# Part I

## Framings

# 1

# The framing of climate change: why it matters

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## Introduction

Climate change is now considered by many to be the most complex and serious environmental issue that human societies have ever faced. The science is unequivocal – human activities are influencing the climate system, contributing to increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, the widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising average global sea levels (IPCC, 2007). Well-known economists have shown that there are instrumental reasons to immediately minimise $CO_2$ emissions (Stern, 2007), and these arguments are underscored by global assessments of the potential human impacts (UNDP, 2007/2008; Global Humanitarian Forum, 2009). Some voices argue that climate change is a cultural phenomenon that is reshaping understandings of humanity's place on Earth (Hulme, 2009), while others warn that '[w]e do not seem to have the slightest understanding of the seriousness of our plight' (Lovelock, 2009: 4). Al Gore's famous statement that 'the truth about the climate crisis is an inconvenient one that means we are going to have to change the way we live our lives' (2006: 286) captures the essence of the climate change challenge. The problem is that we have very little idea about what exactly needs to be changed and why.

Although it has taken the global community and the general public many years to acknowledge the inconvenient truth pointed to by Gore, the urgency of responding to the climate crisis is becoming increasingly evident. This has led to a wide range of proposed responses, ranging from a 'one degree war' plan, to strategies to 'overshoot, adapt and recover' (Cambridge Programme for Sustainability Leadership, 2009; Parry *et al*., 2009). Yet, perhaps it is the time to acknowledge that Gore's inconvenient truth is not the whole truth. A set of uncomfortable truths that have not yet been widely acknowledged is related to questions that have not yet been widely asked or answered. These questions include: What types of meaningful changes and alternative futures should be envisioned and why? How is this process going to happen? What types of risks are bearable, and by whom? How can transformations

*Climate Change, Ethics and Human Security*, eds. Karen O'Brien, Asunción Lera St.Clair and Berit Kristoffersen. Published by Cambridge University Press. 

be managed to minimise injustices and conflicts? And most importantly, who is the 'we' that is really going to have to change?

The answers to these questions, which are only starting to emerge, make it clear that climate change is not simply an environmental issue that can be managed through behavioural changes, sectoral interventions or new regulations. It is not a problem that can be addressed single-handedly by environmental ministries, by international institutions and non-governmental organisations or by development aid and adaptation funds. Finally, it is not a problem that can be *solved* by ecological modernisation, ecosystem stewardship or sustainable development. It is, instead, a problem that can only be *resolved* by focusing on climate change as an issue of human security, which includes a thorough investigation of what it means for humans to be 'secure'. This demands, first and foremost, a change in the way that we think about change. It requires a shift away from the dominant framing that focuses on responding to change through a utilitarian, problem-solving approach or cost–benefit analyses, and towards a framing that recognises and prioritises the capacity of individuals and communities to both respond to and create change, including envisioning and pursuing alternative futures.

In this book, we explore some less familiar, yet important questions related to climate change, including issues of framings, equity, ethics and reflexivity. Questioning the framing of climate change matters. It matters because dominant perspectives do not confront fundamental aspects of the problem and may lead to regretful (and deadly) actions or inaction. Indeed, the current discursive orientation on climate change focuses disproportionately on regulations, policies and behavioural changes, which alone are unlikely to address or influence the underlying factors that threaten the capacity of individuals and communities to respond to threats to their social, human and environmental rights. Many of the so-called 'solutions' to climate change are partial responses to the symptoms; they fail to address the underlying and structural conditions necessary for resolving the problem, i.e. for creating transformational change. As the contributions to this volume show, shifting the dominant framing of climate change towards a focus on human security raises questions of ethics, values, justice and responsibility.

In the last decade, human security has emerged as both a concept and a discourse that complements the closely related notions of human development and human rights (Gasper, 2005; and Chapter 2). Human security has been defined in very general terms as freedom from want and freedom from fear, and more specifically as having the ability to respond to critical and pervasive threats (UNDP, 1994; GECHS, 1999; Commission on Human Security, 2003). It is a concept that is centred on people and their social relations, rather than on national and state security needs (see Barnett, 2001b; Dalby, 2002, 2009). Human security addresses the wellbeing of individuals from multiple and interrelated perspectives: income

security, food security, health security, environmental security, community/identity security and security of political freedoms. It is inherently an integrative and relational concept that draws attention to present and emerging vulnerability that is generated through dynamic social, political, economic, institutional, cultural and technological conditions and their historical legacies.

The discourse on human security invokes normative claims that 'what matters is the content of individuals' lives, including a reasonable degree of stability' (Gasper, 2005: 228). The concept of human security, broadly understood and closely interrelated to norms, values, rights and entitlements, draws attention to notions of empowerment, protection and responsibilities. In other words, human security is about the protection and fulfilment of people's vital freedoms and the development of capabilities to create satisfying lives for all people (Sen, 1999; Commission on Human Security, 2003). It also directs attention to the role of values, beliefs and world views, which are fundamental to both understanding and addressing threats and opportunities linked to climate change (Chapter 12). It takes as a point of departure the intrinsic value of the dignity of all human beings in a holistic way that includes their dependency and their relations with the natural environment, and it holds that the basic needs of any individual are neither to be sacrificed nor discounted (see Caney, Chapter 7). At the same time, it is a broad concept that embraces ideas that most cultures can relate to, albeit through different interpretations. Although diverse actors and users may interpret the concept of human security in different ways, it nonetheless permits a joint understanding and guidance for action (St.Clair, 2006b). As a normative discourse, human security offers a basis for fair decision making (Adger and Nelson, Chapter 5). It raises issues that are often swept aside in international scientific and policy debates about climate change, and forces a rethinking of political systems and even political theory, which may be outdated and unable to respond, and thus in need of reformulation (see Gardiner, Chapter 8; Hayward and O'Brien, Chapter 11).

In this introductory chapter, we first consider how the framing of an issue defines the scope for debates and actions. We then discuss the dominant framing of climate change, which is based on the conceptualisation of humans as related to (or coupled to) the environment, yet nonetheless separate and distinct. We consider the limits to this approach, particularly how this framing excludes key perspectives related to equity, ethics and reflexivity. The 'environmental' discourse pays little attention to people's positionality, or their values, beliefs and world views, and it ignores the importance of equity and global solidarity in both adaptation and mitigation. We next present the concept of human security as an alternative way of framing the challenges of climate change. Returning to the themes of equity, ethics and reflexivity, we consider what the emerging normative discourse on human security brings to research, debates and policy. We then present an overview of the key

arguments made by the different contributors to this volume which, taken together, can be seen as an important first step towards building an alternative framework and a new science of climate change.

## Framings of climate change: what are the boundaries?

Framing is a variation of discourse analysis, but also a way to situate knowledge and to interpret and question processes of knowledge formation (Jasanoff and Wynne, 1998; Forsyth, 2003; Jasanoff and Martello, 2004). Taking as a point of departure the question of how a particular issue is framed can unveil, even if only partially, some of the underlying premises, assumptions and baggage carried in all processes of knowledge production. Framing situates these processes as parts of ongoing social relations, and thus sheds light on the ways in which power relations translate into dominant expert views.

The way that a particular issue is framed is of utmost importance because it provides concrete suggestions for action, and serves as a guide for policy making (Forsyth, 2003). All climate change knowledge is increasingly (and dangerously) driven to 'hurried' and highly compromised and politicised policy decisions. As Miller and Edwards (2001: 3–4) rightly argue, contemporary debates about climate science are 'in the long run just as importantly helping to set basic rules of standing and legislation for global environmental decision making.' In the same way that expert knowledge about global poverty co-produces both knowledge and politics, climate change knowledge co-produces a particular politics of poverty and vulnerability reduction (St.Clair, 2006a, 2006b). The relevance of framing is fundamental with a problem such as climate change, which is being addressed through multiple and interacting scales of governance (Young *et al.*, 2008). A focus on framing permits the identification of disconnects, incongruities and competing views on the issue from different perspectives (e.g. local versus global). As Martello and Jasanoff (2004: 22) note, '[w]hen national-level actors confront transnational problems such as climate change, they often discover incongruities between globally constructed framings of environmental phenomena and their own histories, political cultures, and priorities.'

Highly politicised, complex and ill-structured global problems, plagued with uncertain outcomes, are precisely those that call for a careful questioning of framings. In this volume, we use the notion of framing to challenge the views offered by what can be considered the dominant 'environmental' discourse, unveiling some of its limitations, particularly in the ways that it drives actions and policy making in specific directions, bypassing alternative pathways. We consider how framing influences the ways that climate change is understood, interrogated and narrated, and how it inhibits the asking of uncomfortable questions that may nonetheless be necessary to ask, in order to understand why climate change really matters.

## Climate change as a separate box

Climate change is considered to be a serious *environmental* problem. Environment, in this sense, is defined as 'the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival.'[1] Within the global change research community, the atmosphere, oceans, ice, land, water, vegetation and species of all types are considered to be key components of the global environment, or Earth System. Humans are also considered to be an important part of this system, as they both drive and are impacted by environmental change (Steffen *et al*., 2004). Nonetheless, humans are conceptualised as separate from the environment, leading to what is referred to as 'society–nature dualism' (Castree, 2005). This dichotomised or dualistic understanding and interpretation of the relationship between humans and nature underpins many debates about the causes and consequences of climate change (see Castree, 2005; Hulme, 2009). On the one hand, this dualistic understanding of nature–society relationships gives rise to a climate system that is separate and external to human activities, which may help to explain why some people deny that climate change is a problem, or attribute observed change to natural or supernatural forces outside of human control. On the other hand, this understanding may promote a strong sense of control, and a view that human influences on the climate system can be managed through the right regulations and interventions. As Adger *et al*. (2006) argue, this managerial discourse dominates the climate change debate, pointing to institutional and policy failure as the ultimate cause of the problem, and technocratic interventions as the solution. Such orthodox approaches to environmental problems, Forsyth (2003) argues, fail to acknowledge the institutional basis, including language and culture, through which environmental problems are experienced.

More recently, a new scientific paradigm has tried to capture the non-dual aspects of nature–society relationships. Research on coupled social–ecological systems recognises that humans and nature are interconnected and interdependent, interacting in complex, non-linear systems (Gunderson and Holling, 2002). Much of this thinking has come from the work on ecological resilience, which challenges the 'stable equilibrium' view of ecology and considers non-linear dynamics, thresholds, uncertainty and surprise, as well as the interplay of periods of gradual and rapid change and its dynamics over different temporal and spatial scales (Folke, 2006). From this perspective, climate change represents one more factor demonstrating how human activities are altering ecosystems and ecosystem services, which in turn have implications for human wellbeing (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005).

[1] Merriam-Webster Dictionary: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/environment

While the metaphor of coupled social–ecological systems attempts to dissolve the dichotomy, it nonetheless retains the image of society and ecology as separate but interacting systems. As Castree (2005: 224) states, 'the society–nature dualism blinds us to the need for a new vocabulary to describe the world we inhabit.' The vocabulary to describe this world may readily be found in indigenous cultures and Eastern philosophies, or in deep ecology, ecosophy and more holistic world views (see, for example, Devall and Sessions, 1985; Naess and Rothenberg, 1993; Harding, 2006; Berkes, 2008; Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman, 2009). These perspectives, however, are invisible within the dominant discourse on climate change.

Although the rational scientific knowledge that underlies the dominant framing of climate change has offered important insights on the impacts of climate change and has demonstrated that the changes facing society are anything but trivial, it does little to explain how individuals and communities can best respond to threats to their environmental, social and human rights, and what climate change means for human security. In fact, the environmental discourse in many ways excludes much more than it explains when it comes to understanding the human dimensions of climate change. Below, we consider how it hides important questions related to the three themes discussed in this book: equity, ethics and reflexivity.

### *Equity*

An environmental framing of climate change has promoted a limited understanding of the equity dimensions of climate change. To the extent that it does draw attention to these issues, it is mostly in terms of a North–South divide, particularly in relation to climate change mitigation, development and sustainability. Considerable attention has been given to the uneven relationship between those responsible for emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and those who are most likely to be affected by it (Müller, 2002; Roberts and Parks, 2006). For example, the United States emits a disproportionately large proportion of carbon dioxide, in comparison to small islands in the Pacific, which are likely to disappear if sea level rises in the next centuries (Barnett, 2001a). Less attention has been paid to equity issues within national boundaries, or those that manifest at diverse scales and units of analysis (O'Brien and Leichenko, 2006). These include many of the inequities related to race, gender, caste, ethnicity and class. The inequities that are associated with climate change are closely linked to existing inequities, and they cannot be divorced from the very processes that create these in the first place. The equity dimensions of climate change are not limited to questions of historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, but encompass a much broader range of questions about the underlying and often inequitable factors that contribute to vulnerability.

Current North–South relations treat underdevelopment and poverty as issues separated from the histories of development that advanced economies have pursued or their current prioritised development paths. These paths have reinforced inequality both within and among many countries (UN, 2005). Climate change responses have tended to follow this pattern. Over the past years, there has been a rapid reorganisation of development aid bureaucracies as they have sought to include and mainstream climate change into their technical and expert work in relation to the global South (Klein *et al*., 2007). Adaptation funds are being sought to supplement existing development funds, marking new efforts to 'climate-proof' development. Most of these efforts are reinventing or reinforcing decades-old development and poverty reduction strategies that have framed these issues as managerial matters, mainly dealt with and defined by outside experts, and driven by technocratic and economist perspectives. Poverty and development have been framed outside social relations, ignorant of the real problems of poor people and their positionality (Lawson and St.Clair, 2009).

Although much progress has been made in terms of learning how to enable and promote good development, aid continues to be driven by charitable, moralistic and top-down expert knowledge that frames poverty as separate from power and social relations, or as the geographically self-contained problems of poor countries. Dominant framings have constructed the issues as problems with an economic fix, while, at the same time, there has not been a substantial commitment on the side of wealthy countries to invest the needed funds (St.Clair, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; McNeill and St.Clair, 2009). Not surprisingly, global commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals are both insufficient and unlikely to be met, and eliminating severe poverty remains one of the biggest moral challenges of our time (Pogge, 2004).

## *Ethics*

As in debates about poverty reduction, many very important ethical aspects of climate change are treated as externalities in contemporary debates about environmental change. This is particularly true in relation to ethical questions about justice and fairness in climate change (see Adger *et al*., 2006). It is not possible to quantitatively 'measure' the ethical impacts that climate change is posing for vulnerable individuals and groups. Nor is it possible to establish a fair price on the 'value' of future generations. Such calculations are perversions of a particular type of expert knowledge, emphasised and driven by political actors who have difficulty coping with the complexity of the issue in relation to the short-term demands of public service and the desire for concrete fixes and measurable results.

The challenges of climate change pose important ethical and moral questions to a global community that has substantial scientific knowledge about the trends and

consequences of climate change, including projections of ecosystem changes, increased morbidity and death, massive displacements due to sea-level rise, and other impacts (see Parry *et al*., 2007). Yet many members of this global community refuse, resist or prevent politically challenging decisions and actions from being taken to avoid dangerous climate change.

Current attitudes of scientists regarding possibilities for averting such change are pessimistic: increasingly, society is being told to prepare to adapt to temperature changes of 4°C or more over the next 100 years (Parry *et al*., 2009). Visions of a planet in crisis, unable to sustain more than one billion people by the end of this century, are becoming common features in the news (see Lovelock, 2009). Notably absent is a vision of a more just and sustainable world built on an economy that is not based on carbon, where values associated with universalism and benevolence are prioritised. The ethical implications of these two contrasting visions are enormous, and key questions that are excluded by an environmental framing include: 'Whose vision is being pursued by society and why?' and more importantly, 'Whose values count?'

### *Reflexivity*

It is worth questioning whether the framing of climate change as an environmental issue can, in fact, lead to the changes necessary to avoid dangerous climate change. Interpreting climate change as an environmental issue, where the 'environment' is separate from humans, prevents the self-reflection necessary to initiate large-scale transformations. In development psychology, changes in perspectives or consciousness arise when 'subject' becomes 'object' – in other words, when it becomes possible to look objectively at an event or process and reflect on it from a new and broader perspective, without being enmeshed in subjectivity (Kegan, 1994).

While scientific rationalism has mastered the objective study of the environment, many scientists themselves remain trapped in their own subjectivity, constrained by a modern world view that sees humans as separate from the environment. This limits reflexivity to the objective world of the Earth System, which includes objective analyses of the impacts of human activities on that system, as well as objective assessments of the consequences for human society. The perspective of coupled social–ecological systems likewise enables an objective analysis on the systemic interactions between society and nature, but nonetheless seldom includes an analysis of subjective and intersubjective dimensions of these systems. Neither perspectives allow for objective reflexivity on a 'bigger picture' based on non-dual human–environment relationships. Post-modern world views, as well as Beck's 'reflexive modernisation', allow for reflections on the human–environment dichotomy, including critiques on the social construction of nature, and of the wider systems

and power arrangements that create problematic nature–society relationships in the first place (Beck *et al*., 1994; Castree, 2005).

The dominant framing of climate change holds it in a separate box, as an issue that can be addressed through environmental policies and by changing individual behaviours (Maniates, 2002). This 'box' hides the diversity of motivations and interests that favour keeping things as they are, allowing for and even promoting changes in the environment in order to gain or maintain power, dominance, economic growth, familiar consumption patterns and so on. It also hides implicit assumptions and interests behind some of the rapidly emerging adaptation policies that are being propounded by governments and institutions at all scales. These implicit assumptions were perhaps best articulated by Paolo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970: 76, emphasis added):

> The educated individual is the *adapted* person, because she or he is better 'fit' for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquillity rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it. The more completely the majority *adapt* to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe.

In other words, the more completely people adapt to climate change, the more easily humans can continue to change the climate. If people do not identify what climate change means for the things that they value, reflect on how it influences or interacts with their beliefs and world views, and critically question and contest the drivers of climate change itself, then dangerous climate change is likely to be accepted as a given. With climate change accepted as a given, the solution will likely be quick fixes that permit development to proceed as usual, along with increased rates of greenhouse gas emissions.

History shows that narrow and unreflexive approaches have failed to resolve other issues, including the abolition of severe poverty. The framing of climate change as an environmental problem prevents the capacity to reflect on centuries long assumptions about development, progress and the good life. As has been the case for decades with the management of poverty and underdevelopment, managing climate change is becoming a technocratic issue; a question that can be solved with the appropriate 'fix'. In short, this dominant framing not only prevents ethical reflection, it displaces responsibility.

## Opening the box: climate change as an issue of human security

There is no denying that climate change is a serious environmental issue. Yet treating the environment as a reified, independent category without questioning the ways that past and present social processes and power influence people's livelihoods and life