

WHO WILL SAVE THE PLANET?

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It is in the basic human nature to play the blame game when we are very close to finding out we may be at fault. Whether it is a defence mechanism, or just the belief of “offense being the best form of defence,” truth is, it is always easier for us to shift the blame than to assume responsibility and put ourselves in a position which requires the effort to change.

And perhaps for this sole reason, in a world where the average global temperature is constantly rising and previous predictions made about the devastating impacts of climate change actually coming true, “climate change denial” persists and the people with the greatest capacity to make a difference actually accuse climate change to be a scam with probable political and financial agenda.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

In the mid-18th century, around the time the Industrial Revolution took place, fossil fuel emerged as the primary source of energy. The indelible combination of the exponentially increasing energy consumption and a major population boom would thus cause energy demands to increase with greater intensity. This would eventually lead to the emission of a huge amount of harmful greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. These greenhouse gases – mainly carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxides and chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) – trap the solar radiation in the atmosphere instead of allowing them to be reflected back.

This, along with pollution, deforestation and other activities causing major ecological damage would then cause irrevocable damage to the climate of the world. A permanent increase in the global temperature, a higher sea level due to glaciers melting, more fierce natural calamities (i.e. hurricanes, floods) and extreme and unbearable temperatures are only a few examples of the devastating impacts of the greenhouse effect and global warming. Detrimental effects to the environment automatically result in the destruction of biodiversity and ecological balance. (The Causes of Climate Change, 2019)

The future impacts that have been predicted throughout the years are happening right now. The problem we’ve been learning about in textbooks and reports throughout the years is not an issue for the future, it is a problem for the present and this is our last chance to make a difference.

CAN WE STILL FIX THIS?

Reports conclude that the solution to this problem requires



two aspects to be considered: the mitigation of climate change, and the adaptation to the change that has already occurred.

The mitigation refers to the reduction of the sources of greenhouse gases and the increment of “sinks” that would allow the gases to be accumulated. Overall, the goal is to decrease human interference with the climate and alleviate the levels of greenhouse gases in enough time to allow the ecosystems to adapt to the changes naturally. Adaptation on the other hand involves preparing the ecosystems for the future climate and reducing the vulnerability of the ecosystem to the occurring changes. (Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, 2019)

A major part of combating climate change has always been about reducing plastic waste and keeping the air clean. The weight thus has been translated to individual consumers to make “environment-friendly” choices. From avoiding plastic products to limiting meat consumption, it seems as if the entire weight of combating climate change is on the shoulders of the general public, even though individual choices make up a very small portion of a large effort to make a sustainable change.



THE PROBLEM OF UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Suppose a man of the average income group walks into a grocery store to buy a water bottle. He’s given the option to choose between a plastic water bottle of about USD 2 and a planet-friendly stainless steel water bottle with a UV-C light in the cap to clean and purify the water that costs about USD 95 (Valle, 2018), he is probably not going to give a second thought before obviously choosing the plastic option given the 4650 percent difference in price.

Now, suppose a lady wants to invest in a house, and is about to spend all of her savings to barely afford the down payment. She will be taking a home loan to pay for the rest of it, as she also has a family to look after. She is then given the choice to save a good amount of money on a regular

house with up-to-date facilities that serve her well, or to spend a large amount more on an energy efficient house that has been retrofitted. She would also probably go for the first option.

In a world where 6.75 billion people (Kharas & Hamel, 2018) are either in the vulnerable or middle socio-economic class, and most of these people being in crippling debt, unable to afford basic housing and barely making ends meet, the environment-friendly product range is something

that they simply cannot afford. With these people taking up mostly all of the population, they are basically responsible for driving demand in the global economy. So, it’s safe to say there is very little demand for extremely expensive products that may help us go green, especially when individually these products have almost negligible impact.

The shift of responsibility to the general population is therefore not something that can create the change necessary, and definitely not at the scale that is required. So, who do we turn to?

HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

When the ones on the receiving end do not have the capability to help make a difference, you turn to the ones responsible for the massacre. According to the Carbon Major’s Report in 2017, 70 percent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions

can be tracked down to 100 renowned companies. (Griffin, 2017).

These major fossil fuel companies, for the better part of the past century, have wrecked the climate beyond repair. “This ground-breaking report pinpoints how a relatively small set of fossil fuel producers may hold the key to systematic change on carbon emissions,” says Pedro Faria, Technical Director at CDP (formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project) (CDP, 2017). Having played some of the major roles in the global warming phenomenon, it is now the responsibility of the 200 million rich, many of whom are investors of these companies to take a crucial step forward to

majorly

reduce their carbon footprints.

While our attempts to use less hot water while taking a shower and to switch off lights and fans when not in use have remained futile over the years, a systematic and globalised approach with all the countries, governments, and corporations coming together could actually help mitigate, if not completely revert, climate change. A few recent studies have revealed that “seaweed” can actually be a much better alternative to plastic products. It can be moulded into shapes according to the requirement and has the added benefit of having actual nutritional value instead of harmful side effects. Most importantly, it

is biodegradable in nature unlike plastic, and also leaves behind next to no waste during production. In case that wasn’t enough, seaweed forests can actually trap a lot more carbon dioxide than a land-based forests and can actually be a solution to the global warming problem.

This may just be our last chance to deal with the climate change problem. The extreme heat, the unusual weather patterns are all the impacts of global warming, and what we see now are impacts of a mere 1 degree Celsius change. The impacts of a change of 1.5 degrees to 2 degrees will turn our worst realities true at an unprecedented rate. The needs of the near future must be put forward, and steps must be taken to save the environment. As the Greek proverb goes, “A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.”

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