided tend to be common (albeit not for all property types). So:

- Households are given different coloured boxes and bins. Note that the size of the bin indicates an expectation of the maximum amount of waste or recyclate produced.

- Households are given weekly, fortnightly and sometimes monthly or seasonal schedules for putting out various boxes and bins. Collection is reliable as well as regular.

- Households are expected to clean and sort their own recyclate.

- Special collections can be arranged for larger, bulkier products, like furniture.

- New recycling boxes are being introduced over time for new products, food waste being the latest.

- Recycling 'on the go' is becoming increasingly apparent in towns and cities, with on-street bins for individual products creating a new expectation that people will think (and sort) before they throw away.

In short, very strong social norms can be created by building the desired norm into everyday life, which in this case means providing a very visible shared physical infrastructure and creating the services and schedules to support it so they become built into neighbourhood/street routines. EU and Scottish legislation on the regulation of waste has also had a role in encouraging local authorities to provide the appropriate infrastructure for recycling. This kind of change is substantial – hardly a nudge. And although some norms take decades to form (changes in norms around smoking developed over the last 50 years), this new norm has been built relatively quickly. In 2000, only four in ten Scots recycled, but by 2010 this had risen to nearly nine in ten.

For Scottish Government recycling statistics:

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/seso/Datasets.aspx?TID=9

Griskevicius, V. et al (2008) 'Social Norms: An underestimated and under-employed lever for addressing climate change'. IJSC.

http://195.37.26.249/ijsc/docs/artikel/03/3_03_IJSC_Research_Griskevicius.pdf

A first step: combine 'Individual, Social and Material' elements to make programmes more cohesive

It goes without saying 'building change into the fabric of everyday life' is neither straightforward nor low cost, but looking at examples of success can help identify first principles. The CCBRP's *International Review of Behaviour Change Initiatives* (2011) assessed 30 behaviour change initiatives developed outside Scotland and set out a framework for understanding why these were more and less successful. This framework suggests that the more successful initiatives were those that combined interventions across three levels:

- The **individual**, influencing the attitudes of individual consumers so as to change their behaviours and choices;

- The **social**, which refers to the social norms, cultural conventions and shared understandings of consumer practices;

- The **material**, which refers to the objects, technologies and infrastructures that both enable and constrain ways of behaving.

The report argues that behavioural initiatives will be more effective if they go beyond targeting the individual context (which historically has tended to be a major focus) to include mechanisms which intervene in the social and material contexts. Successful examples included the Barclays Cycle Hire Scheme in London, the FoodNYC plan in New York, and the RECO (Residential Energy Conservation Ordinance) in Berkeley California.

These multifaceted interventions provide the kind of straightforward ambition – to make cycling, sustainable food, and energy efficient homes part of the everyday – that can deliver genuine and radical change.

Read the International Review here:

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/02/01104638/0

The CCBRP team will be publishing a 'User Guide' to the Individual, Social, Material model in Spring 2013.

A values approach should underpin everything

This summary has already talked a lot about recycling, and one irony, of course, of the understandable emphasis on recycling in environmental policy in recent years is that there is a public perception that green action now equals recycling. More worryingly, there is a range of evidence that suggests that many people think they are 'doing their bit for climate change' simply by taking out their bins and boxes. So, although it's great to have major success stories, they too will not build a low-carbon society on their own – a consistent low carbon narrative is also needed.

Essentially, *Common Cause* (originally funded via WWF) has led on these comms ideas over recent years, and the CCBRP hosted a number of workshops on this in 2011 with the Public Interest Research Centre. In particular, *Common Cause* suggests that a consistent

focus on 'intrinsic values' across all comms work can help build a stronger values basis for ongoing work.

But what are 'intrinsic values'? *Common Cause* talks of self-transcendence (generally concerned with the wellbeing of others); and openness to change (centered on independence and readiness for change). Pinning these down precisely in climate change terms can be difficult but they might include:

- Care for nature and the environment.
- Understanding the importance of acting on climate change.
- Solidarity: concern about the impacts of climate change on disadvantaged peoples around the world.
- Fairness: concern about how resources are used and distributed.
- Concern about the impacts of climate change for children and future generations.
- Community spirit: concern to build and maintain a strong community.

In contrast, there are 'extrinsic' values of self-enhancement (based on the pursuit of personal status and success) and conservation (not environmental conservation, but more about resistance to change).

Environmental campaigns have often in the past tried to persuade people to 'do good' on the basis of their own self-interest (saving money). But evidence increasingly suggests that communicating intrinsic values in a consistent way may be able to influence norms more effectively. This is a complex and multi-layered argument, one that's difficult to summarise, so this section ends with a strong recommendation to read the Common Cause Handbook: http://valuesandframes.org/handbook/

More could be done to exploit Moments of change

Major moments of transition (moving home or to a new area, having a first child, starting a new job and so on) offer opportunities to rethink behaviours. In these moments of change, which are major life events, households tend to be looking for new social cues as to how to live and work.

Retailers already have a well-developed understanding of similar trigger points (for example, having a new kitchen installed opens the door to a wealth of other products and services) and so plan carefully to ensure all market opportunities from one 'moment' can be realised. But other partners could do more

to maximise the potential from these moments of change by rethinking programme design so as to better target them.

Mainstreaming 'behaviour change'

The CCBRP team undertook an audit of Scottish Government policy work across a range of areas which had an interest in influencing behaviours. One of the key findings from this work was that 'behaviour change' as a concept was sometimes seen as the work of specialist staff or teams, rather than an issue that needed to be understood and acted on as a core skill or competency of policy-making and programme design.

This suggests that there may need to be a process at the start of programme development wherein 'behaviour' as a core issue can be explicitly considered, a concept to be mainstreamed throughout the process of policy design. For example, programmes rolling out new infrastructure or installing new products need to consider how people actually use that infrastructure or product. What, in other words, might the behavioural response be to a smart meter? Do households behave differently as a result? How? Do they pay too much attention to energy 'spikes' (from kettles and toasters) and less attention to lower level but more important energy usage? If programmes do not fully consider how people might respond when faced with new infrastructure, they will not be as successful as they should be.

Monitoring, evaluation, and experimentation are all key

Without robust monitoring and evaluation, it is very difficult to prioritise those programmes that offer best value for money, and equally difficult to improve programmes so as to maximise value for money. Even programmes that seem simple, like insulation installations for example, can benefit from finding out: why households drop out after originally signing up (drop out has been a significant feature in some insulation programmes in the past) or why households fail to sign up in the first place when it would appear to be in their interests to do so. Every major programme needs monitoring and evaluation to maximise value for money.

What's more, it would make sense for all programmes to build in a level of experimentation so that future programmes can be informed by an understanding

of which approach works best. For example, boiler scrappage schemes may offer an opportunity to test out different approaches to householder support. An 'intervention group' could have boiler replacement but also receive intensive and personalised support on reducing energy use. A control group (matched to the intervention group in terms of characteristics) could simply receive a new boiler. Both groups' energy use could be compared before and after, to get a clearer sense of the kind of difference personalised support makes in terms of energy saving. Experimenting in this way could provide genuine insights and maximise value for money.

Further work and links

Reports on *Innovations in Practice* from the Sustainable Behaviours Research Group, and an *Individual, Social, Material Model User Guide* will be published in spring/ summer 2013.

For all CCBRP publications, please visit:

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research/ by-topic/environment/social-research/Behaviour-Change-Research

This document, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the internet at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or on 0131 244 2111.

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