

Why don't we talk more about climate change?

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Focus

Why don't we talk more about climate change?



Cover: "Global Warming" series by Nigerian artist Fred Martins (see p. 4).

Last year was the warmest on record, but too little attention is being paid to the creeping catastrophe of global warming – not least because of many other crises. Disinformation actors are distracting people from the issue, downplaying it and deliberately spreading false information. Overall, there is too little pressure on political leaders to close the glaring holes in climate financing. Low-income countries will suffer particularly as a result.

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The articles in this magazine's focus section are part of The 89 Percent Project, an initiative of the global journalism collaboration Covering Climate Now.

Around

205

million women in sub-Saharan Africa still do not have access to mobile internet services according to the mobile industry association GSMA.

This is almost two-thirds of the adult female population. The lack of smartphones and internet connection makes it even more difficult for women to access education and employment. Improving women's digital connectivity is therefore crucial for their empowerment.

The good news

Researchers have developed a chatbot that, according to a study, reduces belief in conspiracy theories even after relatively brief interactions. May we introduce DebunkBot? According to the research team, the approach is based on an AI system that can draw on a wide range of information to generate conversations that encourage critical thinking and provide tailored, fact-based counter-arguments.

The trick: The conversation with DebunkBot begins with the bot asking a few questions about what the user believes and why. This allows the AI to tailor its persuasion precisely to the individual's worldview. [Give it a try here.](#)

Art to educate and advance society

The cover image of this issue and the image featured at the beginning of the focus section show artworks of the series "Global Warming" by Nigerian artist Fred Martins.

Here he introduces himself and his art:

"I was born in Aggah-Egbema in southern Nigeria and named Ekele. My art is a reflection of the lived realities of African people, environment, wildlife, and culture. I believe that art should educate and advance society, so my practice has always been rooted in using the unspoken power of imagery to trigger emotions, awaken consciousness, and ignite change. As a father, I'm building a future my daughter, Adaola Lviv, can grow into. One where she can live purposefully as a human being on earth."

Photo: Delight Ndudi Olinwa



FAMINE

A preventable disaster

Sudan was once the breadbasket of Africa. Today, the country is embroiled in a seemingly endless war, famine and the world's fastest-growing humanitarian crisis. A collapse unfolding in real time – predictable and preventable.

BY EATIZAZ YOUSIF AND CORINA PFITZNER



Photo: Noory Taha for the IRC

War forced Altuma and her nine children to flee their home in Khartoum, displacing them multiple times. Now in the city of Gedaref, they face the challenge of living in temporary housing with limited protection from weather conditions.

Just three years ago, millions of Sudanese people led self-determined lives with jobs, homes and access to education. Today, many are completely dependent on humanitarian aid. Without decisive diplomatic action and continued humanitarian support, the situation will continue to deteriorate. This will have serious consequences for the already fragile region.

The crisis in Sudan has displaced around 12 million people, approximately 8 million of whom within the country. According to the UNHCR, more than 122 million people are currently displaced worldwide, the highest number ever recorded. Sudan alone accounts for over 10% of this total: one in ten refugees worldwide currently comes from Sudan, making it the world's largest displacement crisis. Many families have had to flee multiple times, with no safe place to go. This displacement not only destroys lives, but also severely limits access to food, services and other basic needs.

Almost 25 million people – more than half of Sudan's population – are affected by hunger. Several regions are already experiencing famine (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification level 5). For the second time in a row, the June planting season was missed. The conflict has destroyed agricultural infrastructure, displaced farmers and decimated livestock. Fertile land remains uncultivated – not because of climate change, but because of war. Once a net exporter of food, Sudan is now barely able to feed its own population.

At the same time, it is becoming ever more difficult to provide humanitarian aid on the ground. Increasing violence and the current rainy season are hampering access to affected areas. What limited access remains is increasingly hampered by bureaucratic hurdles, with even vital services often delayed or blocked altogether. Thanks to international support, some programmes have been able to continue, but this is far from enough, and aid often remains limited to short-term emergency assistance.

The consequences are devastating. Locally organised relief efforts such as community kitchens – facilities for preparing and distributing meals, often run by refugees themselves – are vital. However, cuts in US foreign aid have led to the closure of up to 80% of these kitchens, leaving hundreds of thousands of people without access to food in the midst of war. Proven structures are being dismantled at a critical moment.

DONOR COUNTRIES ARE OBLIGED TO ACT

Sudan tops the International Rescue Committee (IRC) Emergency Watchlist 2025 for the second year in a row. However, the international response is clearly inadequate:

“One in ten refugees worldwide currently comes from Sudan, making it the world's largest displacement crisis.”

only 14.1% of the UN aid plan for 2025 is currently funded. At the London Conference on Sudan in April this year, Germany pledged € 125 million in aid – an important step, but a significant decline from the € 325 million pledged the previous year. Once the budget for 2025 has been passed, the German government should at the very least continue its previous commitment.

Local organisations – especially women-led initiatives – are essential to maintaining basic services and supporting vulnerable populations. However, they are chronically underfunded and heavily burdened by administrative requirements. German support for the Sudan Humanitarian Fund (a pooled fund for multiple donor countries administered by the UN) is crucial, but it must become more flexible and accessible to local actors. Emergency response rooms should also be systematically integrated. Through equitable risk sharing and simplified administrative requirements, local aid workers can not only provide assistance, but also actively contribute to reconstruction and greater resilience.

Sudan needs more than just emergency aid – the country needs long-term investment in education, infrastructure and livelihoods. Germany and other donors should invest specifically in measures that align humanitarian aid with long-term goals for stability and reconstruction.

THE ROLE OF GERMANY

Germany's role must go beyond mere financial support. The current approach – characterised by short-term financing cycles and fragmented diplomatic efforts – will not bring about a ceasefire. The crisis in Sudan requires a strategic re-

sponse: long-term commitments combined with sustained political engagement. Germany has the necessary diplomatic weight and credibility to take on a leading role here.

“Protecting civilians and securing humanitarian infrastructure are not only a moral obligation, they are also strategically essential for regional stability.”

The German government should continue to keep Sudan high on its foreign policy and humanitarian agenda. This includes supporting the African Union in establishing a joint negotiating forum for de-escalation. The fact that the London conference failed to produce both a joint communiqué and a contact group shows how urgently a coordinated approach is needed.

At the same time, regional and international actors continue to contribute to the escalation, for example through military or financial support for the parties to the conflict. Germany should advocate de-escalation both publicly and through diplomatic talks. Economic levers such as exports of Sudanese gold and other raw materials should also be used to increase pressure for serious negotiations.

It is also essential to consistently advocate for international humanitarian law and human rights. Protecting civilians and securing humanitarian infrastructure are not only a moral obligation, they are also strategically essential for regional stability.

HESITATION COSTS LIVES

As long as there is no political progress, providing the Sudanese population with essential aid must remain a top priority. Germany should advocate for an immediate three-month suspension of bureaucratic obstacles to access for aid, including unrestricted UN access to areas outside the control of Sudanese military forces. Humanitarian access

must not be contingent upon a ceasefire.

Germany should use its influence in multilateral forums to maintain international attention on Sudan. The goal must be to protect civilians, ensure humanitarian access and hold regional actors accountable.

The crisis in Sudan is not temporary. It is a long-term, systemic collapse – and one that was foreseeable. The Sudanese people are resilient and committed, but they cannot rebuild alone.

LINKS

rescue.org/de/report/watchlist2025



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In April 2025, Corina Pfitzner travelled to Sudan with representatives of the German Federal Foreign Office and Eatizaz Yousif to assess the catastrophic humanitarian situation and visit IRC projects in particularly affected regions such as Gedaref. Despite major logistical challenges, the delegation travelled from Port Sudan to Gedaref, where they visited projects providing healthcare, psychosocial support and cash assistance in the Tunaydbah camp.

Photo: dpa / ASSOCIATED PRESS / Jason DeCrow



Climate and debt activists are calling for the complete cancellation of the Global South's debts and a UN-led framework for debt and climate protection.

FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT

Reforming the global financial architecture should be non-negotiable for Africa

With the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) on its way, the call for reform of the global financial architecture is more urgent than ever — especially for Africa, which remains structurally disadvantaged within a system established decades ago without its participation.

BY AFRICA KIIZA

Ffd4, currently underway in Seville, Spain, provides a platform for UN Member States to reach agreements and take collective action on major obstacles to sustainable development. For Africa, this is particularly significant, as the continent faces an enormous development-financing gap – estimated at \$200 billion annually by the African Union – to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Africa has long endured the leadership arrangements of the Bretton Woods Institutions. Under the informal “gentleman’s agreement,” an American has always led the World Bank, while a European has headed the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The imbalance of the global financial architecture is further illustrated by the IMF’s quota system: the entire African continent – comprising 55 countries and over 1.4 billion people – holds just 6.47% of voting rights, whereas the US, with a population of around 340 million, holds 16.5%. This disparity limits Africa’s influence on key global economic decisions, such as how debt sustainability is assessed, which types of financing are offered to countries in debt distress, and what constitutes “sound” economic policy.

Africa is also unfairly treated within the global financial system through the practices of credit rating agencies. The global credit rating market is dominated by the “Big Three” – Moody’s, S&P Global and Fitch Ratings – all headquartered in the US and the UK. Their assessments have frequently led to higher borrowing costs for African countries, capital flight, pressure on local currencies and the adoption of pre-emptive austerity measures aimed at avoiding downgrades. In 2024, Botswana was the only African country to reach a BBB+ credit rating, the highest on the continent.

HALF OF GERMANY’S DEBT WAS CANCELLED

More than 25 African countries are currently either at high risk of debt distress or already in distress. Yet, the absolute numbers are relatively low. Africa’s total debt stock is \$ 1.8 trillion, compared to \$ 2.9 trillion in Germany in 2023.

The London Debt Agreement of 1953 waived 50 % of Germany’s debts, with the remaining debts limited to three percent of export earnings and only payable if Germany had a trade surplus. Today, the majority of African countries pay more in debt service than Germany was required to pay under the London Debt Agreement. This example shows that the international community deals with national debt problems in very different ways.

As one of the most significant development finance conferences of the past decade, Ffd4 must confront these system-

“Today, the majority of African countries pay more in debt service than Germany was required to pay under the London Debt Agreement.”

mic challenges. This requires reforming the IMF quota formula to account for economic vulnerability, regulating private credit rating agencies, and supporting the establishment of local alternatives, such as the African Credit Rating Agency (AfCRA). The AfCRA could provide Africa with an opportunity to establish a credit rating system that reflects the continent’s socioeconomic realities and promotes a more accurate representation of its creditworthiness.

Overcoming systemic challenges also means reclaiming public finance to address the climate crisis, ending opposition to debt architecture reform by establishing a UN Convention on Sovereign Debt, supporting the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation to foster a fair global tax system and urgently advocating for debt cancellation.

LINK

actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/Debt-Swaps-Wont-Save-Us-Briefing-2024.pdf



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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Imprisoned for a novel

In many countries, not only is direct political expression dangerous, but indirect expression, too – for example, through fiction. Ugandan author Kakwenza Rukirabashaija has paid a high price for his artistic freedom.

BY CHARLES KAMBALE

Authoritarian regimes in many parts of the world severely restrict the fundamental human right to freedom of expression: Those who live under their influence and criticise them must fear repression. One way of dealing with this is to resort to fiction. Satirical fictional texts reflect reality using literary devices and express criticism often without specifically linking it to real people. Satire can thus offer artists protection – especially if the people implicitly criticised do not understand it or can ignore it because of its ambiguity.

However, this protection does not always work. Authoritarian regimes do everything in their power to control narratives and often silence satirists. For example, they ban their cartoons or writings even if their criticism is not expressed directly but can be interpreted into their works.

In Uganda, after almost 40 years in office, the government under Yoweri Museveni continues to deviate from the path of freedom and democracy he proclaimed when he came to power in 1986. Today, many writers, journalists, politicians and civil-society actors must be careful not to come under state scrutiny for expressing views that could be considered critical of the regime.

In 2020, Kakwenza Rukirabashaija, a Ugandan lawyer and author, published the novel “The Greedy Barbarian”. It tells the fictional story of a boy who has to flee his homeland with his mother and pursues a political career in a neighbouring country. The book deals with issues such as corruption and greed at the highest levels.

Rukirabashaija’s political satire got him into trouble because it could be linked to the current political situation in

“Rukirabashaija’s political satire got him into trouble because it could be linked to the current political situation in Uganda.”



Kakwenza Rukirabashaija in Kampala, Uganda, in 2022.

Photo: dpa / ASSOCIATED PRESS / Hajarrah Nalwadda

Uganda. In 2020, he was arrested ostensibly for violating Covid-19 regulations, but he was interrogated about the content of his novel. Later that year, he was arrested again, this time for “inciting violence and promoting sectarianism”, after he had made unflattering remarks about the president and his son on Twitter (now X).

“THE PEN WILL ALWAYS WIN AGAINST GUNS”

Rukirabashaija was tortured in state custody, but his spirit remains unbroken. He later said that freedom of expression should never be hampered by a dictatorship because it is recognised in both domestic and international law. “The pen will always win against guns and all the oppression,” he said. In his book “Banana Republic: Where Writing is Treasonous”, he gives an account of the torture he endured in prison.

The fate of Kakwenza Rukirabashaija has moved many. In 2021, he received the PEN Pinter Prize for an International Writer of Courage, and in 2023, the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent. He currently lives in exile in Germany as a fellow of the PEN Centre Germany.

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Vietnam's growing e-learning business has attracted the attention of Apple CEO Tim Cook who visited the country in 2024.

Photo: picture alliance / Associated Press / Tuan Hung



E-LEARNING

A top-down digital revolution

A digital revolution is underway in Vietnam's education sector. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the government swiftly introduced digital learning. Now they want to take their project further: The digitisation of classrooms aims to enhance the quality and inclusivity of education, and ultimately stimulates economic growth.

BY GIOVANNI PUGLISI



In 2022, Vietnam has embarked on a journey towards a digital transformation of its education system. During the pandemic, the country quickly shifted to online and distance learning. A government-initiated project running from 2022 to 2025 now aims to integrate digital technology across all levels of the education system. Technology is intended to promote innovation in teaching and learning and to improve the quality and accessibility of education.

The Vietnamese example is a special one, given its political system. The one-party government is taking a top-down approach to drive the country's digital transformation by mandating the use of learning management systems (LMS) and prioritising digital skills training. It is drawing on the experiences of other Asian countries, such as South Korea and Singapore, where state-led education reforms have been key drivers of economic transformation.

In 2023, UNESCO reported that nine out of 10 schools across the country are connected to the internet: "With one of the fastest growing markets for online learning, Viet Nam has enormous opportunities to establish itself as a leading regional education hub and a global example."

INVESTMENTS IN DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To this end, the government has invested in expanding its digital infrastructure. It has partnered with public telecommunications companies, such as VNPT and Viettel, to provide internet access in previously underserved regions, particularly rural areas. Furthermore, it has launched initiatives to provide devices and connectivity to students in need, and to target disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities and rural communities.

"Major challenges remain in Vietnam's education sector, particularly in rural areas, where access to infrastructure, digital equipment and qualified teachers is limited. That said, the digital-education revolution in Vietnam appears promising overall."

Vietnam's growing educational technology (EdTech) sector is also playing its part: Companies have provided access to learning apps and online platforms that facilitate communication between students, parents and schools. Phan An, founder and CEO of WordsMine, a Vietnamese EdTech company, said: "We're using an AI-powered platform to deliver knowledge across subjects like finance, mathematics and history – with a focus on empowering young people, including female students, and Indigenous communities in rural areas – helping to close the knowledge gap created by language barriers."

Nevertheless, there is still a lack of digital libraries, e-learning tools and resources, such as e-books, particularly in regions where traditional educational resources are already scarce, such as rural areas.

A robust digital education system requires teachers who are well-trained in using modern tools and can provide students with individual support. Although Vietnam has trained over 2000 teachers in digital skills, many schools still lack the specialists needed to maintain digital resources.

"Despite government policies supporting the move towards increased use of digital education, many educational institutions still employ a more traditional teacher-centred approach, which is not well aligned with digital education and skills required for Industry and Education 4.0," says Sasha Stubbs, Learning Design Manager at RMIT University Vietnam. UNESCO states that teacher readiness varies greatly, especially in remote areas.

However, study programmes are beginning to address this gap. For instance, Hanoi University of Science and Technology's Bachelor of Education Technology programme prepares teachers for digital learning environments. At RMIT University Vietnam, collaboration between educators is encouraged.

NEXT STEP: BRINGING AI TO THE CLASSROOM

Major challenges remain in Vietnam's education sector, particularly in rural areas, where access to infrastructure, digital equipment and qualified teachers is limited. That said, the digital-education revolution in Vietnam appears promising overall. According to a recent study, Vietnamese students with access to digital tools achieved higher test scores than their peers without such resources. The country is prioritising teacher training and trying to overcome regional and gender disparities. The next steps are already in the pipeline, with the aim of increasing AI usage: Perhaps one

day soon, chatbots will be telling Vietnamese students whether their maths homework is correct.

LINK

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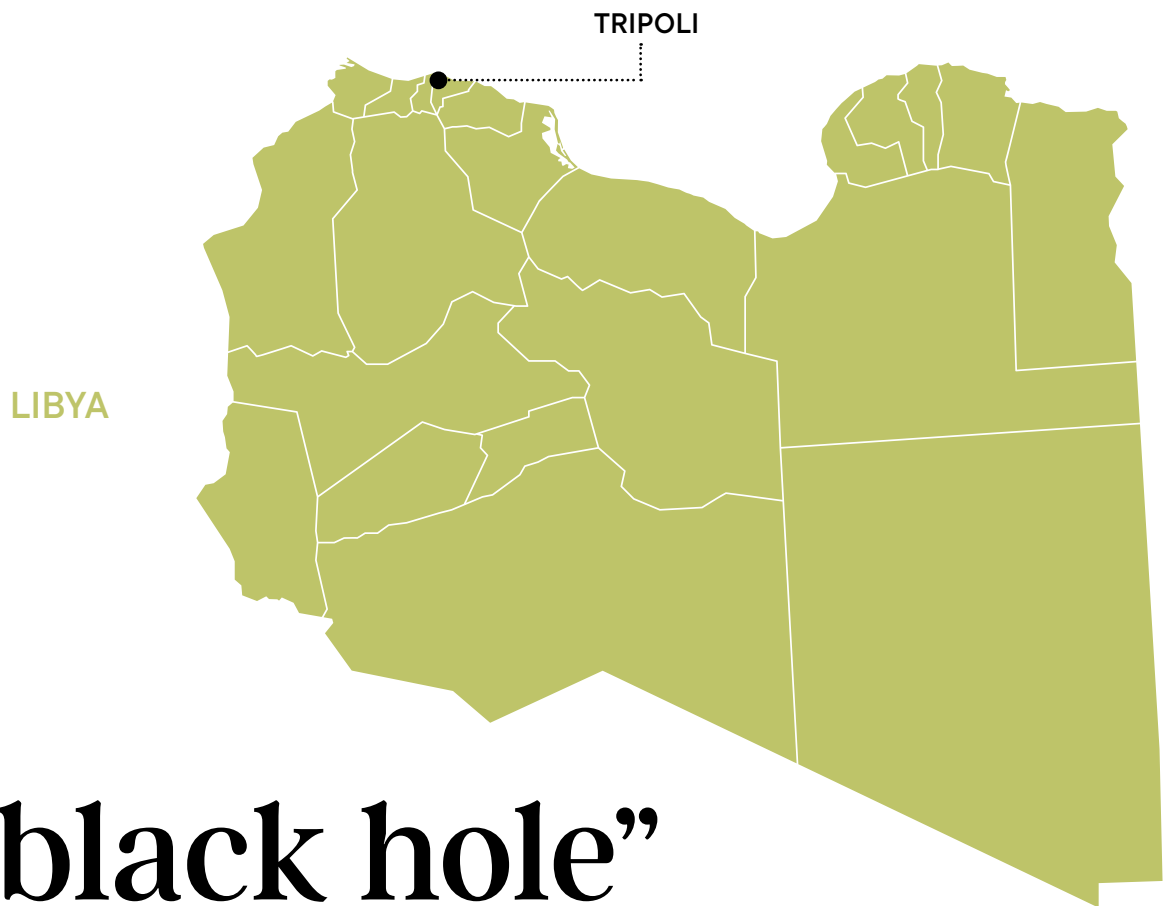
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PRESS FREEDOM

A “black hole” of information

Libya lacks independent media outlets. Radio and television stations, newspapers and online media are controlled with an iron fist by the two major political camps, making it easy for hate speech and misinformation to flourish.

BY MOUTAZ ALI

Two governments have been competing for power in Libya since March 2022: the internationally recognised Government of National Unity (GNU), based in Tripoli, which controls parts of western Libya, and the Government of National Stability (GNS) in Benghazi in the east of the country. Libya's deep political divisions have a significant impact on press freedom in the country. Many media professionals have left Libya. Those who remain have either taken sides in the conflict or are under the control of one of the two camps. There is a lack of free, independent reporting.

The civil-society organisation Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls Libya a “true information black hole” and ranks

the country 137th out of 180 in its latest World Press Freedom Index. According to RSF, journalists have been the target of intimidation and physical violence for years, even though the situation seems to have improved since the end of the civil war. Both in the east and the west of the country, those in power have succeeded, via their armed factions, in instilling fear among journalists and have ended up eliminating media independence in Libya, RSF states.

THE MEDIA AS A TOOL OF THE POWERFUL

“As a Libyan journalist, I am very concerned about the continuous deterioration of media in the country,” says freelance journalist Eman Ben Amer. Amid the unstable political

“The political, economic and security situation remains critical for the population. Violence erupts repeatedly at the local level.”



Photo: picture alliance/abaca/AA/ABACA

Soldiers parade in Tripoli in February as part of the celebrations to mark the 14th anniversary of the February 17 Revolution that led to the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime.

situation, she believes the media has become a tool of the rich and powerful. According to Ben Amer, the people of Libya have lost trust in the media due to rampant disinformation and the lack of laws protecting journalists and media independence.

RSF, too, bemoans the fact that no authority or law in Libya guarantees media pluralism, transparency or access to information. Socially relevant issues are neglected in the Libyan media – especially the perspectives of young people, who have turned to social media platforms that promote radicalisation and hatred.

THE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION

It is striking that the political sides in their media battles are increasingly relying on “bloggers and mercenaries of electronic armies” rather than traditional media, says freelance journalist Majd Gannud. Many social-media bloggers spread false information that serves the interests of the conflict parties and in no way meets ethical journalistic standards, Gannud says.

Freelance journalist Rabiha Habas says that although Libyan journalists had media cards, they were unable to do their work on the ground. “This is not due to a lack of passion or efficiency,” she says. Rather, they are being exploited by influential individuals for their own short-term interests. At least foreign journalists and Libyan media professionals working from abroad were covering important political issues, Habas says.

The situation is not likely to improve in the foreseeable future. The political, economic and security situation remains

critical for the population. Violence erupts repeatedly at the local level. Although it is clear that elections are to be held, there is still no agreement on the exact circumstances under which they will take place.

“The international community must come together to collaborate on a unified plan to support a democratic state that addresses the Libyan people’s fundamental needs and aspirations, fosters economic growth and equitable development,” says Hanna Tetteh, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Libya. She emphasises that the oil-rich country has sufficient resources to guarantee the safety and well-being of its citizens.

LINKS

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GENDER EQUALITY

A female president does not automatically guarantee equality

Namibia is creating history: For the first time, women hold its top government positions. But this political breakthrough needs to translate into social reality for the rest of the country's women.

BY CLEMENCE MANYUKWE

In November last year, Namibia elected Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah as its first woman president. Alongside Nandi-Ndaitwah, Lucia Witbooi was appointed vice president and Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila became the first woman to lead Parliament. Eight ministerial posts were given to women. This is a historical moment not only for Namibia.

An international comparison underscores the country's progress: In the Global Gender Gap Report 2024 by the World Economic Forum, Namibia ranks first in gender equality among all the countries in Africa and eighth worldwide. Relevant factors include a progressive government that guarantees equal rights, as well as legislation aimed at women's advancement.

Photo: dpa / ASSOCIATED PRESS / Dirk Heinrich

Netumbo
Nandi-Ndaitwah,
President of
Namibia.



“The challenge for the new government will now be to convert political successes into structural progress.”

In her inaugural address in March, the new president emphasised that her election was based on achievement, not gender. “As women,” she said, “we should not ask to be elected to positions of responsibility because we are women, but because we are capable members of our societies to hold those positions.” She also stressed that achieving gender equality is an ongoing process worldwide.

Women’s empowerment has high priority in the programme of her party, the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO), and will now serve Nandi-Ndaitwah as a policy guideline. For instance, she wants to improve access to land, credit, markets and jobs; fight violence against women and strengthen women’s entrepreneurial skills. Another area of focus is protection from gender-specific violence, with help from specialised police units, for example.

CIVIL-SOCIETY DOUBTS

Civil-society voices point out, however, that formal equality does not automatically lead to true participation. Liz Frank, activist and director of the Women’s Leadership Centre Namibia, has criticised the fact that the share of women in Parliament has fallen to 33 %. She is calling for a law that obliges political parties to promote equality.

Despite the presence of women in government positions, the president’s first staffing decisions represent setbacks. The 50/50 principle was ignored when regional governors were appointed: six out of seven of the new posts went to men. All the other governors are men, too. Frank considers this a sign that equality is not being systematically pursued.

Brigit May Loots, a Namibian consultant who specialises in gender and social development, stresses that many Namibian women experience little in the way of equality: unemployment, sexual violence and limited access to reproductive healthcare shape their reality. According to Loots, every fourth woman has been affected by intimate partner violence; every fifth woman between the ages of 15 and 19 has already been pregnant.

Another target for criticism is the president’s attitude towards equality for sexual minorities. The state leadership’s rejection of rights for lesbian women contrasts with its general equality rhetoric.

James Itana, the director of Regain Trust, a civil-society organisation that aims to empower women and girls in Namibia, further urges that boys and men be included in equality strategies. According to him, boys and men have experienced a decline in educational opportunities and mental health, which is reflected in high suicide rates.

The challenge for the new government will now be to convert political successes into structural progress. This includes targeted measures to support disadvantaged women, such as women with disabilities, women living in rural regions or women from marginalised communities like the San or Ovahimba. Only when political representation is accompanied by true participation can Namibia fully realise its potential as a pioneer in matters of gender equality.



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PUBLIC HEALTH

India's manual scavengers still face serious caste-based exploitation

Although illegal, manual scavenging persists across India, exposing oppressed caste workers to life-threatening conditions. The practice highlights systemic discrimination, poor infrastructure and slow progress on decent work targets.

BY IPIL MONICA BASKI

One of the global aspirations, envisioned in the 8th UN Sustainable Development Goal, is the promotion of decent work and economic growth. In India, the prevalence of manual scavenging, a practice that involves informal and oppressed caste workers doing unhygienic and unsafe work, poses a threat towards progress in achieving this goal.

Manual scavenging is a practice where people do blue-collar jobs such as manually cleaning human waste in latrines, open drains and other places. In other instances, scavengers have to go down potholes without any protection gear, while potentially being exposed to toxic waste, including harmful gases and pathogens that can lead to diseases like leptospirosis, hepatitis and helicobacter. It is reported that some people have lost their lives doing this kind of work, although official statistics on the deaths are scant.



Roxy Gagdekar Chhara, a BBC News contributor from the Indian state of Gujarat, while covering a story on the plight of India's "sewer workers," affirmed the mystery surrounding statistics on manual scavenging. He referred to an Indian federal minister who told the parliament in 2021 that the government had identified 58,098 manual scavengers in the country through surveys but also added that there was "no report of practice of manual scavenging currently in the country." His claims are disputed by data from Safai Karmachari Andolan, a movement which works to eliminate manual scavenging. The organisation states that there are more than 770,000 such workers.

WEAK ENFORCEMENT DESPITE LEGAL BANS

Tasks performed by manual scavengers are so humiliating

that they are usually done in secrecy or at night, so that the “civilised” society doesn’t have to see something so heinous. Officially, manual scavenging is illegal in India.

The country first banned manual scavenging in 1993 with the Employment of Manual Scavenging and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act. In 2013, the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act was passed, mandating the identification of persons engaged in manual scavenging for their liberation and rehabilitation. A year later, in 2014, the Supreme Court of India ruled that manual scavenging violates international human-rights commitments.

CASTE-BASED INEQUALITY AND STRUCTURAL POVERTY

Despite the legal regime and the apparent dangers of manual scavenging, poverty leads people to engage in this practice. India’s caste system plays a significant role here, since workers from oppressed castes are particularly affected. The Dalits, the so-called untouchables, and the Adivasis, the indigenous people of India, are among the country’s most oppressed groups. For centuries, they have been ostracised and denied basic human rights. This affects the Dalits and Adivasis adversely, exposing them to poverty, little access to education and even fewer job opportunities. The newspaper Indian Express reported, citing government data, that an overwhelming 97% of manual scavengers in India are Dalits, highlighting the strong link between caste and this practice.

Manual scavenging reveals various problems in Indian society. In addition to the oppression of entire population groups and a lack of labour rights, the country is struggling with inadequate, outdated infrastructure such as poorly maintained public washrooms, flooded roads and dirty drains across public spaces. Whereas the country has made advances in technology, it is lacking proper machines to help keep sanitary infrastructure clean. Under these conditions, manual scavenging provides cheap labour.

Discrimination against oppressed groups in India, including in the workplace, must stop. The people currently working as manual scavengers are trapped in a vicious circle of social discrimination and exclusion from large parts of the labour market. They deserve decent work under dignified conditions, however – just like all other Indians.



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FOCUS ON CLIMATE

Why don't we talk more about climate change?



"Global Warming" series by Nigerian artist Fred Martins. For more information about the artist, see page 4.

Illustration: Fred Martins
@fredmartinx

Spotlight on climate protection

Our planet is getting warmer, but other topics are dominating media coverage. Climate disinformation is also being purposefully spread. This combination is disastrous because only well-informed and responsible citizens can exert the necessary pressure on politicians.

BY JÖRG DÖBEREINER

Let's not forget that the past 10 years have been the warmest on record worldwide. The frontrunner was last year, which saw average temperatures over 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. May 2025 was the second-warmest May on record. Other topics have dominated traditional and social media in recent weeks and months, however. These include the conflicts in the Middle East, Kashmir and Ukraine; US tariffs and foreign policy; the election of Pope Leo XIV; and countries' current domestic affairs, like Germany's discussion about reintroducing compulsory military service.

All of these topics are important, and the media should report on them. But too little attention is currently being paid to the creeping catastrophe of global warming. After the Covid-19 pandemic pushed climate issues out of the spotlight, interest rose in response to the UN climate summits in Glasgow in 2021 and Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022, then immediately dropped off again, as data from the Media and Climate Change Observatory show. Recently the attention curve has been trending downward, though it is higher overall than it was before the climate movement started staging mass protests in 2018. Yet researchers consider it likely that the climate crisis contributed to extreme weather events that killed tens of thousands and displaced millions last year alone.

The complex, long-term phenomenon of climate change has a hard time competing in a media landscape that is often dominated by short-term concerns and simple messaging. While extreme weather events occasionally make headlines, they do not create enough political momentum to close the glaring holes in climate financing. The non-profit organisation Climate Policy Initiative calculated

that annual investments would have to be at least five times higher than current spending levels to reach the 1.5-degree goal.

At the same time, disinformation actors are purposefully undermining climate education efforts: they are distracting people from the crisis, downplaying it and deliberately spreading false information. And they are making a lot of money in the process, as Ava Lee from the civil-society organisation Global Witness writes.

For these reasons and more, policymakers are not being put under enough pressure. That is true both in rich industrialised countries and in low- and lower-middle income countries where people are facing entirely different problems, as our correspondents from South Sudan and Pakistan report. But those very problems – including hunger, conflict and a lack of educational opportunities – are being exacerbated by climate change.

At D+C, we regularly call attention to climate protection – whether or not a climate conference is currently taking place. Moreover, we recently joined the international media network Covering Climate Now, which aims to be the voice of a too-silent majority: the up to 89 percent of the global population that supports climate protection.



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REIGNITING CLIMATE ACTION

The one thing that affects us all

The climate crisis continues to devastate communities. And yet it has largely disappeared from global political discourse, while people continue to live their lives as if it were a crisis we could solve with an app. How could such a crucial issue become mere background noise?

BY ABIGAEL KIMA



The climate crisis makes extreme weather events such as droughts more likely, including in the Global North: branch of the Rhine, Germany's largest river, in April.

Living through a global pandemic and cost-of-living crisis while being forced to witness senseless wars, the erosion of democracy and the escalating climate crisis is not what I had imagined for my youth. Watching the world fall apart like this just goes to show that humanity can be its own worst enemy. Greed, irresponsibility and the relentless pursuit of wealth by a small minority of the world's population have brought us to this point.

Among our multiple crises, the climate crisis often appears to be a slow-moving emergency – especially in countries where extreme weather events typically occur during specific seasons. That is usually when the world pays attention: flash floods in Bangladesh and Kenya, forest fires in Australia and Canada. While these disasters – and the attention they receive – may last only a short time, the reality for those hardest hit is very different. They are left to deal with long-term consequences that upend their lives. This is not something one easily recovers from – especially without support and solidarity at the global level.

AS ATTENTION FADES, SO TOO DOES POLITICAL WILL

As soon as we pay less attention to the climate crisis, political will likewise wanes. Given the current political situation, it is hardly breaking news to claim that we could potentially find ourselves undoing the progress we have made since COP1, the first UN Climate Change Conference in 1995. When the new US administration took office, it was clear that the government would once again withdraw from the Paris Agreement. Unfortunately, it is not only the US that is slashing its budget – other industrialised nations are, too. This has serious implications for meaningful programmes in many countries in the Global South, which now have to work out how best to adapt to climate change and mitigate its further effects largely without foreign aid.

One argument put forward by countries that are scaling back their climate commitments is that it is time to focus inwards and take care of their own citizens. This argument is problematic because it ignores the historical responsibility of countries that became rich through the use of fossil fuels, while the most vulnerable populations, especially in the Global South, are now suffering from the climate impacts of this industrialisation. Making climate funding available to vulnerable communities is therefore not a favour rich countries are granting, but an obligation they must fulfil. That aside, Western countries will soon realise – if they have not already done so – that climate disasters will not spare their own populations, so looking after them also requires them to take climate action.

It is also sad that these budget cuts have come at such a crucial moment in the climate movement, just when important

discussions were starting to become more mainstream. After years of wrangling, the Loss and Damage Fund finally got off the ground, yet the contribution that ultimately flowed was a drop in the ocean compared to the GDP of those countries most responsible and to the profits reaped by oil giants.

REOPENING PEOPLE'S EYES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

So, what is sparking renewed awareness of climate change? Let me give two examples from my continent:

Communities in the Horn of Africa have experienced three failed rainy seasons in a row. Families have been devastated by the loss of their livestock, their main livelihood. Children are suffering from malnutrition and cannot go to school, forcing girls into early marriage as their parents can no longer meet the family's basic needs and have to reduce the number of mouths they have to feed.

“We must redefine climate —
not least in the media —
as a unifying element that
permeates all other aspects
of our lives.”

In southern Africa, communities in Mozambique are constantly on high alert, fearful of when the next cyclone will strike. They are exhausted by the prospect of having to start all over again after every cyclone, without adequate shelter, without enough food, without proper systems to support their recovery – and without the infrastructure to prepare for the next time.

These communities, whose reality is shaped by extreme weather, are very well aware of climate change, but often lack platforms to express themselves, tell their stories and participate in decision-making processes.

At the same time, it seems that many people in richer parts of the world only pay undivided and long-term attention to climate change when they are directly affected by disasters – or when their everyday lives are impacted by rising food prices or disruptive action taken by young people. These stories then easily find a platform and are repeated worldwide – at least until they are replaced by the next political news story.

What everyone around the world needs to understand is that their lives and those of people in Mozambique or the

Horn of Africa are inextricably linked. The effects of the climate crisis will affect us all, either directly in the form of extreme weather events and natural disasters, or indirectly as a result of entire regions of the world becoming uninhabitable and their residents seeking refuge elsewhere.

But why should we simply sit back and wait for this to happen? Now more than ever, we must hold institutions, governments and large companies accountable. This year, the 195 signatory states of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will submit their new Nationally Determined Contributions, which will need to be ambitious. Over the years, we have seen local communities take action to address their situation. The contributions must therefore be incorporated into solutions that best reflect the reality they face on the ground.

A UNIFYING ELEMENT

It is of utmost importance that we continue to prioritise climate action as a cross-cutting issue. Ultimately, we all depend on a viable planet – one where everyone has access to clean water and food, where vulnerable communities can be safe and children healthy, where businesses can thrive, and livelihoods are secured for present and future generations.

To reopen people's eyes to climate change, we must redefine climate – not least in the media – as a unifying element that permeates all other aspects of our lives and therefore take it into account in all our actions. We are fortunate to live in a time when the digital realm is constantly advancing, allowing us to easily build communities through online platforms that transcend geographical boundaries and create solidarity around what unites us: the impacts of climate change, however differently they may manifest in our different contexts.

This solidarity will help us maintain the necessary political and civil pressure to bring about change. The Earth is our shared responsibility, and we must act in our different roles and contexts to protect what sustains us all.



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Climate protest in Berlin.

MEDIA

The silent majority must make its voice heard

A new global study reveals that the vast majority of people want to see more climate action – yet many underestimate just how widespread this desire is. The 89 Percent Project wants to change this, and D+C is part of this initiative.

BY KATHARINA WILHELM OTIENO

The vast majority of people – 89% – want their governments to do more to fight the climate crisis. More than two thirds would even be willing to sacrifice one percent of their income to combat climate change. These are the findings of a study conducted by the University of Bonn, which surveyed 130,000 people from 125 countries.

People in China were among those who worried the most: 97% said their government should do more in the fight against climate change. Even in the US, three quarters of respondents had higher expectations of their government

– and nearly half would also be willing to donate a small part of their income to climate protection.

It comes as little surprise that people in countries already significantly impacted by the climate crisis are most vocal in calling for more action. What is astounding is that far fewer of those surveyed in rich countries were prepared to give even one percent of their income to support climate change mitigation.

The study was published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* in April 2025. Its results are a remarkably unequivocal

cal confirmation of what previous studies had already suggested: In 2024, around 75,000 people took part in a UN survey – in countries representing 90% of the world's population. 80% stated that they would like to see their country step up its climate action commitments. For a survey conducted by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication in 2023, 140,000 people in 187 countries were asked how high a priority climate change should be for their country's government. 89% said very high, high or medium.

SERIOUS PERCEPTION GAP

But if almost everyone in the world believes that climate change mitigation should be accorded higher priority, why is this attitude not reflected to a greater extent in concrete political action? After all, we are well on the way to significantly exceeding the 1.5-degree target, while extreme weather events such as droughts, flooding and forest fires are becoming increasingly frequent.

The Bonn study offers one possible answer: Most people massively underestimate the extent to which others in fact support climate action. On average, those 89% in favour of climate change mitigation believed that only around 43% of their fellow citizens shared their opinion.

This distorted perception has serious consequences. Anyone who believes they are alone in their view is more likely to keep quiet – even if their own opinion is in fact held by the majority. As a result, public support for climate action is underestimated and no political pressure is exerted. Environmental psychologists speak of a “spiral of silence”.

The Bonn-based research group used an experiment it carried out in the US, which likewise formed part of the study, to show that people are more willing to act – to donate or get politically involved, for example, – when they discover that most of their fellow citizens actually support climate action. So even when it comes to climate action, how we behave is determined by what we know about the behaviour of others. Teodora Boneva, an author of the Bonn study, drew the following analogy in the Guardian: if everyone else in a shared home is cleaning the dishes, you will do it too. If everyone else is just leaving their stuff, you won't bother either.

Experts have no doubt that one of the most powerful tools in the battle against the climate crisis is targeted communication that redresses the existing perception gaps. The problem is that the 11% of the world's population who argue against climate action do so much more loudly, thereby dominating public opinion. Because its voice is enormously amplified, this minority appears much larger than it is.

ACTIVATING THE SILENT MAJORITY

This is precisely where the 89 Percent Project comes in. It was initiated to bridge the gap between perception and reality. Part of the international media network Covering Climate Now, the initiative wants to help raise the profile of the “silent majority”. The aim is to use properly substantiated data-based reporting to make the public aware that climate action is by no means something that only soup-throwing environmental activists care about – but is an issue close to the hearts of people in every corner of the globe.

“Climate action has majority global support.”

Covering Climate Now (CCNow) was set up in 2019 by the Columbia Journalism Review and the US magazine The Nation in collaboration with the Guardian and the US radio station WNYC. Today the network encompasses more than 500 media partners in over 60 countries, from large news portals to local community media. D+C has also been a CCNow media partner since this year. The goal is that the climate crisis should not be addressed within a specific silo but in a comprehensive, accessible and continuous manner – with a view to permanently activating the public. To this end, the network provides editorial resources, training, joint reporting projects and platforms for journalistic exchange.

The central message of the 89 Percent Project is clear: climate action has majority global support. The challenge now is to make this majority visible so that it can achieve political impact. The media will play a crucial role in making this happen: those who explain that we are not alone in worrying about our existence on a planet that is becoming warmer and warmer will boost our trust in collective action. And this trust is one of the key prerequisites for preserving this existence.

LINK

89percent.org



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HEAT

The vicious circle of inattention

South Sudan has had to close schools for the second year in a row. As temperatures rose to 45 degrees Celsius, it was no longer possible to teach students in already overcrowded classrooms. It takes such clearly visible consequences of climate change to make people in this crisis-ridden country aware of the problem.

BY ALBA NAKUWA

South Sudan has been struggling with unpredictable weather conditions for years. Schools had to be temporarily closed in two consecutive years due to extreme weather. In March 2024 and February this year, the South Sudanese government closed all schools across the country for more than two weeks, leaving tens of thousands of students unable to attend classes.

This decision had to be taken to protect students from heat waves that saw temperatures soar as high as 45 degrees Celsius. It was among other things reports from non-governmental organisations such as Save the Children about students collapsing in schools in the capital Juba that prompted the government to take action.

The country is particularly vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis and extreme weather events. Rainy seasons, which last from May to July, are becoming increasingly intense, leading to flooding. This is followed by long dry spells from November to March, with severe heat waves.

Extreme weather has destroyed livelihoods and displaced communities, exacerbating existing inequalities and conflicts. Compared to other problems facing South Sudan, however, climate change receives little attention from the country's population and media.

“In February and March, classrooms become unbearably hot.”

The focus remains primarily on dealing with the consequences of many years of civil war and repeated ethnic conflicts, which are currently flaring up again and threatening South Sudan's fragile peace. High poverty rates among many parts of the population and problems in governance also attract a

Photo: dpa/ASSOCIATED PRESS/Brian Inganga



In Nzara, in the south of the country, students drink water during the February heatwave.

lot of public attention, meaning that climate-related challenges are not adequately addressed or prioritised.

Only when climate events become so extreme that children are forced for example to stay home from school for weeks do the public and the government become concerned. The school closures in February were among the reasons that prompted President Salva Kiir to invite the executive director of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to visit the country in March. It was the GCF's first-ever delegation to South Sudan. The GCF is supported by the UN and helps developing countries reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions and adapt to climate change.

A LACK OF PUBLIC PRESSURE LEADS TO WEAK GOVERNANCE

It is safe to say that weak governance and inadequate policy measures are eroding the country's ability to adapt to climate change. At the same time, this is because the government, in the absence of public pressure, is inclined to push the issue down the agenda – and has been very busy lately manoeuvring the country back to the brink of war through an escalating conflict between Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar and their respective supporters.

This vicious “circle of inattention” is then reflected in a dearth of adaptation measures, as can be seen from the example of school closures. Many secondary and primary schools lack the necessary infrastructure and are unable to cope with the challenges posed by extreme weather events. Most schools are made of sheet metal and have no electricity. Furthermore, most educational facilities are too small in any case to accommodate a large number of students. In February and March, classrooms become unbearably hot.

South Sudan is one of the countries with the lowest literacy rate in the world, at just 34%. Efforts are being made to improve this situation, but repeated long interruptions to schooling are obviously not helpful.

One solution could be to adjust the school calendar. For example, the Ministry of Education could introduce a school year based on two rather than three terms. This would mean that schools would remain closed from January to March in order to adapt to the climatic conditions and avoid further interruptions to learning. Many teachers and education policymakers are already calling for this.

More funding should also be allocated to renovating schools to improve ventilation. Air conditioning systems are not a viable option as they consume a lot of energy and contribute to air pollution. Heat-resistant building materials and architectural solutions are needed instead.

But all this requires attention that does not fade when temperatures drop again or the next wave of ethnic violence breaks out in a region. This is not easy, because the problems competing for attention in South Sudan – and in many other places around the world – are grave. The trouble is that climate change will eventually overshadow or exacerbate all other problems. It is the responsibility of civil society and the media to keep this in the public consciousness.



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ADAPTATION

Despite disaster, climate action is lacking

Pakistan has been heavily affected by extreme weather events in recent years. Experts urge policymakers in the country to implement existing policies to protect vulnerable communities. They criticise the fact that, even though Pakistanis have experienced devastating disasters, they have little interest in climate policy.

BY SYED MUHAMMAD ABUBAKAR

The 2022 floodings in Pakistan are considered the worst in the country's history.



Photo: dpa / ASSOCIATED PRESS / Faleed Khan

Pakistan was the country most affected by climate-related extreme weather events worldwide in 2022, according to the latest Climate Risk Index (CRI), which is published by the German civil-society organisation Germanwatch. The index analysed more than 170 nations around the world. Pakistan topped the list mainly because of its “exceptionally high relative economic losses”. Germanwatch acknowledges, however, that the country’s economic losses were also high in absolute terms, as was the number of affected people.

In 2022, Pakistan was devastated by floods, landslides and storms due to a heavy monsoon season that resulted in torrential rainfall. The 2022 floods are considered the worst in the country’s history. They affected more than 33 million people, cost more than 1700 lives and caused economic damages of nearly \$15 billion, Germanwatch writes with reference to data from the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters. Post-flood challenges included a lack of drinking water, a rise in water-borne diseases, malaria outbreaks and skin infections.

“Some experts argue that developing countries such as Pakistan should not expect much support from richer countries when it comes to tackling the consequences of climate change.”

Scientists who link extreme weather events to climate change say that the majority of models and observations show that intense rainfall has become heavier as Pakistan has warmed. Some models, they report, suggest that climate change could have increased the maximum rainfall intensity in the worst-hit provinces, Sindh and Balochistan, by up to 50%. According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, the country witnessed 243% more rainfall than usual in August 2022, making it the wettest August since 1961.

In addition to catastrophic rains, Pakistan also witnessed intense heat from March to May 2022. Temperatures reached more than 49 degrees Celsius in some parts of the

country. The heatwave “led to rapid glacial melting in northern Pakistan, which likely contributed to the floods,” says Sher Muhammad, cryosphere specialist at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). Scientists claim that climate change made the heatwave more likely, too.

SELF-RELIANCE INSTEAD OF BLAMING THE WEST

In the face of such devastating extreme-weather events, some Pakistanis point to the fact that the country’s population has contributed little to the climate crisis but is suffering immensely from climate impacts. They argue that Western industrialised countries and China have caused a significant portion of the world’s greenhouse-gas emissions and thus bear responsibility for damage caused by a warming planet – including in Pakistan.

While this is factually correct, some experts argue that developing countries such as Pakistan should not expect much support from richer countries when it comes to tackling the consequences of climate change. One of them is Tariq Banuri, Professor of Economics at the University of Utah, U.S., and member of the Pakistan Climate Change Council. “The media as well as policymakers tend to use these reports to lament the country’s vulnerability and guilt-trip the West for not providing badly needed aid for climate adaptation and damage compensation. This was never a winning strategy, but recent events have rendered it particularly meaningless and irrelevant,” he says.

Banuri refers to the fact that political opinion around the world has been shifting to the right, even the far right, in recent years – especially in Western countries. This shift, he argues, has coincided with changes in global governance, including the dismantling of the international aid system and growing isolationism. “Self-reliance has re-emerged as the optimal strategy for poorer countries,” he concludes. “The dismantling of USAID has to be seen as a culmination of a long period of right-wing dissatisfaction with international obligations. Some other donor countries have also indicated their intention to scale back their aid portfolios.”

Since the climate crisis will be a reality for a long time to come – no matter what action the global community takes in response – poor countries should “assess how to live with climate change, how to prosper in a world defined by climate change,” Banuri argues.

BEING BETTER PREPARED

The prerequisite for prospering is to ward off the worst climate impacts, however. For Pakistan, this means ensuring that the country will be better prepared for disaster in the future than it was in 2022. “The losses could have been re-

„The start of the 2025 monsoon season is a stark reminder that Pakistan’s national and provincial leadership should swiftly mobilise resources for more climate action.”

duced if (the national) Flood Protection Plan-IV had been developed and implemented on time,” says Aisha Khan, chief executive of the Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change (CSCCC), a Pakistani consortium of organisations with the aim to promote climate action. At the same time, she acknowledges that no one can be fully prepared for “something that is not quantifiable and exceeds forecasts by two to three hundred percent”.

Khan suggests that Pakistan should implement several policy measures to better adapt to climate change. She laments that while the country has developed a National Adaptation Plan, it lacks the means to implement it. “As the prime responsibility for adaptation falls on the provinces, it is important to work closely with the provincial governments and help them to develop detailed Provincial Adaptation Plans,” Khan says.

While she finds that attributing losses and damages to climate change, calling for climate justice and relying on external finance is a “good negotiating strategy”, Aisha Khan points out that it will not provide immediate solutions to the country’s humanitarian crisis. “Pakistan has to start implementing the policies it has developed on water, food and energy,” she says. She also urges policymakers to take measures to reduce the current population growth rate, empower women and make access to services more equitable. “The social and economic inequities in our society are going to explode when the survival of the majority is threatened by the dangers of climate change,” she warns.

PUTTING PRESSURE ON POLICYMAKERS

One reason why measures relating to climate change have not yet been implemented more effectively is that Pakistanis obviously consider other issues more important. Aisha Khan criticises this attitude. “While overall awareness of cli-

mate has increased in the last decade, the masses in Pakistan don’t put adequate pressure on policymakers to implement existing policies. The main reason behind this disconnect is low levels of interest in environmental issues and a high level of interest in politics, political parties and their agendas of rivalries. The media also does not give prime time to the climate, as the topic itself is of little interest to viewers,” she says.

One way to engage people in climate and environmental issues could be to present them in a more appealing way. “Clearly climate change advocacy needs a strategy that resonates with people and doesn’t simply share technical data and information,” Khan says.

The start of the 2025 monsoon season is a stark reminder that Pakistan’s national and provincial leadership should swiftly mobilise resources for more climate action. Vulnerable communities should be protected, and infrastructure needs to be made more resilient to climatic impacts. Even if Pakistan cannot prevent disasters like those in 2022, policymakers at least have a duty to minimise the damage.

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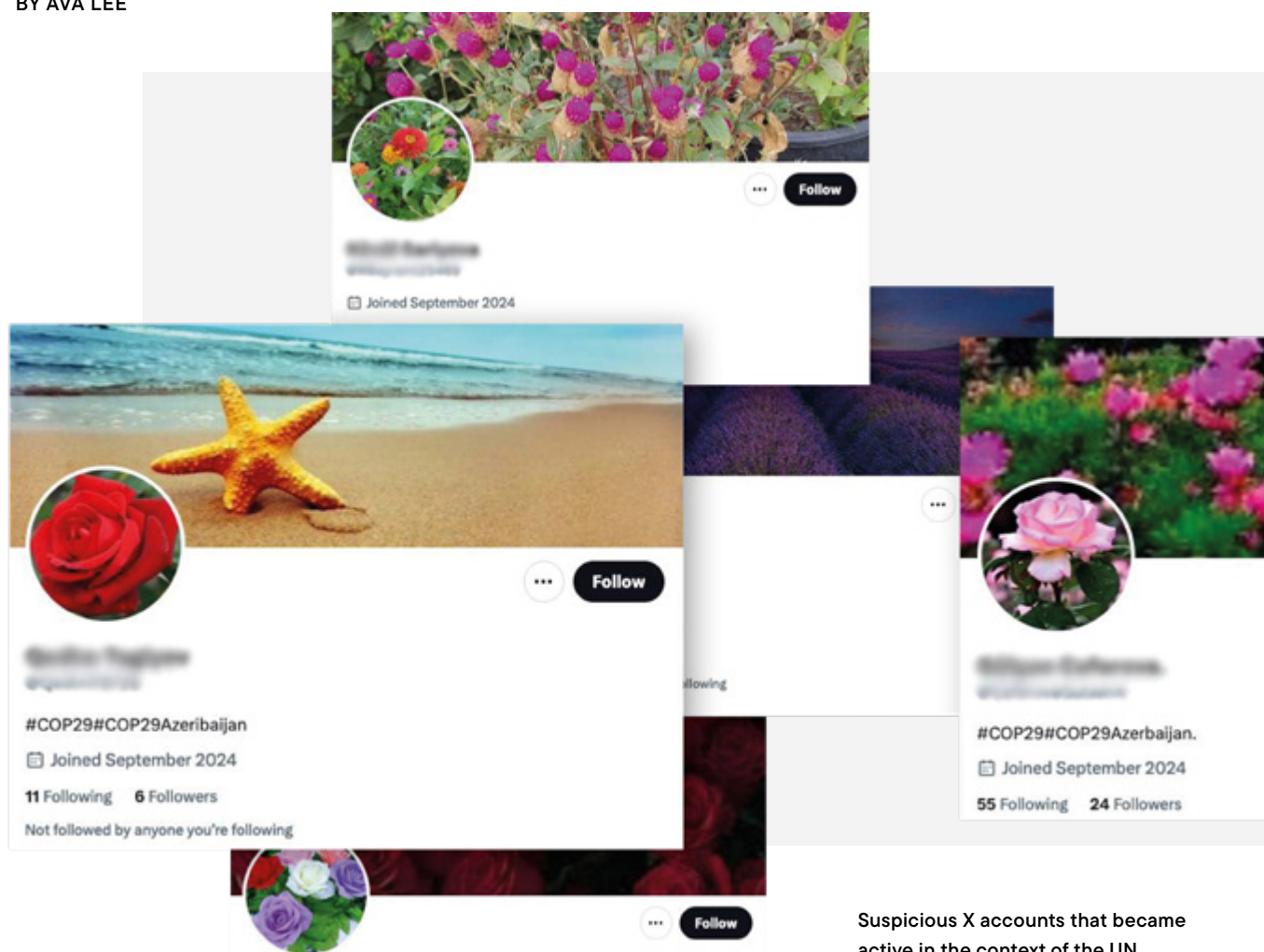
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INVESTIGATIVE RESEARCH

The profitable business of climate disinformation

In a world marked by increasingly frequent and extreme weather events, outright denial of global warming becomes less and less convincing. As a result, those who seek to undermine climate action have adapted their tactics. Today's climate disinformation is a complex web that includes false information, harassment and AI-powered green-washing posing significant challenges to climate action and public understanding.

BY AVA LEE



Suspicious X accounts that became active in the context of the UN Climate Conference in Baku 2024.

When most people think of climate disinformation, they envision outright denial that climate change exists or is caused by humans. While this does exist, the current landscape is far more nuanced, as research by Global Witness, the investigative human-rights organisation, shows.

Our Digital Threats to Democracy team is looking at how social-media companies deal with disinformation, hate speech and other worrying things happening online. At Global Witness, investigations take many forms, from undercover, data-led or traditional “follow-the-money” inquiries, to digital investigations. For the past year, we ran a dedicated Climate Disinformation Unit to investigate how climate disinformation spreads across major social-media platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and X. We found new forms of disinformation stretching well beyond traditional denial, encompassing everything from AI-facilitated greenwashing by major corporations to targeted harassment of climate defenders.

THE MANY FACES OF CLIMATE DISINFORMATION

Modern climate disinformation often takes the form of “distract and delay” narratives. These acknowledge that climate change is a problem but argue that other issues take priority. We often hear that net-zero targets are simply too expensive to pursue.

Greenwashing is a key feature of this category. Fossil-fuel companies and other major polluters often heavily promote the small fraction of their business focused on sustainability, while obscuring the environmental damage caused by their primary operations.

“Research consistently shows that content provoking anger and outrage generates the highest engagement rates. Disinformation and conspiracy are very effective at triggering these emotional responses.”

One major concern for us is perhaps a less obvious form of climate disinformation. Across social media we are seeing targeted harassment and hate directed at climate scientists, activists and environmental defenders. These are efforts to silence those voices we need to hear from the most.

AI'S COMPLEX ROLE IN CLIMATE DISINFORMATION

Tech platforms are increasingly integrating generative AI tools into search engines and messaging services. As these tools become widespread, they also shape how people access information about climate change. We found that artificial intelligence already plays a role in disseminating climate disinformation. However, not necessarily in the ways we expected.

We wanted to find out how four major chatbots respond to climate related queries. So, our Climate Disinformation Unit investigated Open AI's ChatGPT, X's Grok, Google's Gemini and Meta AI. While none engaged in outright climate denial, some amplified greenwashing, especially when asked about specific oil and gas companies. These systems often quoted directly from fossil fuel companies' websites and press releases, adding a seemingly neutral and authoritative veil to corporate messaging.

In one instance, Meta AI described the French multinational energy and petroleum company TotalEnergies' “commitment to sustainability” as “evident”. In another it characterised BP as “working towards helping the world reach net zero.” In contrast, X's Grok took a more critical approach in its “fun mode”, describing Shell's role at climate conferences as “a bit like inviting Dracula to a blood drive.”

As online experiences are increasingly filtered through these systems, it is crucial that we make sure that generative AI tools promote access to reliable information. Investigations are a key tool to hold companies accountable.

THE PROFITABLE BUSINESS OF CLIMATE DENIAL

The engagement-based business model of major tech platforms, where clicks, likes, comments and views are the ultimate currency, is making climate disinformation a good way to make money. Platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram or TikTok profit from keeping users online longer to show them more advertisements. In return, they share their advertisement profits with influencers to create even more content and ultimately engagement. Research consistently shows that content provoking anger and outrage generates the highest engagement rates. Disinformation and conspiracy are very effective at triggering these emotional responses.

What we found is that a well-known climate disinformation spreader was using this system to generate vast profits – for themselves and the tech platforms. In one investigation, we looked at the Epoch Times. It was created as an alternative media outlet by followers of the Falun Gong religious movement. Since the beginning of the century, it has platformed known climate deniers and amplified far-right views.

The New York Times once described it as operating a “global-scale misinformation machine”. Yet, the organisation continues to benefit from the digital advertising system.

Our Climate Disinformation Unit’s estimations suggest that Google ads running on Epoch Times webpages generated approximately \$ 960,000 for The Epoch Times and \$ 450,000 for Google in just one year. Tech platforms are creating financial incentives for spreading emotive rather than informative content, climate regulations are facing a backlash, and fact-checking programmes are being scaled back. Caught in this dangerous mix, we are all likely to face even more disinformation in the future.

“By eroding public trust, climate disinformation poses fundamental challenges to climate action. This often-manufactured division makes it harder for the people working at the forefront of climate action to do their work, and it hinders collective action.”

TARGETING CLIMATE DEFENDERS

Climate disinformation increasingly targets those working to defend the environment and promote climate action. Our own poll, conducted together with YouGov, revealed that approximately half of climate scientists who had published more than 10 papers, experience abuse and harassment online. These attacks at times include violent threats, are frequently gendered and lead to serious mental-health consequences. In the end they discourage scientists from speaking out about their work and for climate action, making it easier for vested interests to delay much needed climate action.

Prior to COP29 last November, our Climate Disinformation Unit uncovered another approach to drowning out criticism. In the lead up to the annual climate conference our team monitored the official COP29 hashtags on X. The conference was held in Baku in Azerbaijan, a petrostate with a terrible human rights record. Initially there was much scepticism and criticism being voiced. The criticism was warranted: just days before the opening of the conference, another investigation from our fossil fuel campaign caught the COP29 president on tape offering to help broker fossil fuel

deals.

As we got closer to the conference, our team noticed a shift in the conversation – it suddenly became very positive about the petrostate host. Across the board Azerbaijan’s official messaging was being amplified. In the end, we uncovered a network of 71 suspicious accounts that did little else but repost official COP29 posts. This created an artificial impression of grassroots support for the controversial host. While this particular operation was unsophisticated – all of these accounts sported similar nature and flower images on their profiles – networks often use much more advanced techniques that make it really hard for independent researchers to detect.

This year’s COP30 is scheduled for Brazil – a country that consistently ranks among the deadliest for climate activists. This is cause for serious concerns about escalating harassment campaigns and attacks on our information ecosystem.

THE PATH FORWARD

By eroding public trust, climate disinformation poses fundamental challenges to climate action. This often-manufactured division makes it harder for the people working at the forefront of climate action to do their work, and it hinders collective action.

The evolution of climate disinformation from outright denial to campaigns of misdirection, harassment and confusion reflects the stakes involved in the climate debate. As the climate crisis intensifies, so too must efforts to identify, understand and counter the forces seeking to undermine climate action through the deliberate spread of false information.

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CLIMATE ACTIVISM

“The climate movement is much less naive now”

Linus Steinmetz was one of the most prominent faces of Fridays for Future in Germany and contributed to tightening German climate legislation by filing a successful constitutional challenge. In this interview he talks about the setbacks faced by the climate movement, the mistakes made by organisations such as Just Stop Oil and why, despite everything, he remains optimistic about the future.

LINUS STEINMETZ IN AN INTERVIEW WITH JÖRG DÖBEREINER



Photo: dpa / ZUMAPRESS.com / Marco Di Gianvito

Climate protests by Fridays for Future in Rome in April.

International headlines in recent months have been dominated by the conflicts in the Middle East, Kashmir and Ukraine. Multiple column inches and minutes of airtime have also been devoted to US President Donald Trump's tariffs policy and the election of the new pope, Leo XIV. During the German federal election campaign, migration and the economic situation in Germany were the key issues. Is enough media and political attention currently being paid to the climate crisis?

No, despite this being the central crisis we are facing in the 21st century. It affects countless areas. Why is Donald Trump suddenly staking a claim to Greenland? Naturally he is keen to get his hands on the resources there, but he is also counting on the polar ice melting – factoring climate change into his plans, in other words. International politics and climate change are inextricably linked these days.

Furthermore, surveys show that many people in Germany and elsewhere are still taking the climate crisis very seriously. They are worried about the climate and their future. And yet the climate crisis is much less prominent in media reporting than one would expect.

What is the reason for this?

For one thing, the climate crisis is a difficult story to tell by comparison with other topics. Many people take a very acute view of it as a major problem but still see it as an unsettling background issue that is difficult to really get their heads around. Other urgent crises around the world are more tangible and easier to report on. What is more, it is clear that the necessary structures have not yet been sufficiently established: Media, movements and political parties still have their work cut out to build dedicated climate reporting capacity. Foreign correspondents have a much higher profile than climate correspondents – when indeed the latter exist at all. This may also be a generational problem: Many young journalists would like to write more about the climate crisis but find themselves having to report about energy or international policy. At least there is no lack of stories to tell, as the impacts of the climate crisis can be found everywhere.

What is the current mood in the climate action community?

There are various emotions, one being a sense of disillusionment. We no longer talk as much about stepping up our climate action ambitions, for example at the major climate conferences or at EU level. Instead, it's more about how we can ensure that at least a minimum degree of climate policy is enacted. And we don't exactly have the feeling that we are winning this battle just now. At the same time, many people take a pragmatic and, in some cases, optimistic view

of the future. We know that the problem won't go away. In Germany, the climate movement will be keeping a very close eye on the coalition government. There were major political shifts last year, both in Germany and abroad, and now we have a clearer idea of where we stand. Obviously, it is depressing to see Donald Trump in the White House. But it's also clear now whom we climate activists are struggling against: him and the other leaders whose policies are jeopardising our planet and our future on all kinds of levels. This results in a new clarity that is energising us.

The mood was rather different when Fridays for Future began to become popular in 2018.

We were euphoric, and many of us thought it was just the beginning of something that would go on and on. There were more of us every week, exerting pressure on politicians. It was embarrassing for politicians not to be on our side. And yet it has now become completely acceptable again to demand backpedalling on the climate. That's partly why we are disillusioned, though we have also become more realistic. At COP25 in Madrid in 2019 for example, very many people sided with us and voiced their support for more ambitious goals. We know now which of them meant it seriously. The climate movement is much less naive now.

“To communicate the climate crisis, it is essential to name and shame those who are causing it. I'm talking about large fossil fuel companies which have no interest in climate action and do everything in their power to delay the transition.”

Just a few months after the conference in Madrid, the whole issue of the climate was overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic. Studies show that climate reporting initially declined internationally but then picked up again around the climate summits in Glasgow in 2021 and Sharm el-Sheikh in 2022. Generally speaking, it is now at a higher level than before Fridays for Future was launched.

Our protests were certainly not in vain. On the contrary, the millions who took to the streets achieved an incredible amount. Many people around the world now acknowledge the problem, and as soon as the time is right will once again

devote a great deal of their time and energy to combating the climate crisis – or indeed are already doing so. The major fossil-fuel companies and political actors such as Donald Trump may believe that they can continue to promote fossil energies far into the future, supported with loans from banks. In my view this is an overly complacent attitude, as it simply won't make financial sense in the long run. That's why, despite all the setbacks that we have definitely experienced, I remain optimistic. We will continue to make progress.

What needs to happen to focus more positive attention on climate action again?

One of our biggest problems in Germany was that we didn't state clearly enough who is actively in favour of climate action and who is against it. We tried too hard to integrate everyone. But to communicate the climate crisis, it is essential to name and shame those who are causing it. I'm talking about large fossil-fuel companies which have no interest in climate action and do everything in their power to delay the transition. In recent years they have openly admitted that they do not take their own climate targets seriously.

“It is essential to be aware of the impact one will have and how one will come across when demonstrating for a cause in public – after all, it can also backfire.”

Often it is specific events that cause people to focus their attention on the climate again: annual climate conferences, the publication of reports, large-scale climate protests or natural disasters. How significant are such events?

They continue to play an important role. People need to experience time and again that they can take action against the climate crisis at the local level – be it by taking part in strikes and demonstrations or getting involved in clubs and associations. The worst thing we could do would be to say that the climate crisis is awful but that we don't think we as individuals can do anything about it, so we will just step out of the limelight and get on with our lives. At the same time, it must be clear that these events alone are not enough. An expert report or a couple of successful lawsuits will not transform climate policy. What is required is a more fundamental shift and much larger majorities, which is why youth movements are needed again.

Is that an appeal to the next generation?

People would often appeal to me when I was 15, which is why I'm not keen now, as an adult, to make similar appeals to 15-year-olds. But yes, I do believe that a shift towards more real climate policy could be sparked again by creative democratic protests, by people taking to the streets. That's why it is important to give the many people who have not yet taken to the streets various opportunities to get to know and learn from one another, for example at local weekday meetings. Sooner or later, such structures lead to genuine, rapid and sudden change, as was the case with Fridays for Future.

At the height of its popularity, Fridays for Future was mobilising huge numbers of people to take part in demonstrations. The next protest wave chose a different way to draw attention to itself: Representatives of Just Stop Oil in the UK or Die Letzte Generation in Germany blocked busy roads and airport runways. They poured tomato soup over paintings by Vincent van Gogh and daubed the stones at Stonehenge with orange paint. Though this made them the target of a great deal of criticism, it did not have the same mobilising effect as Fridays for Future did.

This kind of protest didn't make people angry about bad climate policy but about the protests themselves. By contrast, Fridays for Future's aim was not to provoke people but to galvanise them to take action against bad climate policy. One major problem is that this more radical approach to climate communication has made it easy for those who have no interest in climate action to discredit it. Nonetheless, the protesters' intentions were not wrong per se, it's just that they opted for the wrong means. That should serve as a lesson: It is essential to be aware of the impact one will have and how one will come across when demonstrating for a cause in public – after all, it can also backfire.



LINUS STEINMETZ

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Photo: dpa / ASSOCIATED PRESS / Peter Dejong

What motivates people to take climate action? Namibia-based activist Ina-Maria Shikongo at a demonstration during the COP28 UN Climate Summit in Dubai in 2023.

CLIMATE COMMUNICATION

What psychology teaches us about communicating climate change

The media, scientists and activists are all trying to make people understand the urgent need for climate action. Yet too little is happening. Which arguments are most effective in conveying this message? A global study on the psychology of climate change provides some answers. We talked to Kimberly Doell, who led the international team of researchers.

KIMBERLY CRYSTAL DOELL IN AN INTERVIEW WITH EVA-MARIA VERFÜRTH

You have led one of the largest global studies of climate-change psychology, involving over 59,000 participants from 63 countries. The outcome is surprisingly positive: 86% of participants believe in climate change, and 73% support policies that tackle it. However, this does not seem to be adequately reflected in policymaking, public debate or the media.

There are many reasons. An important one is pluralistic ignorance: people tend to vastly underestimate how much other people believe in climate change. Pluralistic ignorance is one of the psychological barriers which prevent people from taking action on climate change. We call them “dragons of inaction”, which is a really fitting name. A study we conducted in the United States revealed that even policymakers significantly underestimated public support for policies tackling climate change.

What are other reasons?

Furthermore, it is difficult to translate what the public wants into actual practice. In order to reduce our carbon footprint, humankind will have to give up certain things or behaviours. However, if you ask people who should take responsibility, most will point the finger at someone else: big oil, the airlines, agricultural companies or the government. People also don't want to be the ones who have to pay for it. So, although people generally support climate-friendly policies, they don't support policies that affect them personally.

During the Covid-19 pandemic we saw that decisive global action is possible. From a psychological perspective, why was the policy response to the pandemic so much more resolute than the response to climate change?

The way people and governments dealt with and communicated about both crises was quite similar. The difference is the timescale: the threat of the pandemic was immediate; it needed to be dealt with here and now. One of the major challenges in raising awareness of climate change is temporal discounting, which is another dragon of inaction.

What is “temporal discounting”?

Humans are known to prioritise immediate rewards over future rewards, even when the future rewards are better. For example, if I offer to give a person either \$5 now or \$20 in a year, most people will choose to receive the money now, even though it is four times less than what I'd give them in the future. That's also part of the reason why people smoke. As lung cancer only develops after several decades, people are confident that they won't be affected. If smoking caused lung cancer the next day, it would

certainly lead to a huge decline in smoking. Similarly, climate change is easy to ignore, because its effects are neither immediate nor concrete.

But the effects of climate change have become very threatening and palpable in many parts of the world. Yet people don't seem to be feeling any greater sense of urgency. We talk about the weather, the droughts and the heat, but not about climate change itself.

This is the challenge of attribution: heat waves, floods and other extreme weather events have always occurred, so it's difficult to determine whether a certain event has been exacerbated by climate change.

What measures could be taken to overcome these psychological hurdles?

It depends very much on who you are. In our study, we tested 11 different psychological interventions that could potentially increase climate awareness, policy support and pro-environmental behaviour. Our goal was to find the most effective solution. However, we found that none of the interventions had a significant overall impact across all the factors we measured. In other words: there is no single solution that will work for everyone. Whether you are a man or a woman, young or old, politically left-wing or right-wing – all these factors determine the effect an intervention will have on you. An argument that works on someone who's more liberal might backfire on someone who's more conservative.

“If a piece of information puts people in a negative mood, they tend to go on social media and post about it.”

Can you give an example?

Consider Germany and Austria, which have a lot in common culturally. In Austria, it was found that “reducing psychological distance” was the most effective way to encourage climate-friendly behaviour. Participants were asked to consider the short-term risks posed by climate change to their country. In Germany, however, this intervention had the opposite effect.

What were the interventions about, and how did you assess their effectiveness?

The interventions were basically pieces of information or small tasks related to climate change awareness (find the detailed description [here](#)). For example, to test the “scientific consensus” intervention, participants were given a text stating that climate scientists agree that the Earth is warming. Before and immediately after reading the text, we asked participants a series of questions: To what extent do you believe in climate change? To what degree do you support policies meant to mitigate climate change? How willing are you to share this information on social media? We also tested how much they were willing to engage in a high effort behaviour to help offset carbon emissions. We then compared how each group differed from another group that didn’t see any text or task.

The study’s main finding was that there is no one-size-fits-all intervention. But which intervention performed best on a global scale?

While it depends on who you are, I would say the “Letter to future generations” was one of the most successful interventions. Participants were asked to write a letter to a child who would read it in 25 years’ time, describing their current efforts to ensure a habitable planet. Although it had some negative outcomes in certain places, it generally increased people’s belief and support.

Did you discover any other general findings or patterns?

Negative emotions and social media are closely intertwined. If a piece of information puts people in a negative mood, they tend to go on social media and post about it.

The research project led to 300,000 trees being planted. What’s the story behind that?

This came about through the behaviour change test. We gave participants a tedious and time-consuming task that required them to work through several pages. For every page they completed successfully, we promised to plant a tree with the Eden Reforestation Project on their behalf. This resulted in over 300,000 trees being planted! The task was effortful and time-consuming, as is the case with most sustainable and pro-environmental behaviours. It’s much easier to throw a bottle away in the nearest bin than to find ways to recycle it. One of the most exciting results was that over 50 % of all of our participants worldwide were willing to put the maximum effort into this task. This suggests that half the population is willing to put in a lot of effort if this helps stop climate change!

Based on your findings, how should the media, politicians and the scientific community communica-

te with the public about climate change to encourage greater action?

No one message will work for everybody, but I recommend avoiding negative emotions. Most information about climate change conveys a very negative message of doom and gloom. This works well on social media but has unpredictable outcomes in all other areas. Having said that, it’s really difficult to write about climate change without evoking some negative emotion.

What would you recommend doing instead?

Try using a reference to personal legacy. What kind of future do you want for the children close to you? How do you want their futures to be? Personal legacy is something that a lot of humanity takes fairly seriously.

What intervention would work best on you personally?

“Effective collective action,” certainly. It shows examples of successful collective action that has had meaningful effects or solved global issues, such as the restoration of the ozone layer. We all perceive climate change to be such a huge problem that it is almost impossible to overcome. Restoring people’s sense of collective efficacy, the idea that we can have an impact on this massive problem, could help motivate people to join forces and work together. Human beings are incredibly resilient and powerful, especially when working towards a common goal.

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The international dataset on the psychology of climate change is accessible online via a web application. You can filter the results by categories such as country, age or income to see how the 11 psychological interventions affected the respective group: climate-interventions.shinyapps.io/climate-interventions



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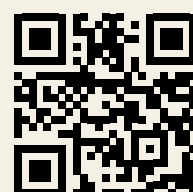
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GLOBAL WARMING

Climate change in numbers

Global events are coming thick and fast, forcing climate change to take a back seat — yet global warming is continuing unabated. Let us keep you up to date with the key facts and figures.

BY ISAH SHAFIQ

1.55 °C

was the amount by which the global average temperature exceeded pre-industrial levels in 2024. It is very likely therefore that 2024 was the first year in which the 1.5 °C target laid down in the Paris Agreement was surpassed. The El Niño phenomenon also played its part in this, alongside the ongoing rise in greenhouse gases.¹

Roughly 90 %


of the excess heat caused by global warming is stored in the oceans, meaning that sea temperatures are one critical indicator of climate change. The rate of warming over the past two decades (2005–2024) was more than twice as high as in the period 1960–2005.¹

The last 10 years

have all been amongst the 10 hottest on record, making for an unusual series of temperature records.¹

102 mm

is the extent to which sea levels rose between 1993 and 2025.² The speed of the increase has more than doubled from 2.1 mm per year (1993–2002) to 4.7 mm per year (2015–2024).¹



74 %

of 750 extreme weather events worldwide were exacerbated or made more probable by climate change, according to studies.³

45.5 million

people were displaced internally in 2024 as a result of weather-related disasters such as flooding, storms, forest fires and drought. This is nearly twice the average of the last 10 years. By the end of 2024, 9.8 million people were living in internal displacement because of disasters. This includes those forced to leave their homes in recent years who had not been able to return or find any long-term solution by 2024.⁴

4.2 trillion dollar

is the total inflation-adjusted cost of the damage wreaked by extreme weather events between 1993 and 2022 – roughly equivalent to Germany's gross domestic product. More than 765,000 people died as a consequence of extreme weather during this period.⁵

One in eight

deaths globally was attributable to air pollution in 2019. This equates to around 6.7 million fatalities.⁷



19 %

is the amount by which the world economy risks seeing its income reduced by 2050 versus a scenario without climate change impacts, a study has found out. This would even apply if future emissions were drastically cut or halted. Known as “committed damages”, these are the result of historic emissions. By contrast, damages post-2049 will largely depend on future emissions.⁶

60 %

is the amount by which income losses in those countries least responsible for climate change will surpass those of countries with high emissions.⁶

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