

# A response to climate change ... a youth perspective

**Katie Riley**

At the start of 2019, the UK youth climate movement leapt into the media spotlight, with school strikes inspired by the Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg.

As a 16-year-old I found myself: organising, lobbying and constantly networking. Now, at 18, I am writing a book and exploring the ways the climate movement impacted on youth in other countries, especially in places where it is difficult or close to impossible to strike or protest.

I began organising and lobbying in February 2019, after attending the first youth-led strike in Birmingham. My days soon after were spent raising awareness on social media, e-mailing local MPs and on Zoom, organising locally and nationally. A network formed over the weeks, linking other areas in the UK doing the same as us.

We asked Katie to share something of her experience to set the scene for this issue of Elephant Times



Katie Riley one of the organisers of the Birmingham Climate Change Strike

This resulted in the 'UK Student Climate Network' (UKSCN), which acted as a forum of local groups and allowed us to plan national strikes.

I was also asked to visit the European Parliament in October 2019, which allowed me to see how legislation was being formed in the EU.



From IAM BHAM: Hundreds of climate strike protesters in Birmingham's Victoria Square

However I must admit that when I began my activism, I did not know much about climate change itself.

My initial concern was the result of my Year 9 geography lessons about melting ice and polar bears. However, **I found the more you learn, the more you want to help.** In between the late Zoom calls and organising, **I began researching more.**

As someone in the UK, I rarely see the effects of climate change, but I learnt that it is those in the Global South who are being disproportionately affected by climate change and who are experiencing the true dangers of climate change. We in the UK may not see the more obvious effects of climate change for some years to come.

The more I learnt about this, the more I wanted to help. Although the strikes were gaining the public's interest, as a result of Covid, they began to diffuse away. This led me to start the project which is now becoming a book.





The **Memoir Project** is, hopefully, an inspiring insight into the behind-the-scenes world of global climate activism, exploring the stories, successes and hardships of young people fighting for climate justice. Using their own words it contains anecdotes, advice and inspiration from more than 15 young climate activists from 11 different countries, covering a range of examples of the impact and responses to the climate crisis from the perspective of youth.

Topics covered include a behind-the-scenes look at the makings of a climate activist and the inner workings of the famous climate movement, as well as addressing social issues such as intersectionality, racism and climate anxiety.

The book is written in the form of first-person accounts with supporting images and graphics to allow for deeply personal and immersive insights. What I have learnt from this project is that in the UK, we are very lucky to have some form of a democratic process. The young people who we talked to came from countries where it was almost illegal to protest or where the issue of climate change wasn't even heard of.

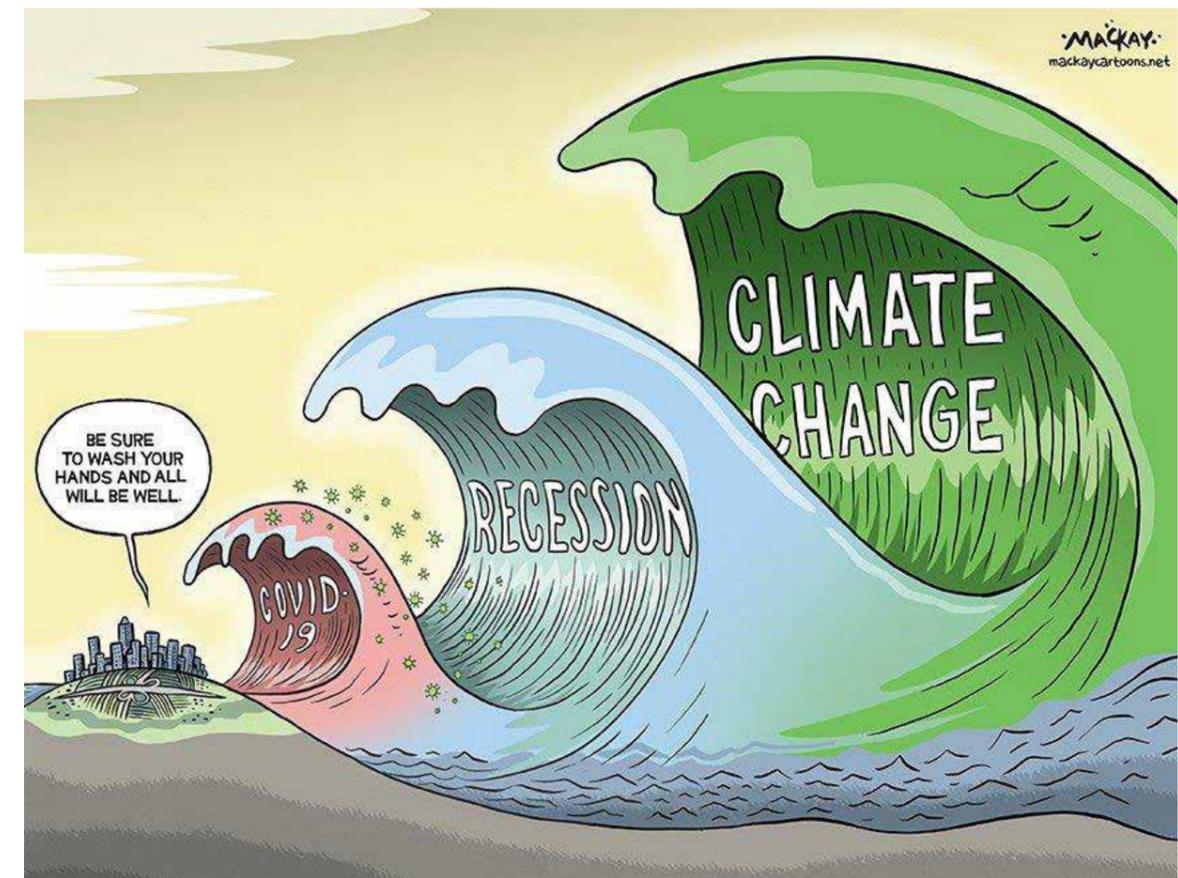
We discovered that we were lucky we did not experience the same issues as those in countries such as Russia or Uganda. They don't have the same resources that we have when protesting or educating. For example, the Russian girl who experiences the frequent restraints that her government enforces; it is almost illegal to protest and the issue of climate change is barely talked about due to media censorship.

Spanning the highs of successful strikes, inspiring actions, breakthroughs in policy, friendship and empowerment to the lows of climate disasters, inequality, prejudice and disappointment, The **Memoir Project** takes readers on an emotional and turbulent journey through the lives of the young people who are making history and writing the future.

In the short time that I have been working in the climate justice movement, **I have learnt that education is incredibly powerful when it comes to raising awareness. It develops an understanding of the impact that climate disasters create and also generates concern for the world around us.**

**However, it is important that the issues discussed aren't limited to ice caps melting and polar bears, but include those most vulnerable in the Global South and the impact that climate change is having today.**

Instead of distancing ourselves from the topic, it is imperative to attack the issues head-on and engage with others ... to educate about the issues that all of us in the world are facing.



With thanks to cartoonist: Graeme MacKay

<https://mackaycartoons.net>

