

RBS or Copenhagen

Forum '09

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Summary

In the lead-up to the Copenhagen climate talks in December this year, it was decided that a decision was needed to be made on the validity and motivation of the network to continue the RBS-NatWest campaign.

A group of around 20 students from across the network came together at the Forum to discuss the issue and find ways to strengthen scenarios. The two scenarios were set out to the group, offering an insight into the strategies, objectives and tactics possible under each. This was followed by small group discussions on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of each. Each small group looked at the SWOT for each scenario.

The group then split in two to look at one scenario each. They held a short discussion on each, looking at the SWOTs already produced. The weakest of the weaknesses were then selected to be strengthened by the group. This strengthening provided a number of possible amendments which were then debated by the during a final open discussion.

During this open discussion, the amendments were discussed as well as individuals giving their own views on both scenarios. After 20 minutes, the group voted on which scenario they preferred to take forward during 09/10.

The group decided by a huge majority that the network would continue with the RBS-NatWest campaign, but the outcome of research to be conducted this summer would not change RBS-NatWest as the target of the campaign and that the unique angle of financing climate change would be our opportunity to feed in to the Copenhagen talks.

Aims of the session

To decide on P&P's climate campaign priorities for autumn 2009. Should P&P campaign for a global climate deal at Copenhagen, or should we launch a boycott of RBS-NatWest to increase the pressure for climate friendly investments?

Overview of the session

The session was divided into the following parts:

- Introduction to the two scenarios (
- Small group SWOT analysis of scenarios
- Discussions and brainstorming of ways to strengthen scenarios
- Proposals to strengthen scenarios
- Open discussion scenarios and proposals
- Vote

The notes below represent the SWOT analysis made by each small group, each looking at

one scenario at a time.

RBS option

Group 1

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Existing campaign – lots of momentum * Unique to P&P * Links people to their personal impact on climate change through actions such as banking * Generated highest profile actions in P&P network * The network likes this target * Clear and specific demands 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What if RBS improves and another bank takes the lead in embedded emissions? * Targeting another bank might lose the campaign credibility, money, time and momentum * Media spot light on Copenhagen (also a possible opportunity)
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Finance and environment focus * Getting better regulation of finance industry * Draw on the power of student boycotts of the past – v. motivational * Grab the initiative in CC campaigning in Sept/Oct ahead of Copenhagen with RBS rapidly changing economic context (also a possible threat) * Keeps it current and relevant * Media spot light on Copenhagen (also a possible weakness) but probably not until November 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Can we mobilise a boycott? With only 100 action cards signed and lots of students bound in by overdrafts * If RBS have improved we lose the initiative on Copenhagen and DDD – the worst of both worlds * By not focusing on Copenhagen we miss out on the biggest climate action of 2009 * Rapidly changing economic context (also potential opportunity) - can we respond quickly enough

Group 2

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * RBS in the public eye and opinion is on our side * Built momentum and resources * Unique P&P campaign * Important to follow through on our campaign threats 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Financial crisis – the government/public want strong not ethical banks * Boycott – will moving fund to other banks potential just as bad have a actual impact of the crisis * How seriously do RBS take the threat?
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Link with funding Kingsnorth * This links to Copenhagen campaign and could be P&P's unique response to the summit * Focus on UK's need to make transition to low carbon economy in order to be 'world leader' at negotiations * High profile financial crisis – environmental critic missing from media coverage and government action 	<p>Threats</p>

Group 3

<p>Strengths</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Already established campaign which the network has been working hard on * Network prepared for September 2009 boycott * Could create change across the whole sector * Better to continue and follow through with boycott as stopping now may weaken P&P's credibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Might not achieve sector wide change – just one bank RBS * Uncertain times in relation to RBS * No sixth from involvement * Is the boycott the best tactic? More effective to focus on getting them of campus?
<p>Opportunities</p>	<p>Threats</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * RBS now Government-owned - very timely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Public opinion might turn against boycott in financial crisis * Not enough people to mobilise boycott – will postponing it effect this? * Nationalised bank * With Copenhagen groups might have less energy for RBS

Group 4

<p>Strengths</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Established campaign – awareness on campus * Unique target and focus (finance and embedded emissions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Uncertainty: what if RSB is no longer the worst? * Boycott my be better as a threat – but it losses any power if we don't follow through * We miss out on an opportunity of Copenhagen
<p>Opportunities</p>	<p>Threats</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Build a coalition of NGOs to join our campaign * Public ownership makes our case stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Boycott might not mobilise enough people to be effective * People might want to focus on Copenhagen – including organisations we want to build a coalition with

Copenhagen option

Group 1

<p>Strengths</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * At top of global agenda – will help with recruitment and publicity. * Well known by general pop. - easy to explain as campaign issue, easier than DDD. * Linking of some relevant actions on coal and airport expansion – linking local to global 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Not everyone on board with SCC approach * Uncertainty with gov. approach
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Link to work on Kingsnorth, RBS, etc. into why we need this for global deal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Is popular mobilisation a distraction by govt. from other issues? Suspicion of this.

Group 2

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Important * Youth * Governmental approach – important for them to take lead with climate change * Inspiring for members to be part of something wider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What difference can we make in a large movement? * Resources and involvement might be better placed. * Many will be involved anyway BUT then could undermine DDD if distracted by this * Need to focus on people to change not just Govt.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Working as part of big movement * May provide future ops for working together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Getting lost in bigger movement – no unique identity * Letting go of something good * Disappointing outcome - morale and momentum * Looking weak to RBS – not carry through threat * Possible direct massive negative impact if let go of DDD -Tar Sands project

Group 3

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Wide network appeal (6f) * Joining with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Will/can Copenhagen achieve anything? * Can we add anything? * We can go anyway – doesn't need to be major focus until then
Opportunities	Threats

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Could attract new members because high public profile of Copenhagen * Critical event since Kyoto – let's make it good! * Be there to challenge and be critical of process * We can make it more edgy (diverse range of groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Difficulties mobilising for mass actions * Could end up legitimising poor process * Harm DDD
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Group 4

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Has urgency, people can see scale of event. * Matches scale of climate change * Educate students 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Coalition limits our radicalness * Doubt in likelihood of Copenhagen being good * P&P not as effective as other NGOs at lobbying govt * P&P unlikely to affect Copenhagen significantly * We can still go anyway
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * If we're not involved and it's good in end, we look silly! * We could get more people to go than otherwise would 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Legitimise bad deal like MPH/celebs * Damage RBS campaign – could lose it! * Dis-empowering

The notes below represent the proposals to change the scenarios offered by the group. Each scenario was worked on by half the participants.

RBS scenario proposals

1. No switch of focus from RBS until campaign demands are met regardless of outcome of new research Public ownership gives us leverage and unique angle. Use new research to follow through on existing threat.
2. Do not mobilise a boycott if situation has changed and RBS is no longer the worst, target the government instead (increased regulation)
3. Link in to Copenhagen campaign by focusing on importance of UK financial sector switching to low carbon economy necessary to be 'world leader' at negotiations
4. Make campaign relevant to sixth formers – produce accessible info on opening/switching student bank accounts

Copenhagen scenario proposals

1. Incorporate DDD objectives (without boycott) into UK position on Copenhagen Use govt commitments and 70% share of RBS to push for action on RBS [climate camp is campaigning on E.On – we add different perspective]
2. Take unique position based on science – regardless of what is “politically viable” or the coalition’s line. Make it clear that anything else is unacceptable. (push Stop Climate Chaos for this)
3. Recognise benefit of working with other groups and raising public awareness

4. We should be as radical as we feel we need to be (coalition not a restriction to this)
5. Climate justice coalition – we should look to see how we could work in other coalitions.

The following notes come from the open discussion session held before the vote.

Open discussion

- * Lots of groups doing COP (Copenhagen) whereas if P&P boycott others no now ill be leading on this
- * We could use network and publicity at COP to promote boycott/RBS campaign
- * Concern was expressed over the COP proposal – too much? Not specific enough?
- * We will be going anyway – is it the best way to spend our time in lead up?
- * P&P are not a summit-hopping campaign org - not what we do best
- * Is it disrespectful to rest of network to cancel campaign - many really involved in campaign
- * Could be a waste of resources to try and steer SCC approach/tactics as SCC may not even be listened to. We should be ourselves
- * Might be good to move boycott 1 year on – give time to rethink position and gain support – could use COP as excuse to postpone
- * Need more time as just started the Parliamentary approach and not enough action cards yet
- * Maybe its more of a question of whether we boycott now or later, rather than never..
- * But - delaying does have an impact – tar sands going ahead will have a massive impact on many and could be a tipping point....
- * RBS have bigger problems than us at the moment..will we have an impact with boycott now.
- * Technical Point from Emily – May be hard to mobilise for a boycott if many supportive orgs preparing for Copenhagen.. Should think about which orgs could get on board and what their priorities will be.
- * It was felt by some that we do have time and that a year may be too long - Maybe the timing will never be good
- * Reminder from someone it is important not to make the decision based on pessimism!
- * Concern was expressed about changing campaign with a small majority
- * Spectrum line suggested to gauge feeling
- * Need to COP to promote boycott as no other chance to do this
- * Reminder that the start of the boycott will be the beginning – won't be a failure if doesn't have immediate effect so we do have more time than it seems.
- * Concern expressed over what P&P can achieve in 6 months in terms of Copenhagen apart from going... don't think we should drop other CC campaign issues that are the climate causing problems that Copenhagen is about.

Key outcomes

Following a vote by the session participants, it was decided to continue with the RBS-NatWest campaign during the first 6 months of 09/10. However, there were some key amendments to the original proposal:

- Retain the focus on RBS-NatWest irrelevant of what new research may say.
- Use RBS-NatWest and finances as P&P's angle at Copenhagen. Link in our work on this to what other groups are doing on climate and justice.

Next steps

The support office will use the decisions made at the Forum to formulate a strategy for the

DDD campaign during 09/10. They will also co-ordinate further research into the financial sectors funding of fossil fuel extraction.

How can people get involved?

- Volunteer – we are always looking for volunteers with a range of skills. If you're particularly keen on the RBS-NatWest campaign, how about being a Campaign Advocate next year? Keep checking the website for details of positions available: <http://peopleandplanet.org/volunteer>
- Get campaigning in your group – now we've decided to continue the RBS-NatWest campaign we need to make sure next year is the best yet. Make sure you think about building a strong group for next year and get ready for a another year of fantastic campaigning. Check out: <http://peopleandplanet.org/ditchdirtydevelopment>