

**A plan for fair
and sustainable
use of materials**



**Friends of
the Earth
Scotland**

RESOURCE

JUSTICE

**YOUR GUIDE
TO JOINING
THE MOVEMENT
FOR CHANGE**



WHAT IS RESOURCE JUSTICE?

The way materials, like plastic and steel, and products, like clothes and phones, are made and used is causing harm, both in Scotland and globally. Resource extraction and pollution are rising but only the wealthy few are benefiting.

We are locked in a **throwaway society** where poor quality and wasteful products lead to profits for big businesses but everyone else pays. As consumers, it can be impossible to do the right thing when every product choice exploits the world's poorest people and destroys nature.

A better future is possible, where resources are used responsibly, products are made to last and people and nature are protected. Using materials fairly and sustainably is known as resource justice.

This booklet was developed by people who are part of communities facing resource justice challenges in Scotland. The findings of conversations on how to harness the power to change are included here.

Do you want the things you buy to last for longer? Should there be less litter and pollution? Do you want the people who make the things you buy to be protected from exploitation? **If so, this booklet is for you.** It covers why resource use today is unfairly exploiting almost everyone, and how you can be part of the movement for change.

SCOTLAND'S THROWAWAY SOCIETY

In Scotland, we are trapped in a **throwaway society**, where the things we buy are wasteful and expensive. Across Scotland, many people can see the need for change, but products are often single-use, poor quality and cannot be recycled. There's too much packaging. Adverts and green claims too often turn out to be lies.

Lots of rubbish means that our bin systems are often confusing or difficult to use. Too many of us live with landfills and incinerators on our doorsteps or litter choking our streets, parks and seas.

Big businesses increase their profits by selling more and more stuff but this creates problems for the rest of us. When we have to spend more on the things we buy, those who struggle financially are hit hardest. On a global scale, nature and communities are being exploited for resources to make everything from laptops to trainers.

Global supply chains are linked to **inequality, climate breakdown** and **toxic pollution** and they are all rising.

It's time to recognise that the throwaway society is not working for anyone except the richest.

**JUST EIGHT MEN
OWN AS MUCH
WEALTH AS THE
POOREST HALF
OF THE WORLD**



Textile waste dumped on a beach in Ghana, 2023. Fast fashion is leading to more clothes being dumped in poor countries. Made of plastic, these clothes clog up waterways, impacting both nature and people. Photo: Greenpeace

THE ROOTS OF RESOURCE INJUSTICE

Our economic system is dominated by corporate greed, and governments that put the never-ending drive for economic growth before the wellbeing of people and the planet.

Taking more from nature and people is an easy way for corporations to grow their profits. More is taken each year. This system 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 each year.**
- > **Capitalism has supercharged 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.**
- > **The need for growth is a deeply embedded assumption in the minds of mainstream politicians, economists, media and businesses. But perpetual growth on a finite planet is impossible.**
- > **Beyond the point where basic needs are met, long passed by richer nations, economic growth does not make our lives better. Instead, only the rich get richer, and everyone else suffers.**

We must move beyond growth if we are to create a better future for everyone.

MATERIAL CASE STUDY: WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH PLASTIC?

Plastic is everywhere. It's a cheap and versatile material, but plastic pollution is damaging our health, our oceans, and the world's poorest communities. It's a clear example of resource injustice. The world is already facing a plastics crisis, but production is set to triple by 2060 if nothing is done.

Plastics break down into **microplastics** and contain **toxic chemicals**. When you drink from a disposable plastic cup, wear clothes made with man-made fibres or play on astroturf, you are being exposed to these microplastics and chemicals.

There is overwhelming evidence that plastics harm human health. They have been linked to cancers, hormonal and auto-immune diseases and developmental disorders. Plastics also harm nature. They are made from **fossil fuels**, so their production adds to climate breakdown. Much of our plastic rubbish is dumped in oceans or in countries where it is left for others to clean up who did not cause the waste.

It's impossible for individuals to avoid the harms of plastic pollution. The only way to limit these is to **make less plastic** in the first place. That means reducing plastic production, especially single use plastics. Governments must work together to ensure companies reduce production. Many communities and groups in Scotland are fighting for more sustainable plastic policies.



**2.5 MILLION
PLASTIC BOTTLES
ARE SOLD IN
SCOTLAND
EVERY DAY**



Scottish activists raise concerns about plastic packaging.
Photo: Colin Hattersley

WHAT DOES RESOURCE JUSTICE LOOK LIKE?

A better way is possible. According to the UN, material use can be sustainable if each person uses 6–8 tonnes of materials a year. In Scotland, we use more than double this amount but some countries, such as Costa Rica and Panama, are already living within this range. What's more, citizens in these countries report similar levels of happiness to those in the UK, despite using much less stuff.

In Scotland, we must use less resources, but this doesn't mean our quality of life will be reduced. In fact, systems which use less materials can improve the way people live.

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 people, regardless of race, gender, disability or class. Taking care of ourselves, others and nature is the priority.**
- > **Governments protect people and nature from corporate harm.**
- > **Ecosystems recover as resource extraction and pollution reduce.**
- > **There is less competition for resources internationally, reducing conflicts and leading to a more peaceful world.**

A FAIRER FUTURE FOR EVERYONE

Using resources more fairly in Scotland will mean:

- > The products we buy last for longer, so we don't need to **buy as much stuff** and save money.
- > There is less rubbish and litter, so councils spend less on cleaning up and more on vital services like health and education.
- > Everyone can **access reuse and repair services**, making alternatives to new products easier and cheaper to choose.
- > There are more local businesses serving the needs of their communities, with decent jobs, many of which involve reuse, repair and refurbishment.
- > Those companies which make and sell wasteful products **are required to pay for their clean up**, rather than this coming from the public purse.
- > **Investment in public services** increases. Public services, like buses and trains, use less resources overall than private models like cars.

This future is **fairer** and more **sustainable**. It's very different from the world we live in today, but we can make it happen.



HOW DO WE GET THERE?

The current system is designed to make the rich richer, but we can change this and create a better future for everyone. So how do we get there?

Often, when governments want to fix something, they focus on changing people's behaviour but telling people to recycle more won't work. **It's the system that is broken, not the people who use it.** We need system change, which requires governments and companies to take action, not individuals.

Government must act on those parts of the system which are most broken, such as:

- > Holding corporations to account for their wasteful practices,
- > Putting people's wellbeing before economic growth,
- > Stopping human rights abuses and environmental damage in supply chains.

Our governments will only act if they are forced to – they are too invested in the current system right now.

This means we need a people-powered approach which is so strong that the government can't ignore our demands. The more people who call for change, the faster it will happen. **We must build a resource justice movement in Scotland.**

No one way works, it will take all of us shoving at the thing from all sides to bring it down.

Diane di Prima, American poet, artist and activist

OUR AIM IS TO GROW A PEOPLE-POWERED MOVEMENT THAT CAN CHANGE THE WAY WE USE MATERIALS FOR GOOD

SCOTLAND'S RESOURCE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

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 becomes.

A movement is not one organisation or campaign, but groups of people working with shared goals. These groups come together to organise specific events, campaigns, or actions to make things happen.

There are many people in Scotland who are already working towards resource justice in different ways: from coastal communities concerned about plastic, to those fighting waste incinerators being built in their towns and the hundreds of reuse and repair organisations working across Scotland.

Representatives of these groups have created a resource justice plan for Scotland. The plan has three phases:

1

Show that change is possible: develop a shared vision of the future and set out the changes that will make the most progress towards that future.

2

Grow the movement: increase membership of 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 on resource justice issues.

WHAT NEXT?

STEP ONE: CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

Goal	Actions	Measures of success
We have a vision of resource justice that people believe in	<p>As a movement, we agree our priorities and how to communicate them. New members can contribute to this as the movement develops.</p> <p>Local groups are supported by the network, and their successes are seen as the stepping stones to wider change.</p>	<p>The movement has a shared vision of resource justice which is meaningful to a wide audience.</p> <p>Campaign group successes are shared across different areas of resource justice.</p>

STEP TWO: GROW THE MOVEMENT

Goal	Actions	Measures of success
More people join the resource justice movement in Scotland	<p>We share our vision through the press, social media, and events. We respond to national moments on resource justice together.</p> <p>We create accessible spaces for people to talk about local resource justice issues and learn about media and political engagement.</p> <p>Local groups are linked to national opportunities for change and communities fighting for resource justice internationally.</p>	<p>More people are aware of, support and connect to our vision.</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>

STEP THREE: RESTORE POWER

Goal	Actions	Measures of success
Our demands are included in policy plans and change the way materials are used in Scotland	<p>People are supported by the movement, through knowledge building and joint planning, to take part in political decisions that affect their resource use, locally and nationally.</p>	<p>Our members are included meaningfully in policy making plans.</p> <p>Those in power start using our language and suggestions for change. Eventually, policy plans include our demands because they cannot be ignored.</p>

Through these steps, we will establish and grow the resource justice movement, improving our systems of resource use in Scotland in ways that benefit people and nature.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Join Scotland's resource justice movement!

You can sign up to the **Scottish resource justice newsletter** to get regular updates on the latest resource justice news and activities that are happening across Scotland. Use the QR code below or email us at info@foe.scot to join.

Share your thoughts, photos and videos on how resource justice affects you with us.

You can learn more about resource justice, including the report which this booklet is based on, on the Friends of the Earth Scotland website at www.foe.scot





Leaders of the Wampis Nation and supporters outside the Scottish Parliament in 2025. Photo: Forest Peoples Programme



Plastic-Free Dunfermline's message to the Global Plastics Treaty in 2025. Photo: Plastic-Free Dunfermline



Find out more at www.foe.scot

