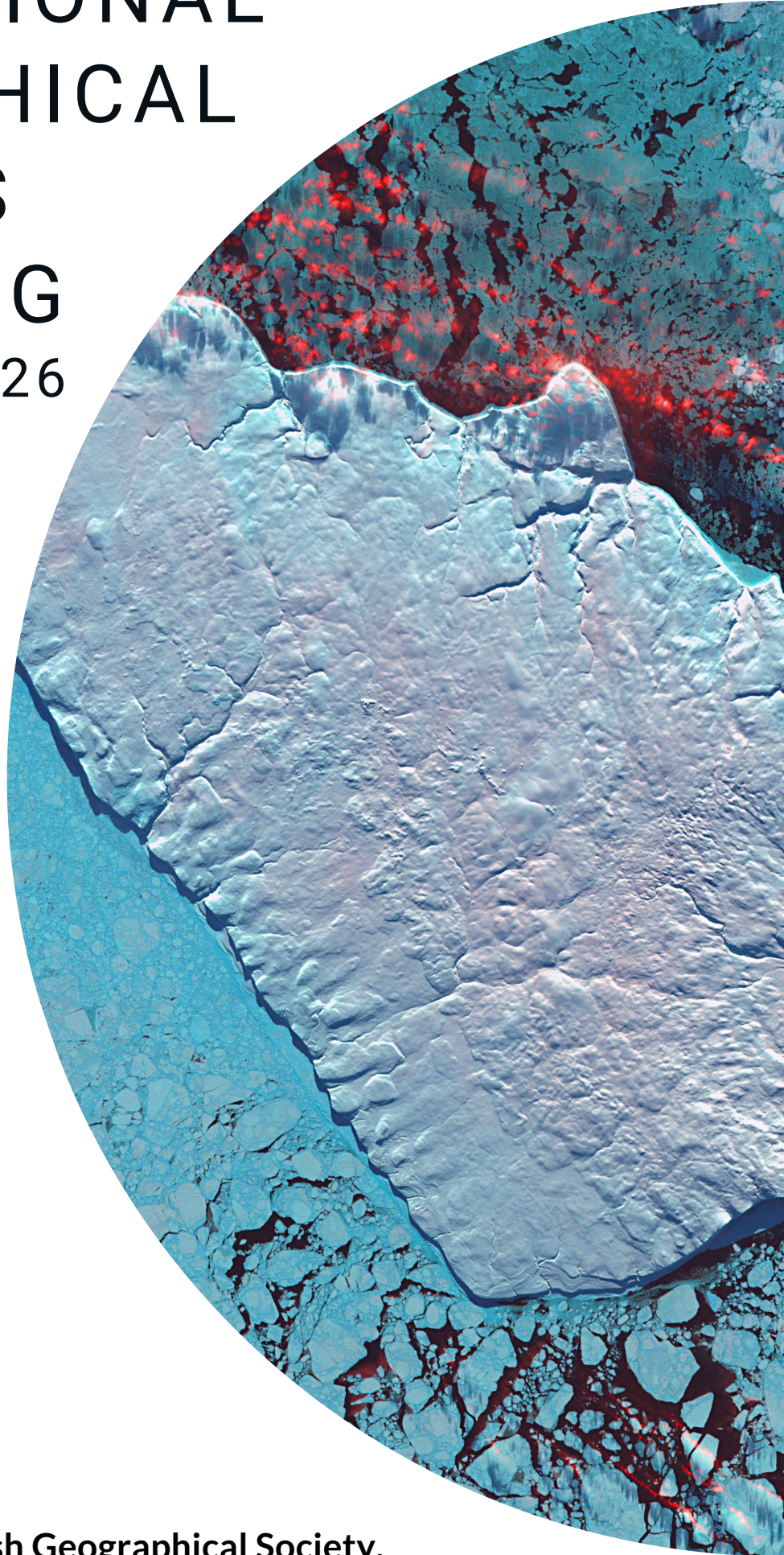


**INTERNATIONAL
GEOGRAPHICAL
SOCIETIES
GATHERING
AHEAD OF COP26**



22.06.2021

**Hosted by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society,
in collaboration with the International Geographical
Union and the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)**

For millions around the world, 2021 has been a year of great expectation.

Now, as we look towards the end of a pandemic that has affected the lives of so many, we are also approaching two of the most important meetings in a generation for the future of our planet: the UN Conferences of the Parties on climate and biodiversity.

It was therefore in the spirit of the times that on 22nd June 2021, representatives of the international geographical community gathered to discuss our own collective and respective responses to the climate emergency, our efforts to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and our potential to make a real difference in the decades ahead.

This report records the discussions and findings of this gathering of the world's geographical societies, hosted by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in collaboration with the International Geographical Union and the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).

It concludes with a joint declaration of action which asks all of our societies to pledge to redouble our efforts to apply our unique knowledge, skills, and networks as geographers to these great global challenges of our time.

We hope that all of you will join us in doing so, and that the recommendations of this report might act as a guide in these and all of our future endeavours.

'This November, as Scotland plays host to the world's governments at COP26, we wanted to help play our part by convening our global network of sister organisations, to understand each other better, to seek greater collaboration, and to inspire us all to use our collective leadership to promote a wide understanding of solutions and action on these critical global issues.'

Mike Robinson, Chief Executive of the RSGS



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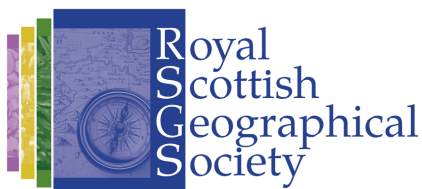
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Mike Robinson, Chief Executive of the RSGS

The geographical community has an incredible heritage, with a diverse range of approaches and opinions. Yet, regardless of our differences in approach, our shared language of science and geography grants us a strong collective ability for promoting positive global change. Our collective influence can make an impact to inform debate, to inspire the public, and to place geography at the heart of solving the global emergency that is climate change.

Prof Joe Smith, Director of the RGS (with IBG)

This historic gathering is an opportunity for the world's geographical organisations to gather together to challenge ourselves—and geography—to recognise the broad responsibilities and opportunities that climate change represents for our discipline. The problem of climate change generates compelling questions that the subject is uniquely well placed to respond to, and also opportunities to demonstrate the unique attributes of geography. We are interdisciplinarians, problem-solvers, and applied thinkers. But it also presents us with profound responsibilities to apply our knowledge and skills with urgency and purpose to the task of managing the far-reaching risks presented, through mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

Prof Michael Meadows, President of the IGU

Even as the global population reels in the face of the most serious health crisis in over a century, the climate crisis is affecting all of our lives. Geographers have a very special skillset in terms of teaching and research that can—and indeed must—be harnessed through the kind of cooperation that the international community of geographical societies is able to foster in order to help mitigate the myriad problems associated with the human impact on the environment.

I. Mike Robinson, on the potential of the world's geographical societies

The geographical community has an incredible heritage and a great deal of potential influence. I look around at many of our networks and we are well connected, respected academic and scientific institutions. The Russian Geographical Society, who were 175 last year, and their board reaches into the highest echelons of Russian society. The Canadian Geographical Society celebrated its 91st birthday by awarding the current Canadian Prime Minister a medal and Fellowship. And the French Geographical Society, who are 200 years old this December, will hold a dinner hosted by Emmanuel Macron. There is no question that we each have significant reach.

My own organisation is a relative youngster. We are only 137 years old, but like you we can count many of the most influential global figures in our current and past awards programmes. We are also one of the smaller geographical societies, and whilst this small scale has disadvantages it can offer some strengths too. It allows some freedoms that perhaps the larger bodies have found harder to come by. We can afford to be light on our feet, not overly tied up in bureaucracy, open to new ideas and quick to respond.


But although we are small, we share with you all a widely held respect and regard. Like all of you, I am sure, people see us as a wise and safe pair of hands: they trust us to report, inform, convene and advise on a wide array of current topics. We interact with everyone - schools, teachers, university academics, business leaders, members, explorers, media, civil servants and politicians - and are often asked to chair meetings and inquiries or be advisors to them.

Because we want geography to prove its relevance and vitality by being at the heart of what matters, we think it's important to take these opportunities. We currently chair external forums on agriculture, on climate change, and on city development. We have advisory roles on Arctic policy, aviation, citizen engagement and rail travel, and advise several universities and other charities. Those of you with more staff and capacity will have many more opportunities to influence, I am sure.

So as a global geographical community, with this collective regard, this collective trust, our collective networks and our collective influence, we have an opportunity to make a difference. Would it be helpful to share more than we do? Can we help each other more than we do? We will not agree about everything, nor will we all have the same cultural or political contexts to work within. But with geography and science as our common language we have the potential to be a considerable force. So my question today is, by working more collaboratively, could we (and should we) use that force to deliver more good?

With the increasing urgency around climate change (and of course with COP26 in Glasgow this year), with the increasing urgency around biodiversity loss (and the delayed COP that was meant to take place in Kunming last year), and with growing awareness of and agreement on the need to deliver against the UN Sustainable Development Goals, my sense is that we have a real opportunity to inform debate, to inspire the public and to place geography at the heart of solving these global issues.

Here in Scotland, we have some of the most stringent climate targets in the world. But just before the pandemic hit, we still saw 30,000 school children and young people protest to parliament demanding more be done about the climate emergency. These same young people are turning their back on jobs in the fossil fuel sector, and as a result we are seeing more than a 40% decline in geosciences uptake at universities. We need to work harder than ever to make our subject more relevant – to make it feel part of a positive future. We risk it becoming obsolete if we don't, and our societies with it. Don't we owe it to the next generation of geographers to be bolder?



'As a global geographical community, with this collective regard, this collective trust, our collective networks, and our collective influence, we have a real opportunity to make a difference.'


II. Ellie Kirkland, on behalf of young geographers

One of the things that made me fall in love with geography was its real-world relevance, and the way in which any issue in the news could be linked to a geographical line of thought. Climate change is the defining issue of our time, and as a discipline that positions itself at the intersection of human and natural worlds, I don't think it's possible to promote geography without promoting awareness and action to avert the climate crisis.

As geographers, we're best positioned to understand and communicate climate change. As a network of organisations, you have a pretty astonishing list of connections, and the potential to influence global policy really significantly.

In the lead-up to COP26, young people around the globe need you to use your influence and push for governments and diplomats to be as ambitious and collaborative as possible. This means recognising historic emissions and inequalities. It means working together and seeking to lead the way in a just, green transition. It means getting excited about COP26 as a real opportunity for change. And getting worried, starting to recognise climate change for the crisis that it is.

A lot of climate rhetoric centres on future generations. Today's young people are the first of these future generations, and we've spoken out in the millions, begging anyone and everyone to do their part. We've given you a mandate to pursue stronger action and to fight to protect our planet.



'Today's young people are the first of these future generations, and we've spoken out in the millions [...] We've given you a mandate to pursue stronger action and to fight to protect our planet.'

All of the organisations present today have a lot in common. You work tirelessly to promote exploration, research, and education. You are all passionate about the importance of geography in both local and global issues. Each society teaches its citizens about their country's past, encourages them to get outdoors and explore its present, and prepares them for the challenges of the future. For me, stronger action on climate change is a natural continuation of the great work you are already doing.

COP is only the beginning. In the longer term, it's really important to help keep the pressure up on governments, industries, and international organisations to act on promises made and ideally to go beyond them. I hope that you will engage more with young people. We are so keen to be part of the discussion and to help in any way we can.

Finally, faced with all the polarisation we've seen in recent years, I think it's extremely important that geographical societies step up and act as a platform to bring opposing views together and to bridge growing divides. By facilitating conversations, you can play a key role in promoting understanding and fostering greater public consensus needed for rapid and sustained environmental change.

I'm really hopeful that this year will become another landmark for climate agreements and that you will do your part to push for the commitments and ambition we sorely need. I hope this conference marks the start of greater collaboration between our societies, leaves you inspired by the stories and successes of other organisations, and brings home your collective influence and potential to enact meaningful change.

It's a real privilege to have been included in this gathering. I've been involved with Royal Scottish Geographical Society for a number of years and I have a huge amount of respect and admiration for each of your societies. But we can all do more, and that's what I'm here to provoke.

There are less than five months until the most important climate conference to date. Starting now, young people and really the whole planet need you to make full use of your expertise and connections, to push for the political goodwill, targets, and actions that will limit global warming as close to 1.5 degrees as possible. Thank you.



III. Prof Bhaskar Vira, on the responsibilities of higher education institutions

Cambridge has very recently celebrated its centenary of educating young people in undergraduate degrees in geography—so we are actually a little bit younger than some of the institutions around this room today. But we have been reflecting a lot on doing our bit to try and enthuse the next generation of geographers and, in particular, how we respond to the expectations of students in relation to teaching and learning around the climate emergency.

What should we be doing? Especially as we emerge out of the pandemic, as students in the last couple of years have had a pretty tough time with online learning and with remote teaching, as we go back to more normal forms of engagement, how do we respond to expectations of the current generation of students and future generations of students? There are a few things that we've been trying to think about.

We no longer label our two introductory papers in the first year 'human geography' and 'physical geography'. And I think that's really important in terms of signalling the need for this integrative geographical approach to thinking about the climate emergency.

Students might associate one of the papers as a more human paper and one as a more physical paper. But the title of the paper is 'People, Places, and Politics of Difference' and 'Environmental Processes and Change'. And dotted through those two papers are lots of teaching materials that are relevant to thinking critically about the climate emergency. But we don't want them to think about themselves as either human or physical geographers.

Those sorts of divisions within the discipline are ones that we are actually actively trying to get them to break down. And I think that is a challenge that we need to keep thinking about: how do we avoid those fragmentations, sub-disciplinary fragmentations, when we are actually talking about something which is cross-cutting and integrative? So, one provocation would be to try and think about that integrative geography, and how we can continue to communicate that.

But I also wanted to pick up on comments around students' activism and students' desire to see geography as part of their acts of citizenship, not just as a learning process. This generation of students are approximately the same age as Greta Thunberg. They are part of that collective voice, the millions that Ellie talked about. And I think it's important that the conversation that takes place in our institutions of education is a two-way conversation. It's not us teaching the students, it's about us listening to the students as well.

How do we support that activism? How do we make the conversation about wider social action? How can geography as a department be part of thinking about the public geographies that we perform? How can the students be part of that performance of public geographies?

We've been doing a parallel piece of work in our department around decolonisation and thinking about the way geographical knowledge is produced and reproduced. And we are using that as a filter, a lens to think about all of our reading lists, for example. And I wonder whether we should be using a climate emergency filter as well—how are our reading lists actually incorporating and thinking about the climate emergency?



My next provocation comes back to the question of how knowledge is produced and reproduced. And I was really taken by Andrés Guhl's interjection around the roles of traditional and indigenous knowledges. The IPCC and the International Panel of Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services have been struggling a bit to go beyond their models of peer-reviewed science in terms of understanding how knowledge matters in assessing the state of the world in the light of the climate emergency.

So how can indigenous and traditional knowledges be seen as equally valid and incorporated into the ways in which the climate emergency is being understood? How can we ensure that they are still a part of the conversation? I think there's a real challenge for all of us: to think about how we can incorporate those different forms of learning—not on our terms, but on their terms, on equal terms.

The climate emergency is important because it is being experienced by people who don't necessarily contribute to the peer-reviewed literature that writes about it. So trying to level some of those conversations is a big challenge—and I think geography can play a really important role here.

A third set of challenges is about us as institutions. And I'll just introduce that by saying that geography has been and continues to be a field-based discipline.

I am based in an institution in the UK. I do all of my work in South Asia. I can't do that without travel. But what does academic travel mean in an era of climate emergency? I haven't travelled for the last twelve months because of the pandemic. But our norm has been a field-based discipline in which we travel around the world, and the air miles that we've collectively contributed over the last century are probably going to be a staggering reminder of our own responsibility towards the planet.

So what does that mean as we come out of the pandemic? What does a field-based discipline like ours do in terms of continuing that field-based engagement whilst still being responsible for the emissions that we are incurring during the conduct of our discipline? I would like us to think about that.

And lastly, just the role that we can play in convening these conversations across our institutions! With our integrative approaches, with our concerns around the climate emergency, I think we are very well-placed to be a fulcrum, a node around which conversations around climate can take place.

Our own undergraduates coming back to education are very well-informed. But a number of other subjects that I've taught in my university don't even touch upon the climate emergency! But there is a real desire, a real thirst for students who are studying other disciplines to engage with these ideas. So can geography departments become that fulcrum around which those conversations are happening?

'We don't want them to think about themselves as either human or physical geographers. Those sorts of divisions within the discipline are ones that we are actually actively trying to get them to break down.'



IV. Jon-Paul Davies, on the importance of active citizenship

Are geographers doing enough to develop in young people a sense of compassion for their world such that they may go forward as adults and make the essential changes that we and our parents maybe did not?

Are they enabled to become activist citizens or are they, like so many before them, perhaps unavoidably along for the ride, destined to repeat the failings of the past to inevitably worsening outcomes?

In recent years, an increasing number of geographical paths have crossed in my life. I attended meetings and conferences, I've spoken with a number of colleagues and teachers, events such as this one today. And I also recognise there is a change in the media, a change in the voice of normal people everywhere, that are not connected to geographical circles: climate change is becoming, for the first time in my career and my life, real for people—which is a very positive thing.

But at the core of my argument, I'm concerned that when teaching geography we are, perhaps uniquely in the school environment, delving into more than just subject matter. This for me raises big questions.

Is it acceptable to introduce young people to the myriad problems and challenges of the world be they natural disasters, death tolls, or predicted impacts of the climate crisis—and then just leave them there?

Is it acceptable merely to generate another generation of globally aware, factually knowledgeable, exam-passing students, who can quote numbers and names of events like pub quiz specialists, but who don't know how or where next to use this information effectively?

For me, this is unacceptable. I want us to do more. But in the crowded school calendar and exams-focused timetable, in the vast curricula of a subject that is, by its nature, pretty much everything, in a globalising, hastening, competitive wider world, it's quite challenging for geography teachers to also change that world—isn't it?

Beyond the school gates in the pre-COVID landscape, young people the world over were gathering in the world's urban centres on Friday afternoons, following Greta Thunberg's lead and protesting for the climate. School responses ranged from supportive through to labelling it truancy or raising fears about exam results impacts.

Inside the gates, we study a lot of interconnected climate change issues: food production and security, water and carbon cycles, soil agriculture and climate linked to population, projected impacts of climate change.

But I do feel we must go beyond the teaching of facts to a deeper-rooted focus on solutions and on actioning them. I do believe many of the students I encounter are hopeful that they can have a good future. They have positivity whilst recognising the political failings of the past. They marry personal or family desires for success with the more selfless global goals of abating inequality or pursuing a sustainable resource- or climate-stable future.

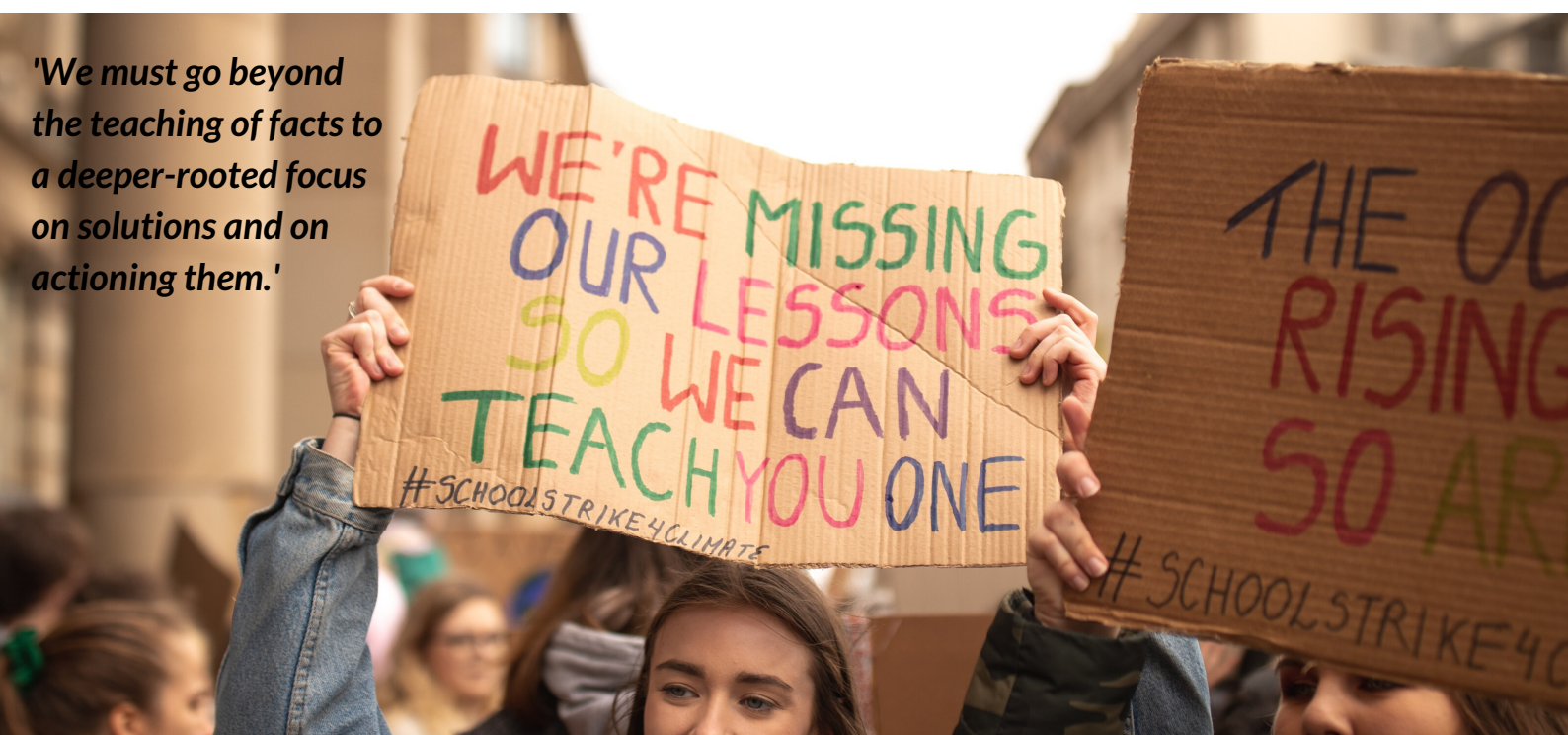
On the whole, they are seeking change and need only a little support to enable them. I'm reaching out to the geographical community requesting we collectively address this story through wide-reaching discussions and by highlighting those areas where successful active citizenship is being or could be made real in our classrooms, in our workplaces, and in our homes.

And there are, of course, great examples of practice from which we can draw inspiration. Netflix and the big TV channels have started doing their bit: *Kiss the Ground* is an incredible documentary which raises many relevant questions, particularly related to soil replenishment and Drawdown Theory, and is not the kind of negativizing documentary that we've been used to in the past.

Through contact with the Geographical Association, I'm aware that programmes are being readied to support schools going forward teaching climate issues pre-COP26. And then of course today, here, so much has been said so far, and it's really positive to hear so many voices globally connected to this.

With President Biden in the White House, and the weight of the world's expectation convening on Glasgow and COP26, I do feel we're very well-placed to make something happen. My provocation, fundamentally: geography places the real world into the mind of the student. In return, I believe we must do more to adequately place the student back into the real world. It begins with each of us.

'We must go beyond the teaching of facts to a deeper-rooted focus on solutions and on actioning them.'



V. Prof Anindita Datta, on the role of gender and intersectionality

The issues of climate change and loss of biodiversity need to be framed using the lens of women's everyday lives. This not only visibilises the issues that may get obscured at larger scales, but also highlights the coping strategies.

For example, we might consider the issues around the availability and distribution of water as these intersect with women's lives in rural and urban areas. Caste-class dimensions are often not visibilised in international collaborations or studies framed on different scales.

On the one hand, in arid regions there is a concern of growing expenditure of women's time and energy in gathering water for household needs. Progressive desiccation (removal of moisture) has meant women now need to walk greater distances and spend more time and energy to collect, store, and manage water.

While this is well documented, it has had unexpected fallouts such as girls dropping out of schools, as well as spawning of social phenomena such as water wives.



Meanwhile, in Gujarat's Sabarkantha district, male selective out migration resulting from increasing aridity has left women and girls left with the task of arranging and managing water. There are also more women-headed households, which represent altogether different vulnerabilities.

In urban areas, we notice feminist solidarities in ensuring distributive justice with regard to water in poor neighbourhoods facing water scarcity. In low-lying regions, flooding and impacts on women's lives are well-known.

Hence, I argue that climate emergency has translated into constant precarity and in order to provide meaningful interventions, collaborative projects need to be framed around the lens of women's everyday lives.

The second challenge is on supporting young people's awareness-building and climate activism, especially in the light of the concerning manner in which these are often framed as anti-national in many countries around the world.

'The issues of climate change and loss of biodiversity need to be framed using the lens of women's everyday lives.'



VI. Aran O'Carroll, on the urgent need for action and collaboration

I'd like to quote the UN Secretary General from his speech in December: "Humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal. Making peace with nature is the defining task of the twenty-first century—it must be the top, top priority of everyone everywhere."

We think of ourselves as geographers as having unique capacities in interdisciplinary thinking and systems thinking. And when we think about the future of the planet, we are organising to demonstrate our relevance to some of the most pressing challenges before us.

I want to note that on June 10th this year, a mere matter of weeks ago, there was an unprecedented event. And that was the first ever joint report of the IPCC on biodiversity and ecosystems services and the international panel on Climate change, recognising the critical importance of both biodiversity and climate change crises, and a need for coordinated and indeed integrated action on these fronts

It's hard to believe that this was the first ever joint scientific panel to examine the nexus of these issues of climate change and biodiversity loss. Indeed, it's worth reflecting on the fact that at Rio in 1992—that remarkable UN meeting—both of these conventions were simultaneously founded. And they went off on their own paths and only weeks ago have come together for the first time!

As we think about this October and November, there will be remarkable weeks for the future of the planet. In Kunming, China, on October 12th for two weeks, the world will come together at the UN Conference on Biological Diversity Conference of the Parties to set decadal targets for the conservation of biodiversity. And then, as we all know, they'll gather again in Glasgow at the 26th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to set decadal targets—meaningful decadal targets, let's hope—to arrest the climate crisis.

We as geographers know our relevance to these issues. We know that our integrated thinking, our interdisciplinary approach is of great relevance to these things. We know that we have a collective challenge of declining attention to our profession, our discipline.

It's time to demonstrate our relevance to these issues. Before you, you have a proposed joint statement that I would suggest that we collectively, as the world's geographical community, endorse a version of, and encourage action on these critical issues to the future of the planet, before the biodiversity conference in Kunming on October 12th.

But I would like us to think about going further.

On 2008, in the lead-up to the 14th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, a small kernel of the world's geographical community came together to do a joint publication—a special climate change report, aimed at discussing the significance of the climate crisis at that point—and the Canadian participated in that with representatives from Africa, Australia, NZ, the UK, and elsewhere.

And I think that would be an interesting precedent to revisit: that we should consider speaking collaboratively, collectively, about our relevance to these global challenges and indeed encouraging the world to take concerted action to address them. And further, that we think about coming together to talk about what our contribution to these global challenges can be over time.

My suggestion is this: that we issue a joint statement collaboratively, that we explore the possibility of hosting panels that might discuss these issues—and I would think that our collective reach should enable us to pull some of the world's greatest thinkers together. And maybe a year out from these Conferences of the Parties, I think a joint website or print publication might be a very powerful thing: to help address action on these issues, to demonstrate our relevance as geographers, and to galvanise ourselves as a global community to focus on these challenges going forward.

That is my provocation to you all.

'It's time to demonstrate our relevance to these issues.'



The solutions proposed in the following pages are derived from group discussions held at the June 2021 gathering. They are grouped under seven key themes: 2021 and beyond, geography as a discipline, policy impact, research, education, public engagement, and geography as a community.

I. 2021 and beyond

Understand the significance of the moment. We stand at the threshold of a decade like no other in the fight to protect our planet from a global crisis of unsustainability. The upcoming UN Conferences of the Parties on climate and biodiversity represent real opportunities for change, but we must challenge ourselves and others to pursue climate action above and beyond what is expected, before and after these events, in order to lead the way for a greener, fairer, and more sustainable world.

Learn from the challenges of COVID-19. The year and a half have presented a great challenge to countries, societies, and institutions around the world—often to the detriment of effective climate action. However, many agreed that there are vital lessons to be learned from local and international responses to the crisis.

- At the local level, these included a heightened sense of community, greater connection with the outdoors, and a spotlight on consumerism in our daily lives.
- At the global level, we noted that the pandemic made visible on a grand scale the need for long-term planning, inclusive and equitable policymaking, and ongoing global cooperation.

Several also felt that the challenges of service delivery during COVID-19 might motivate countries and institutions to implement climate policies sooner to avoid similar disruption in future.

Champion solutions. A resounding argument that emerged from the gathering was the need to champion practical responses to the climate and biodiversity crises, both to provide a focus for geographical knowledge and skills and to promote and raise awareness of positive solutions at all levels of wider society.

II. GEOGRAPHY AS A DISCIPLINE


Celebrate our interconnectedness and interdisciplinarity. Geography is uniquely situated at the nexus of the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, connecting our understanding of the human and natural worlds. Not only is this essential to understanding the climate and biodiversity emergencies, but it makes us excellent collaborators working across a wide range of disciplines.

Realise our current contributions. Geographers are at the forefront of tackling solutions to world problems, from resource management to natural disasters, global inequalities to humanitarian crises, and even the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to understand that we are already contributing but can do much more to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises.

Prove our relevance. We know that geographers have a critical role as interpreters and communicators of the climate and biodiversity emergencies. But we need to show that we are prioritising these issues across all areas of our work in order to demonstrate our commitment and raise a flag for geographers everywhere.

Humanise the issues. There is a deep disconnect in public understanding between the science of climate change and biodiversity loss and the real impact that these challenges are having and will continue to have on real people and their everyday lives. We need to embrace our role as interpreters of the crisis in order to translate climate change into something that is real, tangible, and worth fighting in order to protect the things that people care about.

Address current and historic inequalities in our institutions, developing robust equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies in collaboration with relevant groups and challenging ourselves to reflect on the impacts of colonialism and other prejudicial systems in all areas of our work.



'The climate crisis has already been solved. We already have the facts and solutions. All we have to do is wake up and change.'

Greta Thunberg

III. POLICY IMPACT

Recognise our ability to influence policymakers. Many at the conference were surprised to discover that certain geographical societies, notably the French and Russian, have historic links with the highest levels of government, while Chinese geographers are regularly consulted in government decision-making processes. Many societies also have a long history of rewarding pioneers and changemakers with awards or fellowships.

The Scottish society also noted that several of our societies also have access to a wide network of public and private sector contacts in addition to their memberships and/or wider general audience, whether or not they have yet unlocked its full potential.

Harness our knowledge, credibility, and networks. We have established that geographical societies are uniquely positioned to be able to influence policy in different ways and at different scales. We now need to learn from each other's experiences to be able to replicate and redouble our efforts to disseminate geographical knowledge around climate and biodiversity to policymakers in our own countries, regions, cities, or institutions.

Grow our connections with other sectors in order to build wide-reaching networks that are both impactful and representative. The need to engage with the private sector was highlighted as especially important if we are to encourage businesses that change can be inclusive and positive, not something to be feared.

Realise the power of conversations. The Scottish society has established a role convening conversations around the climate emergency across a wide range of organisations, which has proved a powerful way to get people involved and thinking about solutions. The recommendations from these events can then be distributed to policymakers and/or decisionmakers in relevant sectors as evidence of a wide-reaching desire for urgent and specific action.

Bring everyone into the room. It is important that policymaking is representative of all parts of society if everyone is to prosper from a just transition. We can help to support this by ensuring that we are active in and open about improving our equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) practices and always make space for those who are or have been excluded from these conversations to ensure that all of our recommendations are fair and inclusive.

Share ideas for widening policy impact. There was wide recognition of the value of continued correspondence between societies on this topic, as perhaps the most impactful way we can make a difference to the climate emergency.

'Climate change, demographics, water, food, energy, global health, women's empowerment - these issues are all intertwined. We cannot look at one strand in isolation. Instead, we must examine how these strands are woven together.'

Ban Ki-moon



III. RESEARCH

Connect human and physical geography. We must sustain and enhance our efforts to promote a more integrative approach to geography and discourage the division of human and physical studies in higher education institutions (HEIs) in order to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the issues around climate change.

At present, the widespread and near-wholesale equation of physical geography with risk reduction and human geography with assessing vulnerability has also meant that physical geography is afforded much higher political capital and research funding, while more anthropocentric studies are neglected.

Much has already been done to bridge this divide—the examples of environmental geography and the curriculum at the University of Cambridge were both raised—but we must find ways to take this integrative approach more mainstream.

Collaborate with other disciplines. As well as taking a more integrative approach within geography, we should also take a more integrative approach to research as a whole, embracing the potential for geography departments to act as a fulcrum around which academics from diverse disciplines can congregate and collaborate on projects around sustainability.

Develop and promote regional geography. One of the major barriers to effective climate action is the problem of implementing solutions at a global scale when the main challenges often emerge out of regional contexts.

Geographers can help to understand, communicate, and resolve these regional challenges. However, in recent years, a shift towards more global approaches catered to the most high-impact journals has resulted in a parallel shift away from vital regional research—despite that fact that the greatest need for information remains at the regional level.

We must attempt to restore the status of regional geography and nurture the growth of regional studies within our institutions if we are to tackle the great global challenges effectively.

Consider vulnerability in interventions. We must not lose sight of the impacts of climate- and sustainability-related interventions upon the most vulnerable groups and members of the communities in which we are working. Another important way to avoid this is to...

Cultivate a grassroots approach. We need to engage directly with communities and integrate participatory approaches in order to ensure that our research reflects and respects the lived experiences and concerns of ordinary people.

Emphasise action and study at the local level. The Chinese and Portuguese societies both stressed the potential of the local/city-level as an ideal laboratory for studied practical interventions, as well as for research into existing experiences of and responses to the climate and biodiversity crises. It was noted that recommendations from these more localised studies would be much more likely to be accepted by relevant local authorities.

Interrogate our fieldwork practices. We need to question whether, how, and in what cases it continues to be appropriate for researchers to travel long distances—often by air—to conduct research overseas, both in the light of the climate crisis and conversations around colonial or ‘parachute’ science.

Develop equal partnerships. Geographers conducting research in countries, communities, or groups not their own should be wary of imposing their own mindsets and make efforts to collaborate with local researchers, organisations, and communities.

Incorporate indigenous and traditional knowledge into the global understanding of climate change, ensuring that efforts to do so are on equal terms (not exclusively dictated by western models of peer-reviewed literature) and participatory rather than extractive. This is especially important where the knowledge concerns the lived experiences of those already affected by climate change.

Nurture citizen science. We should take advantage of increasing access to open data to allow for citizen scientists to engage and contribute to geographical understanding; the potential of such projects has been thoroughly demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.



V. EDUCATION

Facilitate lifelong learning. Education is for all ages, not just students in formal education. We should always make efforts to engage with people of all ages and all levels of education in our work around climate change.

Promote climate literacy in groups where this is not the norm, attempting where possible to make information freely available, accessible, and relevant to people's lives.

Empower learners in early years and primary education by promoting engagement with the environment, positive values, and solutions to challenges above and beyond the challenges themselves in order to prevent climate anxiety and desensitisation to these issues at a young age.

Encourage active citizenship. As educators, we need to bridge the gap between teaching the facts about the great global challenges in the classroom and empowering students to respond effectively to these problems in the real world, both in the present and in the future.

Engage with student activism. Educators and education institutions must not only respond to student demands for change, but participate in two-way conversations and collaborative action.

Develop practical skills and knowledge. We have a responsibility to the geographers of the future to ensure that there is appropriate training available to aspiring and early-career researchers, explorers, and activists focused on sustainability.

The Bulgarian committee expanded on the value of fieldwork opportunities for geography students in higher education, meeting wide agreement. The Russian society are also highly focused on offering practical experience through their expedition programmes.

Develop guidance for careers around sustainability. We should be able to provide adequate support and advice to students and professionals seeking to turn their knowledge and skills to a career around climate change and sustainability, whether in science, policy, education, research, consulting, or advocacy. This could include a resource bank of relevant courses, training, funding opportunities, organisations, and job websites.

Notably, the Uganda GA have already developed a mentorship programme for early-career professional geographers and emphasise the importance of geography to realising the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in career guidance visits.

Lead by example. There was consensus on the point that geographical institutions must not fall into the trap of thinking about climate change as a challenge for future generations. All geographers must recognise their role as active citizens and consider how they can have the best possible impact.

'Education, if it means anything, should not take people away from the land, but instil in them even more respect for it, because educated people are in a position to understand what is being lost.'

Wangari Maathai



VI. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Spread a message of urgency and hope. We cannot face the climate or biodiversity emergency from a position of panic and despair. We must stress the urgency of the situation and the importance of acting now whilst emphasising the positive changes already happening, and the benefits that will accompany the shift to a more sustainable society.

Rehabilitate our public image. Many people have a poor perception of geography from their primary and secondary schooling—we need to challenge the idea of geography as a descriptive subject of ‘flags and facts’ and raise awareness of the uniquely interconnected and interdisciplinary outlook that defines our discipline.

Claim our contributions. Geography has already contributed a great deal to our understanding of the climate crisis and its solutions: from mapping and forecasting projected physical impacts to documenting lived experiences and designing interventions for communities already affected by or responding to change. We need to highlight these contributions across all of our public channels in order to communicate what geography can do for the world.

Highlight prominent geographers. Putting names and faces to our work around the climate and biodiversity crises is one of the simplest things we can do to raise awareness of geography’s important role in solving these challenges.

Showcase our rich visual data on climate change. We have a wealth of maps and images collected and developed using GIS (Geographical Information Systems) which we could share with the public to highlight some of the key issues and solutions surrounding climate change, biodiversity loss, land use, and habitat management.

Share our own progress in reducing emissions. We should be open and honest about what we are doing to set our own house in order to encourage other organisations to do the same.

Recommend documentaries, podcasts, and books which include the contributions of geographers. Use our publications. Many of our societies already have a substantial readership for their magazines, journals, and newsletters, which we can use to communicate the issues of climate change and biodiversity loss from a clear geographical perspective.

Use our events. Several of our societies deliver an annual programme of public talks and events through which we can champion these issues and encourage others to take meaningful action.

Use our online platforms. Some of us have also developed a strong social media presence which we can use to reach an even wider public audience with information designed to be easily accessible, understandable, and actionable.

Engage with other organisations. We can massively extend our reach and impact by engaging more with organisations in different sectors to foster greater collaboration and exchange around climate- and biodiversity-related projects.

Get people involved, whether as members, supporters, visitors, followers, or volunteers. There are endless possibilities for climate- and biodiversity-related projects: from citizen science projects to themed photography competitions, interactive quizzes and games at visitor centres to exhibitions and conferences with experts, attendance at peaceful protests to community projects around food, waste, or green spaces.

'There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. We are all crew.'

Marshall McLuhan

An aerial photograph of Earth from space, showing the Western Hemisphere. The landmasses of North and South America are visible, surrounded by the deep blue of the oceans. The image has a slightly grainy, high-altitude quality.

VII. GEOGRAPHY AS A COMMUNITY

Recognise our potential to lead. The need for leadership on the climate and biodiversity emergencies represents a clear opportunity for the international geographical community, which is uniquely positioned not only in terms of our collective knowledge and skills, but also our capacity to influence, inform, and inspire action at all levels of society.

Develop examples of good practice. Our individual societies all have different strengths in different aspects of action for the climate and biodiversity—whether developing internal policy, influencing external policy, research, education, or public engagement. We should all be willing to share further about our most positive experiences to help others to develop similar programmes for action.

Identify opportunities for collaboration. Many of us are responsible for similar activities, audiences, projects, events, programmes, and/or publications and should make a point routinely to consider the possibilities for collaboration with other societies in all of these spaces in order to strengthen and diversify our existing approaches to the climate and biodiversity crises.

Share activities and ideas on a regular basis. As a community, we should gather more often to share our activities, to develop ideas, and to support and challenge each other to do more and better to confront the climate and biodiversity crises.

Sign the joint declaration of our collective commitment to these issues and their solutions.

'Many small people, in small places, doing small things can change the world.'
Eduardo Galeano



The following text is the proposed joint statement of the international geographical societies on the climate and biodiversity emergencies in advance of the forthcoming UN conferences. To sign the declaration, please contact Aran O'Carroll at the Royal Canadian Geographical Society by no later than Friday 24th September 2021.

Geographers have unique opportunities and responsibilities in the face of the global biodiversity and climate crises. Geography is a discipline that is uniquely located at the intersection of the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities. This equips geographers to be adept systems-thinkers and interdisciplinarians. It is furthermore an applied knowledge, focused above all on the state of our planet and our relationships with it. All of this makes the learning, teaching, and practice of geography centrally relevant to the closely-linked challenges of the global climate and biodiversity crises.

Geographers can do much more than present an analysis of these challenges. They also have a vantage point from which they can point to the kinds of thought and action that can deliver a better tomorrow for every person on Earth.

This coming October and November will see some of the most consequential weeks in terms of humanity's collective relationship with planet Earth. In October, in Kunming, China, the world's governments will come together to confront the continuing dramatic loss of species and their habitats—the biodiversity crisis—compounded as it is by the accumulating impacts of climate change. It is hoped that the meeting will set ambitious new targets for the global conservation of nature out to 2030.

Around the same time, in Milan, Italy and then, for two weeks in November, in Glasgow, Scotland, governments will reconvene to confront the existential challenge of climate change. It is widely hoped and expected that the meeting will set enhanced and more urgent reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions out to 2030, as well as mandating a critical role for nature in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Geographers, whether as students, researchers, educators, writers, explorers, practitioners in business or policy, or as engaged and curious travellers, encourage our leaders to make ambitious commitments to place the protection of nature and a liveable climate at the centre of the world's economics and politics at this critical juncture.

Accordingly, we pledge that our institutions will redouble our efforts to apply the unique attributes that are the hallmark of the learning, teaching, and practice of geography to the global environmental challenges that have drawn together the world's governments to these vital meetings this year. We commit to doing all that we can to apply geography's potent capabilities to the task of making the coming decade one of hope and of positive action.

List of participating societies

Institute of Australian Geographers
 Brazilian Biogeography Association - Associação Brasileira de Biogeografia*
 Bulgarian Geographical Committee**
 Canadian Geographic
 Royal Canadian Geographical Society
 Geographical Society of China - 中国地理学会
 IGU National Committee, China-Macau
 Geography and Education Research Association of Macau - 澳門地理暨教育研究會
 IGU National Committee, Colombia
 EuroGeo
 IGU National Committee, France
 Association for Geography at German-speaking Universities and Research Institutions - Verband für
 Geographie an deutschsprachigen Hochschulen und Forschungseinrichtungen
 Geographical Society of Ireland - An Cumann Tíreolaíochta na hÉireann
 International Geographical Union
 Israeli Geographical Association - האגודה הגאוגרפית הישראלית
 Italian Geographical Society - Società Geografica Italiana
 IGU National Committee, Namibia
 Mexican Society of Geography and Statistics - Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*
 Norwegian Geographical Society - Norske Geografiske Selskab
 Philippine Geographical Society
 IGU National Committee, the Philippines
 Portuguese Geographical Association - Associação Portuguesa de Geógrafos
 Russian Geographical Society - Русское географическое общество
 Royal Scottish Geographical Society
 Society of South African Geographers
 Spanish Association of Geography - Asociación Española de Geografía
 IGU National Committee, Spain
 Turkish Geographical Society - Türk Coğrafya Kurumu
 Uganda Geographical Association
 IGU National Committee, Uganda
 Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (UK)
 Geographical Association (UK)
 American Geographical Society (USA)*

*Registered but unable to attend.

**Representing the Bulgarian Geographical Society, the Association of Professional Geographers and Regionalists, the National Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy, and Geography at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia University, South-West University, the University of Veliko Tarnovo, and Shuman University.

Summary of current activities around climate, biodiversity, and the SDGs

Bulgarian Geographical Committee

Most projects in Bulgaria are related to adaptation to protect communities and/or natural habitats from the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. These include:

- MAIA (Mapping and Assessment for Integrated Ecosystem Accounting), which aims to promote the mainstreaming of natural capital accounting in EU Member States and Norway
- ESMERALDA (Enhancing Ecosystem Services Mapping for Policy and Decision-Making), which aims to deliver a flexible methodology for pan-European and regional assessments
- MAES (Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services), which puts a focus on climate regulation through mapping carbon storage and sequestration

Geographical Society of China

The Geographical Society of China was involved in the launch of the central government's *Outline for Implementing SDGs with an Innovation-Driven Approach*, incorporated into National Five-Year Plan in 2016. Since then, Chinese geographers and ecologists have also been involved in setting criteria and running field investigations in candidate provinces and cities chosen as 'demonstration zones' for the SDGs, including:

- Shenzhen: integrated social governance of a rapidly expanding metropolis (est. 2018)
- Guilin: sustainable use of landscape resources (est. 2018)
- Taiyuan: transformation of a coal-resource-based city (est. 2018)
- Lincang: sustainable development of ethnic region with rich biodiversity (est. 2019)
- Chengdu: headwater source preservation in a metropolitan region (est. 2019)
- Chenzhou: urban water pollution control for enhanced wellbeing (est. 2019)

International Geographical Union, Colombia

The Colombian IGU National Committee emphasised basic education around the importance of the natural environment to human societies as an urgent priority in order to tackle the specific and serious threats to climate and biodiversity in Colombia, which is considered highly vulnerable in spite of its low emissions. The major concerns of its researchers and educators are:

- Rapid deforestation and biodiversity loss
- Need for adaptation strategies that contribute to achievement of SDGs
- Potential of nature-based solutions to address impacts/improve lives
- Need for more climate change policy enforcement
- Need for targeted education of a majority urban population (70%)

Geographical Society of Ireland

Ahead of the gathering, the Geographical Society of Ireland took the opportunity to perform an informal audit of the response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies in university geography departments, and found this to be an instructive and worthwhile process.

It found that while relatively few departments have made formal statements on these issues, many have been highly successful in teaching and securing research funding around these topics. Notably:

- Trinity College Dublin have received funding to work on sustainable consumption/production.
- National University of Ireland, Galway is a leading in affordable, reliable, sustainable energy.
- University College Dublin is leading on sustainable cities and communities.
- The Irish Climate Analysis and Research UnitS (ICARUS) at Maynooth University is leading in integrated climate-system research, solutions, data, and advice to the scientific community, policymakers, and wider society.

The society also noted a strong desire to undertake more work related to spatial (in)justice of the low-carbon transition and how just transitions can be developed using place-based approaches.

International Geographical Union

Most of the IGU's 43 commissions and 3 task forces have projects relating to climate change and the SDGs. An overview of the most notable can be seen below.

IGU Commission on African Studies: International Conference on Geographical Science for Resilient Communities, Ecosystems, and Livelihoods under Global Environmental Change (Uganda)

IGU Commission on Biogeography: Conference on Agriculture, Food, Water, Biodiversity, and Health in a Changing Climate (India), Workshop on Snow Cover Dynamics and Glacier Fluctuations in Himalaya, Winter School on Modelling Challenges for Mountain Ecosystems, Volume on Mountain Landscapes in Transition: Effects of Land Use and Climate Change

IGU Commission on Coastal Systems: Sessions at the European Geophysical Union annual meetings, Workshop on Coastal Hazards (South Africa), Conference on Coastal Transitions (USA)

IGU Commission on Cold and High-Altitude Regions: Attendance at the Arctic Circle 2019 Conference

IGU Commission on Dynamics of Economic Spaces: Conference on Coastal Transitions (USA)

IGU Commission on Environment Evolution: Fifth International Conference and Young Scientist School on Ecosystem Dynamics in the Holocene

IGU Commission on Geographical Education: Symposium on Future Teachers for the Planet: Building Powerful Knowledge for Better Education for Sustainable Development in Teacher Training

IGU Commission on Geography for Future Earth: Third International Workshop on the Human-Earth System Dynamics and Modelling, Geography and Sustainability Workshop and Journal

IGU Commission on Global Understanding: Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences for Sustainability

IGU Commission on Hazards and Risk: Webinar on Innovations in Disaster Risk Reduction

IGU Commission on the Mediterranean Basin: Conference on Mediterranean in Transition: Preserving the Past, Preparing for the Future

IGU Commission on Geography of Tourism, Leisure, and Global Change: Panel Session on Tourism Geographies: Exemplifying Interdisciplinary Research in Geography as part of the IGU India International Conference on Global to Local Sustainability & Earth Future

Israeli Geographical Association

The Israeli Geographical Association has researchers working on historical trends, modelling future scenarios, impacts, mitigation, adaptation, and outreach. It is particularly concerned with regional impacts and challenges of climate change, including:

- High vulnerability of East Mediterranean to rising temperatures, the growing water deficit
- Longer and warmer summers, more severe heatwaves
- Rapidly growing population and investment in physical infrastructure and CO2 impacts
- Growing water deficit, ecosystems degradation, and risk of forest fires
- Widespread use of irrigation and desalination technologies for most of the country's water use

Italian Geographical Society

The Italian Geographical Society is actively involved in a range of activities around environmental education, sustainability, and the organisation of relevant training in collaboration with institutions, associations, schools, and universities.

These include the annual World Earth Day photo contest, a webinar on 'Economy, Health, Environment, or vice versa? Innovation and Renewables for Health of the Planet and Humanity' attended by Italian Minister of the Environment, Land, and Sea Protection, a special session for Environmental Geography students at Sapienza University of Rome, as well as initiatives for the UNESCO Italian National Commission's Sustainability Education Week CNESA2030.

The society also participates in the activities of ASVIS (Alliance for Sustainable Development), the biggest network of civil society organisations in Italy working on the SDGs.

Some notable activities around research include its dedication of the 2020 Annual Report and several meetings on the energy transition, including one on 'The Geography of the Climate and the Emissions Reductions Commitments' which was supported by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the European Parliament in Italy, and representatives of the European Commission amongst others.

Norwegian Geographical Society

The Norwegian Geographical Society's projects around climate change have been centred on public, professional, and civic engagement with the issue and its solutions. It has hosted a number of talks, meetings, and webinars around the subject open to its members, including around the work of the IPCC, Oslo as a smart city, and how geographers can contribute.

Philippine Geographical Society

The Philippine Geographical Society has researchers working on a wide range of projects around the climate crisis and the SDGs, demonstrating the many different and valuable ways of practising geography—from GIS to participatory approaches. Examples include:

- Counter-mapping for urban social justice around community experiences of dispossession
- Innovation for earthquake resilience and response in the Philippines
- Strengthening partnerships for disaster risk reduction and management
- Child-centred participatory approach and GIS for disaster risk reduction

It has also launched an online lecture series, touching on community resilience, participatory mapping, future lives of migrants, LGBT spaces and experiences, disaster risk reduction, and more.

Portuguese Geographical Association

The Portuguese Geographical Association is currently working on a number of projects to:

- introduce climate adaptation and sustainability principles to urban planning, policy, and projects
- reduce pressure on forest resources to prevent negative impacts on biodiversity
- raise public awareness of, attention to, and participation in mitigating climate risks
- assess the impacts of climate change on plant species in Africa and the Macaronesian Islands

Several of its projects also relate to the SDGs, notably its work around urban planning, local communities, climate literacy, sustainable forestry, as well as efforts to reduce the impacts of intensive farming on water, soil, and biodiversity.

Russian Geographical Society

The Russian Geographical Society has a long history of supporting geographical research and fieldwork around climate change. It is particularly notable for its contributions to research in the Arctic and to our understanding of climate change in connection with geopolitical issues.

Its Environmental Commission, established in 1912, continues to emphasise environmental protection as one of the main priorities of the society. Its primary responsibilities include:

- Analysis of the current natural-environmental network of Russia
- Development of new nature reserves
- Recovery of former protected areas
- Restoration of current protected areas
- Development of high-priority projects to protect rare species in the country

Royal Scottish Geographical Society

The RSGS has strong connections with a wide network of businesses and civil society organisations united in their desire to further action on climate change at all levels of society. Its flagship projects are centred on education, policy influencing, and public engagement, including:

- A suite of online Climate Solutions courses for professionals, designed to promote climate understanding at the senior management level where it is most urgently needed, and a sister MOOC course aimed at students in higher education
- Climate Emergency Summits, a series of facilitated thematic events available to interested organisations, designed to use the collective expertise of participants to highlight positive solutions and examples of good practice to senior Scottish and UK policymakers
- The Five for the Future survey, a mass survey of public opinion which it is hoped will generate a set of common answers or 'People's Protocol' on climate change
- A documentary film for COP26 taking audiences on a journey through the past, present, and future of the climate movement in Scotland
- A special edition of our regular magazines, *The Geographer* and *The Young Geographer*
- A one-off scheme to offer world leaders with a wee 'drop of inspiration' in the form of a net-zero 45%-proof single-malt whisky produced in partnership with Glenfiddich

Uganda Geographical Association

The work of the Uganda Geographical Association is characterised by a highly interdisciplinary approach including geographers and professionals in environmental management, tourism, forestry, urban planning, economics, geology, and more.

Its key activities around climate change and the SDGs include its recent Conference on Geographical Science for Resilient Communities, Ecosystems, and Livelihoods under Global Environmental Change (in partnership with the IGU), a mentorship programme to prepare early-career geographers for future research and fieldwork, and career guidance visits which emphasise geography as essential to the SDGs as well as Uganda's Vision 2040.

Recently, geographers from the association also undertook an expedition to Murchison Falls National Park to explore implications of proposed hydropower development project on ecosystem integrity, a report on which was published to a range of stakeholders.

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

The new RGS-IBG strategy places climate and sustainability at the heart of its mission to advance geographical science and its application to global challenges, including commitments to reduce its own environmental impact, report on its progress, and encourage others to do likewise.

This includes the 'House Project' to improve efficiency, reduce waste, and support green travel to its historic HQ building, which already uses renewable energy for 100% of its electricity supply. The society also has its own Responsible Investment Policy and monitors the sustainability performance of its suppliers and corporate benefactors.

Projects for education include a Carbon Calculator for schools, CPD and resources around climate change for teachers, and a #beclimatesmart Twitter campaign.

Projects in research and higher education include the WIRES Climate Change journal, support for specialist research/professional working groups (e.g IMarEst, Env. Policy Forum), and planned roundtable events for professionals facilitating discussion of the consequences of COP26 for professional geographers.

Projects for public engagement include a partnership with Radio 4's 39 Ways to Save the Planet series, climate/sustainability-related talks at Monday Night Lectures and Regional Group events, a planned COP26 special edition of Geographical Magazine, and a planned public event after COP26.

Geographical Association (UK)

The Geographical Association promotes environmental understanding, action, and careers through its core activities of supporting geography teaching and learning. It is currently producing a range of digital, print, and multimedia resources to help teachers and students to understand and approach climate change, and is planning CPD for teachers on thinking critically through these issues.

The Royal Scottish Geographical Society would like to give warmest thanks to the International Geographical Union and the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) for their enthusiastic support in organising this event.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Mark the significance of this next decade.

2 Spread a message of urgency and hope.

3 Harness our networks.

4 Develop and promote a more regional focus.

5 Promote widespread climate understanding.

6 Champion solutions to climate change.

7 Address current and historic inequalities.

8 Share ideas for influencing policy.

9 Celebrate our interdisciplinarity.

10 Connect human and physical geography.

11 Humanise the issues.

12 Embrace traditional knowledge.

13 Cultivate a grassroots approach.

14 Nurture citizen science.

15 Encourage active citizenship.

16 Sign the joint declaration.