

Climate Change - How can Families make a difference

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The family is the basic unit of society and can be an important resource when it comes to the climate and what needs to be done. With the right conditions, families and all individuals can make a difference in influencing climate change.

World leaders must act urgently and put more pressure on those who today account for the majority of all emissions and who therefore have the greatest responsibility. Underlying causes of climate change, poverty, hunger, migration and other imminent human suffering such as war, conflict, military buildup, mass production and mass consumption must be addressed and major changes must be implemented now.

We have damaged the earth and treated its resources as if they were not finite and must now return to living in respect for and in harmony with nature and the earth, which is the prerequisite for human life.

Climate Changes

Human activities have unequivocally caused global warming mainly through greenhouse gas emissions, and vulnerable communities that have contributed least to current climate change are disproportionately affected.

Global emissions of greenhouse gases have continued to increase, as a result of unsustainable energy use, land use, land-use change and lifestyles and consumption and production patterns.

Climate change is causing many weather and climate extremes in all regions worldwide and continued greenhouse gas emissions will lead to increased global warming, with the best estimate reaching 1.5°C in the short term. / *All according to the IPCC, 2023: Summary for Policymakers.*

If the global temperature rises by three degrees Celsius, it would mean a disaster and everyone on earth would be affected. And given that the UN Climate Panel estimates that global warming will reach 3.2 degrees by 2100, if we continue in the same way, the situation is alarming to say the least.

In the UN Emissions Gap Report from 2023 it's stated that the world needs to cut 2030 emissions by 28 percent to get on a least-cost pathway for the 2°C goal of the Paris Agreement and 42 by percent for the 1.5°C goal.

Burning fossil fuels, deforestation and increasing livestock farming are influencing the climate and the earth's temperature. This adds enormous amounts of greenhouse gases to those naturally occurring in the atmosphere, increasing the greenhouse effect and global warming.

A heat increase of 3 degrees would mean prolonged desertification, drought, extreme rainfall, heat waves, fires, floods, rising sea levels, storm surges, extreme heat, wet-bulb temperatures (measure of heat and humidity), which in turn leads to increased poverty, starvation, migration, conflicts and death for plants, animals and people.

We already see how the changes affect many countries, **Bangladesh** having more and worse floods, environmental problems and loss of biodiversity. Millions of people have been forced to flee within the country. More than half of the population lacks clean drinking water, groundwater levels are falling and saltwater intrusion threatens both agriculture and public health in coastal areas.

In **Guatemala**, drought and tropical cyclones have exacerbated poverty and food insecurity. The country is one of the largest economies in Central America, but 65 percent of the country's most fertile lands are owned by 2.5 percent of private landowners who have created monocultures for exports, such as coffee, palm oil, rubber trees and sugar. Half of the population lives in poverty and every second child suffers from chronic malnutrition. Among indigenous peoples, almost four out of five live in poverty and 90 percent of their children are malnourished.

Countries with greater capacity and responsibility for emissions, like **Sweden**, will need to take more ambitious and rapid action and provide financial and technical support to developing nations, according to the UN Emissions Gap Report 2023.

For the world to keep the global temperature increase well below two degrees, the emissions of greenhouse gases need to come down as far below 2 tonnes per person as possible by 2050, and in **Sweden** the carbon footprint is 10 tonnes. The policy presented by the current Swedish government is not sufficient for achieving the 2030 climate targets and instead of reducing emissions, they will actually increase. Positive measures that have been decided on will not compensate for the omission of major emission reductions in Sweden by 2030, *according to the Swedish Climate Policy Council.*

We can use technical possibilities to reduce emissions, e.g. through electrification based on renewable production.

Increase carbon storage in forest ecosystems instead of continuing deforestation.

Pricing carbon dioxide is important or as an alternative trade emission permits under emission caps that are lowered year by year.

But the reason why this is not enough is that emissions need to be reduced quickly, particularly in the most developed countries. Another reason is that rapid growth from an already high level of consumption also brings other problems, e.g. loss of biological diversity and overfishing of the oceans as well as large emissions from mineral extraction and processing and in the form of residual products (e.g. plastics).

Time to Care

We have been encouraged to work, produce and consume more to increase economic wealth in the world and a growth in GDP. Economic independence and individual achievements have become the yardsticks of freedom and success. Equality between women and men strive towards a male norm, working full-time and being independent from care responsibilities, while unpaid care and domestic work that is the prerequisite for all other work has remained invisible, as have those who perform it, mainly women and girls.

But when everyone is in this system with full-time jobs while their children are cared for in institutions, it becomes difficult to take the necessary environmental responsibility as one the most important components disappears: **Time**.

It takes time to give care, time to cook from scratch, time to take care of your home, care for your clothes and other belongings. Time to grow your own food, time to care for nature and

animals in a sustainable way. Time to maintain a community with neighbors, family and friends and it takes time to live in a climate-friendly way.

Solutions when time is limited can be: fast and processed food instead of organic nutritious food that you cook from scratch. 17 percent of total global food production is wasted in households, in the food service and in retail all together, according to the UN.

Fast means of transport can be preferred over sustainable alternatives. Who chooses to walk or cycle when you can take the car, or the train when you can fly?

It takes time to transfer knowledge and values between generations as well as time to create sustainable habits and increase awareness of climate change. In many parts of the world, the value and deeper understanding of this has been lost in recent years and a large part of what we call unpaid and invisible work is in fact an important part of creating a sustainable society.

The children we leave behind to our world

What kind of children are we leaving to take care of the earth and will they have the awareness required, to care for the earth and the climate?

We must bring up children in a conscious way and start by acknowledging the existing research concerning children's needs. Children need more time with us and especially during the first sensitive years of life. The attachment to a primary caregiver is crucial when brain development happens at the rapid speed with more than 1 million neural connections every second. This is the time when the foundations for future learning, behavior and health are formed and families need flexible working hours, economic and parental support, especially to the mother as she often is the main caregiver.

Habits

Individual consumers can influence the emissions by becoming more aware and better informed and by creating new habits . Here are some examples of what we can do.

- **Travel in different ways:** which car we drive and how much and how far and how often we fly. *Example: a car with a gasoline engine can emit 2-3 tons of carbon dioxide equivalents per year; while a person's round-trip flight between Sweden and Asia produces roughly the same emissions.*
- **Change eating habits,** reduce meat consumption, buy local - grow your own food and choose ecological food. *Example: A piece of beef a day can result in emissions of*

more than one tonne of carbon dioxide equivalents per person per year, while a different diet can cause a tenth of the emission level.

- **Heat and cool our houses in a better and sustainable way,**
- *Use electricity in an effective way* To reduce the use of oil and gas, we will need to use more electricity but it should be done in an efficient way
- **Recycle**
- **Reduce consumption,** reuse and mend and become a careful consumer. If spending is reduced, we would not have to work as much and instead of working more to buy things we don't need, we could spend less, work less and have more time.
- **Work less** - more time for a balanced life and to have time to live climate-friendly
- **Influence others** Make an impact by getting involved in movements and organizations and being role models who showcase sustainable choices on various platforms, such as social media.

It is largely about all the choices we make in everyday life. The food we eat, the clothes we wear, the goods we choose, the way we transport ourselves. Much that easily can become new habits.

Åsa Axelsson, The Swedish author who wrote the book, “Jag lämnar ekorrhjulet” (“I leave the rat race”), a mother of four who was forced to change her lifestyle after falling ill due to work-related stress. She did a cost experiment with all the savings she could make thanks to staying at home instead of working full time, which was possible thanks to a partner who could be responsible for the main supply.

What did she do? For example, she cooked all the food from scratch, baked, grew her own vegetables, cycled and walked instead of taking the car, mended clothes and shoes instead of buying new ones, minimized purchases and limited shower time for everyone, grew her own vegetables, baked bread, and compared prices. The food savings went from 740 USD to 416 USD/month and at the end of the year, she added up all the savings, which totaled \$30,800, more than the annual salary she earned as a teacher.

She asked the four children to write down what they wished for when the experiment was over, which proved to be difficult for them. One wanted to get a haircut at a hairdresser's, one to buy a garment, one to donate money to the poor and one wanted to travel and visit grandparents more often.

Åsa recovered from the stress symptoms thanks to the adjustments she and the family made and found a more balanced and harmonious life while their climate footprint was significantly reduced. It's an adjustment that requires time and determination, and for them as a family it has meant a change in a positive direction that still continues. What would happen if more of us followed their example?

Frida - a young committed environmental activist

Frida is Åsa's daughter and, like many young people around the world, she is committed to the climate. Three years ago, when she was fifteen, she got to see a documentary at school and it made a big impression on her. She realized the urgency and wanted to do something so she started making her own changes, one of which was to stop eating meat.

During the pandemic, she thought about and worried about climate change for a whole year and found an organization where she became active. Together with others who shared her concerns and dared to speak up and do something, she felt hope and a deeper meaning. School feels pointless and unimportant and takes up time when the conditions of life on Earth are at stake and someone has to do something.

"Adults don't take responsibility, they don't have time," she says.

Frida is active in the organization Reclaim the Future and is together with many other young people at the forefront of the fight for the climate, not least Greta Thunberg, who has drawn more attention to the climate crisis than anyone else

A New Narrative

Despite the necessity to make adaptations for the climate, we are encouraged to work more, consume more and redistribute unpaid work to someone else. Instead of being given the opportunity to downshift and reduce our consumption, we are needed in production to create economic growth, which is counterintuitive given that “the size of the income is by far the most important factor in terms of consumption and climate footprint.”, *Per Kågeson, Swedish Professor in Environment System Analysis.*

Sweden's GDP per capita has doubled since the beginning of the 1980s when we already had a very high material standard of living, while no shortening of working hours has been implemented after 1980.

We have been treating natural resources, ecosystems and women's labour as infinite and undervalued in the current metrics of economic growth, such as GDP, despite it being essential to all economies and the well-being of present and future generations and the planet, *as stated at the 66th Commission on the Status of Women in 2022.*

The fact that we have failed to include unpaid work in the economy has far-reaching consequences such as poverty and inequality between women and men. 1 in every 10 women in the world lives in extreme poverty, men own 50% more than women globally and the 22 richest men in the world own more than all the women in Africa.

Inequality between rich and poor is also increasing and the crises we have experienced the last three years, a global pandemic, war, a cost-of-living crisis and climate breakdown have increased the differences into extreme inequality. Many live in abundance, some with unimaginable, limitless wealth. The world's richest 1% owns 43% of all global financial assets and are responsible for releasing as much carbon pollution as the poorest two-thirds of humanity while at the same time, close to half of the world's population lives in poverty, (i.e. on less than 5.5 dollars a day), *according to Oxfam.*

The World Food Program estimates that more than 333 million people faced acute levels of food insecurity in 2023, an increase of 200 million people compared to pre-Covid-19. 783 million people faced hunger worldwide in 2022 according to the United Nations. One of the main reasons for the sharp increase in global hunger is the climate crisis, as lives, crops and livelihoods are destroyed.

But the biggest driver of hunger is conflicts, with 70 percent of those affected living in areas affected by war and violence. And given that, it is unreasonable that many emissions linked to military activities are allowed to go unrecorded or unreported.

Climate work needs to go hand in hand with efforts to promote peace.

We have created a narrative where we believe that the more we have, the happier we will be. But many of us will have to make sacrifices for the climate given the huge changes required at the societal level. There is a big gap between what we already know and how we act and what is missing are incentives to make us act in accordance with the agreed environmental goals.

It is a political challenge to make it easier for families and individuals to enable adaptation to climate change. Empower people through education, providing clear information about the effects of global warming so they understand the importance of changing their consumption

habits and that it does not contradict the ability to live a meaningful life. The transition to make a smaller climate footprint will require that families and individuals are given more time and a more flexible work life, which entails lower economic growth.

Our present consumer culture causes an unhealthy lifestyle where the environment is negatively affected, the food pyramid is distorted and where we get less and less time for each other.

We can stop climate change and at the same time achieve other societal goals and live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives and good examples on this can be found in the so-called **Blue Zones**, such as Okinawa, Loma Linda in California, Nicoya in Costa Rica and in Sardinia in Italy. What they have in common is that they eat less and more nutritious food. They take part in regular low-intensity exercise and they live meaningful lives with social networks and strong family ties. Many live to over 100 years of age without age-related diseases.

We need a new and coherent story about climate change that fills us with hope and politicians need to present a credible and understandable policy about why change is needed and how we can jointly build the future and create conditions for healing the planet

A more holistic and long-term perspective is required and the world's leaders must take greater responsibility.

Recommendations

- Strengthen families and highlight the important role they can play in creating better conditions for the climate and the importance of family unity in building resilience in society. Empower parents to take care responsibilities both for their children and for making climate changes, by freeing up the time it entails. Family-life balance instead of work-life balance with shorter working hours and a flexibility that runs parallel to life and care responsibilities.
- The younger generation has been at the forefront of climate change and the world's governments should urgently take on leadership responsibilities and act in line with climate change agreements.
- Governments should design policies that enable families and individuals to make the right consumption choices through various incentives such as reduced taxes on essential and ecological basic goods and increased prices for goods with a negative environmental impact.

- Governments and world leaders must place the highest demands on those responsible for the majority of the emissions and require all emissions to be reported without exception for any activity, such as the armed forces and military industry. The investment in peace must accelerate as conflicts have a strong negative impact on climate change.
- Governments need to develop a clear and comprehensible narrative about how the climate transition is to be implemented. GDP should be replaced with better measuring instruments based on sustainability principles for both the earth and humanity's needs rather than based on constant economic growth. Unpaid care and domestic work must be valued and included in order to strengthen families and recognize the time and invaluable work that mainly women do throughout the world.

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