

A Response to The People's Emergency Briefing: What Shall I Tell Zippy?

The People's Emergency Briefing presents the climate and nature crisis with sobering clarity. Drawing upon expertise in climate science, health, food security, economics and national security, the film warns that climate breakdown is not a remote possibility awaiting some future generation. It is already disrupting lives, threatening food supplies and placing entire communities at risk. Although the film addresses a British audience, its message cannot be confined within Britain's borders. For me, it connects painfully with what I have witnessed in rural Kenya.

I grew up in Kenya in the 1960s, when the seasons appeared dependable. We knew when to prepare the land, when to plant and when to expect the rains. The stream near our home had flowed for as long as anyone could remember. It provided water for people, livestock, crops, trees and wildlife. Nearby stood an ancient traditional fig tree beneath which my great-grandfather once sat. It was more than a tree: it was part of our family history, a living witness connecting one generation to another.

Now the stream has dried up. Even that ancient fig tree has withered and died.

For three consecutive years, my brother has planted maize and watched it grow with promise, only for the rains to fail at the most critical moment. The stalks have withered just before producing any cobs. The labour was not lacking. The seed was planted, the field tended and hope invested in the soil, but the expected rain did not come.

My brother's experience is not unusual. The same picture is being replicated across Kenya, throughout sub-Saharan Africa and in vulnerable parts of Asia and South America. Farmers who have contributed almost nothing to the creation of this crisis are losing crops, livestock and livelihoods. The World Meteorological Organization acknowledges this grave injustice: Africa produces less than ten per cent of global greenhouse-gas emissions, yet it remains among the continents least able to withstand the consequences of climate breakdown. ([World Meteorological Organization](#))

The continuing drought in Laikipia County, Kenya reveals an even more frightening dimension of the crisis. As water sources disappear and pasture becomes scarce, pastoralist communities are compelled to move farther in search of water and grazing for their livestock. This increasingly brings them into conflict with settled agrarian farmers whose crops and livelihoods depend upon the same diminishing land and water.

Climate change is not the only cause of these conflicts. Colonial land arrangements, political manipulation, inequality, insecurity and unresolved disputes over grazing rights have long shaped relationships in Laikipia. Nevertheless, repeated droughts have greatly intensified the competition. Failed rainy seasons across northern Kenya have sharpened struggles among herders, farmers and landowners over increasingly scarce water and pasture. (International Crisis Group)

This is not merely something I have read in a report. During the past five years or so, people have lost their lives in these conflicts, including within my own village. Families have mourned loved ones because the struggle for pasture, water and cultivable land has turned violent. The climate crisis is therefore not only killing crops and livestock; it is disturbing relationships between neighbouring communities and contributing to fear, displacement and death.

This is what gives The People's Emergency Briefing its moral force. Climate change is not simply about graphs, global temperatures or melting ice in distant places. It is about my brother standing in a field of barren maize. It is about a child walking farther each day in search of water. It is about pastoralists desperately trying to keep their cattle alive and farmers anxiously protecting their remaining crops. It is about a stream that has flowed since my childhood disappearing from the landscape. It is about the death of a fig tree that survived generations but could not survive the pressures now being placed upon the earth.

I now live and minister in the United Kingdom. Here, the climate crisis can sometimes appear less immediate. Food still fills supermarket shelves and water continues to flow from our taps. The consequences of failed harvests are often hidden behind long and complex supply chains. Yet the film rightly reminds us that Britain is not insulated from climate breakdown. Our food security, health, economy, infrastructure and social stability are all bound to the health of the natural world. The crisis unfolding in Kenya is not somebody else's problem. We inhabit one interconnected creation.

As a Christian minister, I cannot regard this as merely an environmental or political concern. It is a spiritual and moral matter. Scripture declares:

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." >Psalm 24:1

The earth does not belong absolutely to governments, corporations or even to the present generation. It belongs to God, and we hold it in trust. In Genesis 2:15, humanity is placed in the garden "to till it and keep it." We were appointed not as ruthless owners but as servants and guardians of creation. When we exploit the earth without restraint, exhaust its resources and leave the poorest to suffer the consequences, we sin against our neighbours, future generations and the Creator.

I confess that the film leaves me with fear. It is not so much fear for myself though. I have already lived most of my allotted years. My deepest fear is for my granddaughter Zippy and for her generation. What kind of world will they inherit from us? Will they know streams that flow throughout the year? Will they sit beneath the shade of ancient trees? Will they inherit fertile soil, clean air, sufficient water and the rich diversity of God's creation, or merely our photographs and stories of what once existed?

I imagine Zippy coming to me one day and asking, "Guka, you knew what was happening. Why did your generation not respond appropriately?"

How shall I answer her?

I do not want to tell her that we were too comfortable, too divided or too concerned about short-term economic interests. I do not want to confess that we saw the evidence, watched the films, attended conferences and passed resolutions, but failed to change. Nor do I want to say that we assumed someone else would act.

Our children and grandchildren will not judge us simply by what we believed about climate change, but by what we did when its consequences became undeniable.

Yet despair is not the Christian response. Repentance means turning around and choosing another way. Christian hope is not passive optimism; it is faith expressed through courageous action. It means changing destructive patterns of consumption, reducing dependence upon fossil fuels, protecting and restoring nature, supporting vulnerable communities and demanding serious political leadership. It also means that wealthy nations, which bear far greater historical responsibility for global emissions, must help countries such as Kenya adapt without driving them further into debt.

The People's Emergency Briefing is a summons to awaken from our self-induced slumber. Creation itself is crying out. The dried stream, the barren maize field, the dead fig tree and the lives lost in struggles over water and pasture have all become witnesses against our complacency.

The earth is God's gift and our children's inheritance. It is not ours to hand over damaged and diminished. My prayer is that when Zippy asks, "Guka, what did you do?" I may answer with honesty:

"We finally woke up. We listened to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. We spoke, prayed, changed and acted. We did not do everything perfectly, and perhaps we began too late, but, for your sake and for the sake of God's creation, we did not remain silent."