

# RESOURCE JUSTICE

A people powered plan for fair  
and sustainable use of materials



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This report was written by members of communities facing resource justice challenges in Scotland. The work was supported by Friends of the Earth Scotland.

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# Summary

This plan sets out why a resource justice movement is needed in Scotland and how to establish and grow this. It was developed by people who are part of communities facing resource justice challenges in Scotland.

Anyone can use this plan as a tool for taking action.

All movements are made up of people and groups, their connections, and the infrastructure they use to communicate and work together, organised for a common cause. The stronger these are, the more powerful a movement can be.

Resource justice means using materials and products fairly and sustainably. Today, the way resources are used is causing harm to people in Scotland and around the world and to nature. The way materials are extracted, produced, and disposed of is driving climate breakdown, increasing pollution, and exploiting people – all while only benefiting the wealthy few.

However, there is overwhelming evidence that responsible resource use can help restore the planet and secure a better future for us, our children, and generations to come. To create this fairer future, we must tackle the root causes of resource injustice – and we can do so in manageable steps. By focusing on growing our collective power and changing the things that will make the most difference in the long term, we can bring about a better future. The more people who call for change, the faster action will happen.

In this plan, we set out why we must rethink the way resources are used, why a movement building approach is the best way to achieving resource justice and how to establish, grow and support such a movement.

## Creating a resource justice movement in Scotland involves three steps:

1. **Show that change is possible:** develop a shared vision of the future and the changes that will make the most progress towards that future.
2. **Grow the movement:** increase the number of people in the movement by showing resource justice meets the needs of the many, rather than the wealthy few.
3. **Restore power:** to people and communities, by enabling greater involvement in political decision making.

# Introduction

This document is a plan developed by people who are part of communities and networks that are already facing resource justice challenges in Scotland. We want to transform the way materials are used to serve people and nature, here and around the world, rather than the wealthy few. Our goal is to empower so many people and communities in Scotland to call for a fairer future that our demands cannot be ignored.

This plan is divided into three sections:

**Part 1. Rethinking how we use resources:** Explains why we need to change the way materials are used and our vision of a better future for everyone.

**Part 2. The need for a resource justice movement:** Shows that a people powered approach is the best way to achieve the changes needed.

**Part 3. Building Scotland's resource justice movement:** Sets out how we will build our movement in Scotland and influence the changes we want to see.

*Our goal is to grow a people-powered movement that can change the way we use materials for good.*

## How this plan was developed

This plan based on conversations with people across Scotland, many of whom are already deeply involved, in different ways, in the fight for resource justice. We undertook a series of activities which have informed the development of this plan, including:

- **Workshops** held across Scotland with people already involved in activities and campaigns around the way we use materials;
- **Testing** with the Friends of the Earth Scotland supporter base;
- **Research** on movement building and resource justice.

The workshops and draft plan were organised by Friends of the Earth Scotland, with involvement from people across Scotland's resource justice network.



*Edinburgh workshop participants discussing what a future with fair and sustainable material use looks like.  
Photos: Kyle Downie*

The workshops brought together people affected by different parts of resource justice, including:

- Individuals concerned about specific parts of the throwaway society, such as plastics and those interested in alternatives to economic growth;
- Representatives from community groups such as those fighting incinerator applications in their local area;
- Networks of volunteers such as members of Plastic Free Scotland Communities; and
- Reuse and repair organisations and networks.



# PART ONE:

## Rethinking how we use resources

The first step in changing the way we use resources is to understand what is wrong with the current system and set out what we should be aiming for instead. To encourage others to join us, people need to know what we are fighting for, why it is better for them and that it is possible to achieve a fair and sustainable future for everyone. This section explains the problem of resource injustice and what an alternative system based on resource justice would look like.

### 1.1 Resource injustice

Today, many people are suffering because of the deeply unfair and unsustainable ways in which materials are used. Materials and products, such as metals, plastics and textiles, are used in a wasteful, expensive and harmful way to people and the environment. Using resources in this way deepens the inequality between the wealthy few and everyone else. Natural resources are used to generate profits for big businesses but everyone else pays in terms of the damage done to the environment.

We see this in Scotland, where people are locked in a **throwaway society** of:

- Poor quality products which often come wrapped in too much packaging and break easily;
- Many products designed to be single-use, forcing people to buy new over and over again;
- Producers and retailers make claims about the green credentials of their products which can't be trusted;
- Bin services which are unreliable and hard to use; and
- Litter choking our towns, countryside, and seas.



- Inequality is increasing as resources and power over them get concentrated into the hands of the wealthy few. Just eight men own the same wealth as the poorest half of the world<sup>1</sup>;
- Extracting resources, through activities like mining and deforestation, is destroying nature at an unprecedented rate. The Earth is being pushed past the safe boundaries of the ecological systems, such as biodiversity loss and pollution, that we rely on to live; and
- Climate breakdown is exacerbating these harms as extreme events increase the damage done by resource extraction, leaving people and nature less able to cope with disasters.

People in Scotland care about these international injustices: a recent survey found that more than 80% of UK adults want new UK laws requiring British companies to prevent human rights abuses and serious environmental damage in their operations and supply chains.<sup>2</sup>

Our economic system is dominated by corporate greed, and governments which are too scared to put the wellbeing of people and the planet before the never-ending drive for economic growth. These problems are expected to worsen:

- Global material consumption passed sustainable limits in the year 2000 and is still increasing.<sup>3</sup> This is caused by overconsumption by the wealthy whilst many people, especially in global south regions, live without the basic resources needed to thrive.
- In Scotland, the amount of material we use per year is unsustainably high and increasing<sup>4</sup>, which means the associated health impacts, pollution and climate breakdown are also rising.
- Plastics production is expected to double by 2040.
- Conflicts between mining companies and communities are rising rapidly as demand for minerals increases. In 2025, the Environmental Justice Atlas listed 812 cases of mining-related conflicts, an increase from 705 cases in 2023.

The system itself is designed to increase the power, resources, and wealth of the rich, at the cost of everyone else. Resource injustice ultimately stems from **colonialism and capitalism**, to which it is still deeply linked:

- Colonialism established the systems of extractivism which still dominate global supply chains today, draining poorer nations of US\$10 trillion every year.<sup>5</sup>
- Capitalism has super charged resource extraction and consumption by prioritising economic growth over everything else. It is the pursuit of profit that leads to inequality, as one group takes from another. Those with power take more and more from other people and nature.
- The need for growth is a deeply embedded assumption in the minds of mainstream politicians, economists, and businesses. But perpetual growth on a finite planet is impossible.
- Beyond the point where basic needs are met, long passed by rich nations, economic growth does not make our lives better.<sup>6</sup> Instead, only the rich get richer, and everyone else suffers.

**In summary, resource injustice means:**

- The way we use materials is deeply unfair and unsustainable. Overconsumption by the wealthy few is threatening the entire planet. In Scotland, we live in a throwaway society that harms us, other people and nature – but we cannot opt out of it.
- The throwaway society is linked to global resource injustice and is rooted in colonialism and capitalism. Economic growth is the driving force of businesses and governments. This endless need to increase profit creates extreme inequality as resources, wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of the richest whilst the costs of the exploitation of resources are borne by people and nature.
- These problems are systemic and getting worse.

## 1.2 Our vision of a resource just future

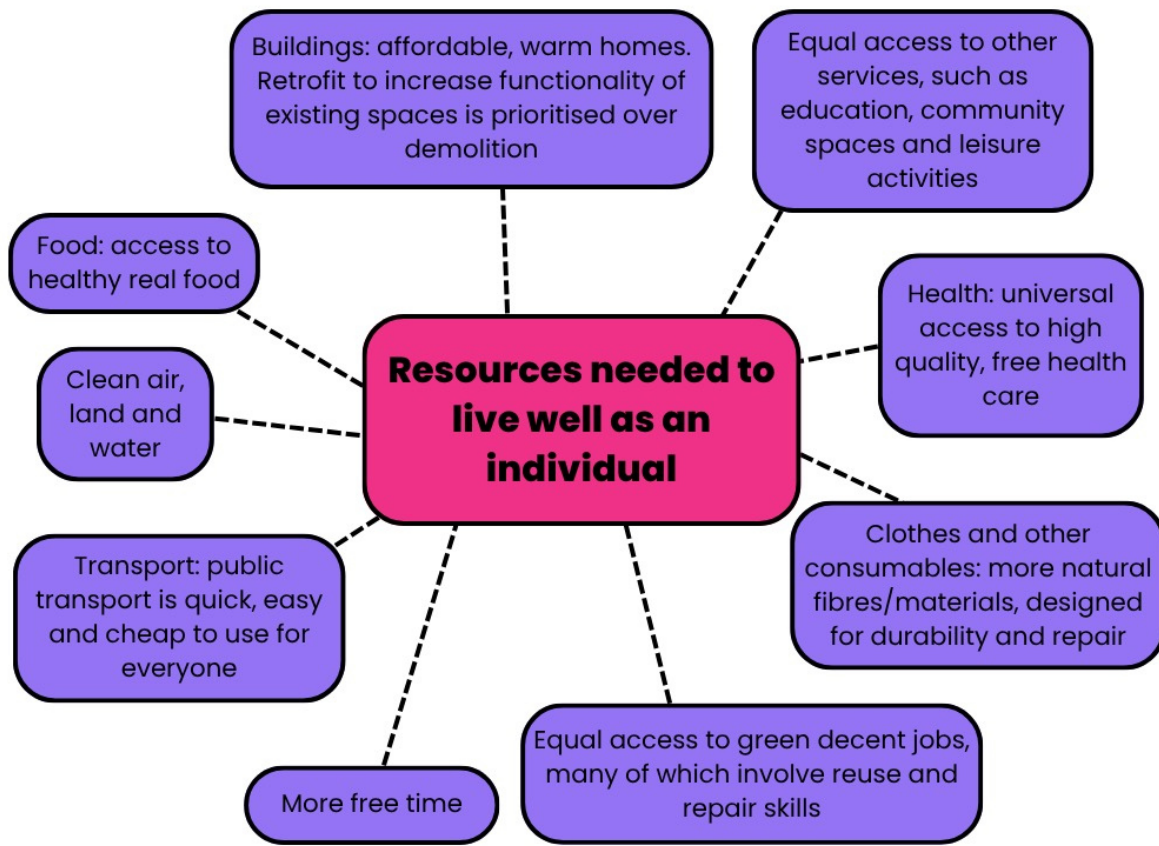
A better future is possible, where resource consumption is reduced to fair, safe and sustainable levels. Redistribution of resources means that everyone has access to enough resources to thrive. Barriers to fair access to resource are eliminated, focusing first on those most marginalised today. These barriers may exist because of, for example, race, gender, disability, or class.

According to the UN, sustainable level of material use is between six to eight tonnes of materials per person per year.<sup>7</sup> Some countries, such as Costa Rica and Panama, have already achieved this – recording similar levels of average happiness amongst its citizens to the UK despite using half the amount of materials per person.

### **A world of fair and sustainable resource use, means one where:**

- Everyone has equal access to the resources they need to live well.
- Our economy serves the needs of ordinary people. Care of ourselves, others and nature is prioritised above economic growth.
- Governments serve the needs of citizens, working to reduce inequality. People and nature are protected from corporate harm across the supply chain.
- Ecosystems can recover as resource extraction and pollution decrease, easing pressure and damage, and restoring balance between people and nature.
- Local people are consulted about how resources are used in their area, whether they live in an urban environment, in the countryside or somewhere in between.
- Reduced competition for resources means less international conflict and a more peaceful global society.

What does 'resources needed to live well' look like?



Fairer resource use does not mean people in global north countries, like Scotland, must make do with a lower quality of life. Instead, **in Scotland, the way we use materials will change so that:**

- People will need to buy less stuff and the products they do buy last for longer and are easy to repair, saving consumers money.
- Single-use products will be minimised. Instead, reusable and refillable models will be accessible and easy to use for everyone.
- There will be less rubbish and litter, easing financial pressures on councils and making waste management services logistically simpler.
- **Councils save money** on waste management services, as less is thrown away, freeing up funds for other vital services to improve.
- **The companies which make and sell the products are required to pay for the cleanup of their products** when they become waste, rather than the money for this coming out of the public purse. Councils have more money to spend on vital public services.

- Private ownership models, such as cars, should be replaced with public services, which use less resources overall and better meet the basic needs of everyone. Public services rapidly improve as investment in them increases.
- With less to buy and more accessible public services, there is less financial pressure on people, which leads to more time to do the things we enjoy, be with those we care about and connect with nature.
- Multi-national monopolies are replaced with more local and sustainable businesses, which are closely connected to the communities and their needs.
- Many more people are employed in jobs which require repair, refurbishment, and reprocessing skills. These jobs are embedded into local communities across Scotland.

*How our lives will be different in a society where resources are used fairly and sustainably*



# PART TWO:

## The need for a resource justice movement

In the first part of this plan, we described the vision of a society based on fair and sustainable resource use. This vision is worth fighting for, but it will take big changes to make it a reality. To increase support, people must believe that change is possible. So, the second section of this plan answers the question of “how do we get there?” We explain that system change is needed and that a people powered movement is the force that will make this happen.

### 2.1 System change, not behaviour change

Many policies aimed at improving the way we use resources focus on changing people’s behaviour. Zero Waste Scotland, the Scottish Government’s delivery body on waste and resources, urges citizens to ‘take an eco-approach to textiles’ and ‘reduce food waste at home’. Such suggestions push responsibility onto citizens, who are one part of a wider system.

Resource injustice is not caused by individuals and focusing on changing people’s behaviour will not fix the system. Telling people to choose products with less packaging, for example, will only make a difference if there are affordable product choices with less packaging available. Consumers do not control this; producers and retailers do.

In fact, **behaviour change tactics can deepen social inequalities rather than repair them**, making it harder to reach the overall goal being aimed for. For example, telling people to recycle more when the proper services are not available to everyone can create confusion, an undeserved sense

of guilt and a breakdown of trust in services, leading to less recycling activity happening, not more.



*Edinburgh resident, Jenny Kerr made hundreds of stars out of crisp packets to demand more action on recycling. Photo: Friends of the Earth Scotland.*

The root causes of resource injustice come from **a system designed to make the rich richer**. However, this system is not inevitable. It can be countered with the right approach, which targets the cause of harm (such as those producers and retailers which put profit before people and nature).

For resource justice solutions to be successful, they must be based on dismantling those parts of the system which most empower big business and elites.

The parts of the system we must target include:

- **Challenging the dominant narrative** that economic growth works for everyone. We must show that a new economic system which prioritises people and nature will benefit more people.

- **Reject solutions which hold individuals responsible** for the harms of resource injustice, and which encourage personal changes to fix them, such as behavioural change communication campaigns.
- Support systemic solutions, such as comprehensive bans on single-use items, corporate accountability standards and extended producer responsibility schemes which **make businesses responsible for the harms** of products they make.
- Government has a key role to play as corporations will only act if they are forced to. We must encourage our governments to put the interests of people and nature before big business.

There is not one single solution, many steps are needed, which push towards the shared goal of fair and sustainable use of materials for everyone.

## **2.2 How can building a movement lead to system change?**

Movements are made up of people, their connections, and the infrastructure they need to communicate and work together – the stronger all of these are, the more powerful the movement tends to be. A movement is not one organisation or campaign, but an ecosystem of groups working with shared or similar goals. These groups come together to organise specific events, campaigns, or actions to develop shared politics and make things happen. The act of collaboration can strengthen the movement's capacity over time.

We can support movement building by:

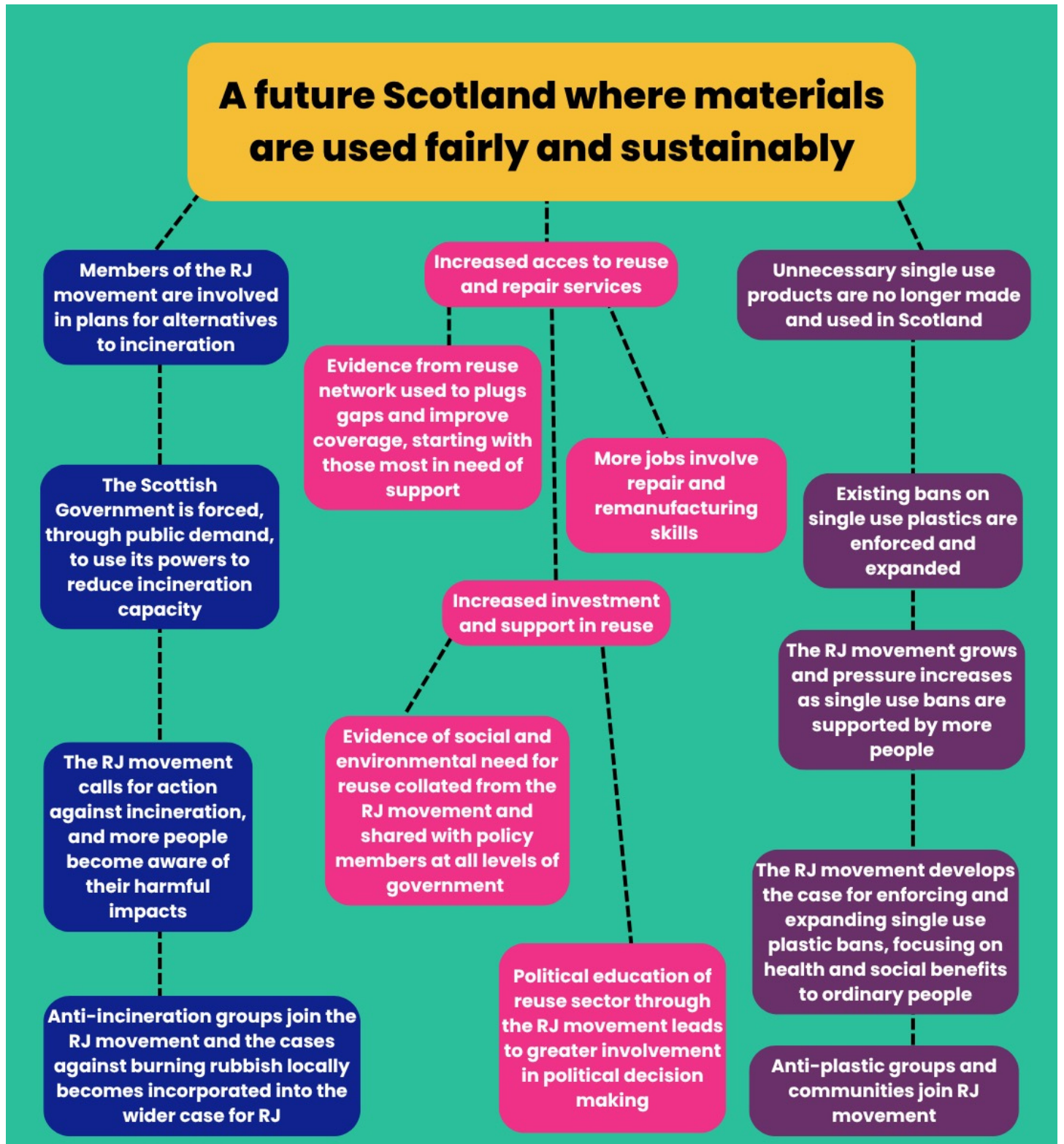
- Creating a framework for people to engage in local campaigns that are relevant to their daily lives.
- Meeting people where they are and organise in a way that meets the needs they have now as part of that (e.g. provide meals in a meeting)
- Training up groups in organising methods that prioritise bringing in new people to the movement.
- Use national mobilising strategically, in a way that is informed and integrated with local organising.

- Provide accessible membership with training, events, and resources, to encourage those who share our vision to collaborate with us.
- Speak publicly about our strategy and analysis.
- Collaborate strategically with organisations aligned with our vision.

By doing this, the movement will facilitate wider and more diverse participation in politics (meaning the decisions that affect people's lives). This will mean the issues important to people will not be able to be ignored. In this way, movements can create the power needed for system change.

A resource justice movement in Scotland can drive this system change by unifying those affected by resource injustice to call for those changes to government and businesses that will make the most difference.

How building a movement can lead to resource justice in Scotland, using three examples: incineration, reuse and single-use plastics



The different resource justice activities can positively re-enforce each other. For example, enforcing single-use bans will increase the need for alternatives based on reuse and repair services. And reducing incineration capacity would force government to invest in alternatives such as reuse.

**In summary, people power is the key to achieving system change because:**

- People can drive the changes we need by calling on governments to force corporations to change their harmful practices.
- The more people that come together, the more relationships are forged and actions taken, and the stronger the call for change grows. We can learn from and support each other through working together and sharing our knowledge and experience.
- If enough people call for change, this can tip the balance of power away from corporations and focuses instead on creating the future that most of us want to see.
- This is true on a local level, and an international one. Collaborating with people and communities fighting for resource justice across the world strengthens our movement at home.
- To make sure the changes benefit local people, the transition plans and process must involve them, include their voices, and focus on their needs.



Plastic-Free Scotland Communities volunteers in South Queensferry calling for action to stop plastic pollution.  
Photo: Plastics-Free Scotland Communities

*By recognising our shared goals and working together, our power to encourage change is increased.*

*This is what is needed to transform our wasteful systems and supply chains.*

# PART THREE:

## Building Scotland's resource justice movement

Having considered the need to change the way we use resources and why movement building is the best approach to achieving this change, we must now consider **how to build a resource justice movement in Scotland.**

Many people, communities and organisations are already fighting for resource justice and the starting point for this movement is to better connect these people. Together, we will grow the movement by showing the benefits of resource justice to others. We will use our growing power to call on government and businesses to act in ways that change the system of resource injustice.

### 3.1 Key elements of our resource justice movement

1. **Show that change is possible:** We will develop a clear, shared vision of the future we want. This vision should be one that many different people, no matter their class, race, gender or where they live, can relate to and challenge the dominant narrative of economic growth. We will consider what parts of the system to target and how we can talk about the changes needed.
2. **Grow the movement:** We will share our resource justice vision with target audiences and ask people to join our call for change. We will create the structures needed to allow the resource justice movement to function successfully, such as meeting schedules and ways of communication.
3. **Restore power:** As more people join this call for change, we will push for the Scottish Government to act. Through political education and

engagement, the members of our movement will be more included in the process of change.

STEP 1: SHOW THAT CHANGE IS POSSIBLE		
Strategy	Actions	Measures of success
Develop a clear, shared vision of a future where materials and products are used fairly and sustainably	<p>Using this plan as a starting point, we will continue to <b>create resources</b> to support the movement's development.</p> <p>One page summary on Scotland's resource justice movement</p> <p>A toolkit for movement members on resource justice which includes a short pitch on why resource justice is important, what the movement is and some ideas on how to take action on resource justice.</p> <p>Develop joint positions on important topics, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How a resource just future will be benefits ordinary people.</li> <li>• How to challenge of the dominant narrative of economic growth</li> <li>• What points of the system should be prioritised for change?</li> </ul>	<p>The movement has a shared vision of resource justice which is based on our understanding of the need for change and how this can be done. The vision is meaningful to a wide audience.</p> <p>Our resources can be used by anyone in the movement to show how their local community could benefit from resource justice.</p> <p>People from outside the movement begin to use our resources, language, and vision.</p> <p>We can point to a growing number of small campaign wins across different areas of resource justice.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increasing our understanding of resource justice intersectionality with race, gender, class, and other injustices.</li><li>• Case studies that show how resource justice is already happening.</li></ul> <p>We may wish to <b>conduct research</b> before we finalise the vision. This could include research into how to draw on international examples resource justice and a deeper understanding of prioritise and tactics for system change.</p> <p>We may also want to <b>conduct surveys</b> with target groups and the public to understand how our shared vision can be best communicated to a broad audience.</p> <p>Use <b>small campaign wins</b> to build momentum, demonstrating that these are stepping stones to more change.</p>	
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## STEP 2: GROW THE MOVEMENT

Strategy	Actions	Measures of success
<p>We increase the number of people who are calling for resource justice in Scotland.</p> <p>Our initial target audiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- communities where resource injustice is having an obviously detrimental effect on people’s lives e.g. nurdles and beach litter, landfills, and incinerators and those living close to resource extraction activities</li> <li>- socially and environmentally conscious people who don’t know much yet about resource justice</li> <li>- people interested in human rights,</li> </ul>	<p>Through <b>national and local press, social media, and events</b>, we share our new narrative with people across Scotland, framing our stories with the values we have in common.</p> <p>In an ongoing commitment to political education, we <b>hold events which support people to engage more politically</b> e.g. workshops and webinars on media messaging and lobbying to politicians.</p> <p>We apply for a <b>long-term funding source</b> for the movement, to provide resources such as organising resources, event materials, room hire and food for resource justice events.</p> <p>We <b>create inclusive and accessible spaces</b> for people to talk about local resource justice issues, such as incineration, plastic on local beaches, litter.</p>	<p>More people are aware of and support our vision for the future.</p> <p>Groups connected to resource justice become better connected.</p> <p>People feel that they can make a difference by taking political action.</p> <p>The movement maintains focus on resource justice as it grows and momentum increases.</p> <p>Those in power start using our language and suggestions for change in their thinking and decision making.</p>

<p>climate, and circular economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- those who sense that corporate power is too strong and the way we use materials needs to change</li> <li>- people with an interest in specific materials, like fashion and food</li> </ul>	<p><b>Link local groups to national opportunities for change</b> e.g. calls for action, support on responding to government policies and engaging with politicians in meaningful ways.</p> <p>The resource justice movement responds to national moments around resource justice together.</p> <p>We link communities in Scotland with those fighting for resource justice internationally, especially those with a connection to supply chains of materials used in Scotland (this may require extra research).</p>	
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STEP 3: RESTORE POWER		
Strategy	Actions	Measures of success
Members of the resource justice community take part in policy decisions to change resource systems and can speak confidently about the changes which matter most to them.	<p>The <b>movement engages with a shared voice</b> with policy makers on matters of resource justice.</p> <p>We support those who want to engage more deeply in the political process (political education, providing background information and research, advice on communication techniques).</p> <p>We provide support to people to <b>take part in political decisions</b> that affect their resource use, locally and nationally.</p> <p>Members of the movement are incorporated into decision making processes and structures for RJ plans.</p>	<p>Our members are included meaningfully in policy making plans on resource justice issues (e.g. involvement in decision making meetings and processes and movement ideas accepted).</p> <p>Policy plans on resource justice include the demands our movement because they cannot be ignored.</p>

By implementing these three steps, we will establish and grow a resource justice movement which can improve our systems of resource use in Scotland in ways that benefit people and nature both in Scotland and on a global scale.

# Conclusions

This document sets out why we must change the way we use materials and products and how a resource justice movement in Scotland is a vital part of creating the systemic changes needed for a better future.

A movement that can truly influence the changes needed to bring about resource justice, must be meaningful to a wide audience. The movement must be supported, as it grows, to maximise its influence. This plan is necessarily ambitious, but it can be broken down into manageable steps that means a better world is possible to achieve.

*Together, we can create a movement which is strong enough to build a better future.*



Activists from around the world show their support for a strong global plastics treaty. Photo: Break Free From Plastics.

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