

perspectives

POLITICAL ANALYSES AND COMMENTARY

ASIA





Heinrich Böll Foundation

The Heinrich Böll Foundation is a publicly funded institute that is closely affiliated with the German party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen. From our headquarters in Berlin and 32 overseas offices, we promote green ideas and projects in Germany, as well as in more than 60 countries worldwide. Our work in Asia concentrates on promoting civil society, democratic structures, social participation for all women and men, and global justice. Together with our partners, we work toward conflict prevention, peaceful dispute resolution, and search for solutions in the fight against environmental degradation and the depletion of global resources. To achieve these goals, we rely on disseminating knowledge, creating a deeper understanding between actors in Europe and Asia, and on a global dialogue as a prerequisite for constructive negotiations.

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Contents

- 2 Introduction – Breaking the climate silence**
- 4 “You want people to become environmentalists? Make it practical and logical. Make it a trend.”**
Thoughts of Thai climate activist Nanticha ‘Lynn’ Ocharoenchai
- 9 “The climate crisis is currently the biggest threat to all beings on earth”**
Interview with Kyaw Ye Htet and Zay Hlin Mon from Myanmar
- 14 “It’s time to take action”**
Interview with Lim Kimsor, Monorom Tchaw and Lak from Cambodia
- 18 Poetics of Climate Crisis in India**
- 26 “Climate change is a serious problem, yet one that seems to be remote”**
Interview with Zheng Xiaowen from China
- 30 “Young people know that the climate crisis is an existential threat to human civilization”**
Interview with Malaysian Youth Delegation
- 34 “I will not stand their silence”**
Eun-young Go from South Korea
- 37 “We believe that art is a powerful tool that can help to save our earth”**
Interview with Henna Nguyen and Trung Phan from Vietnam
- 43 Climate Action in Hong Kong: The World’s First Climate Change Museum**
Debbie P.W. Tsang and George S.K. Ma

Introduction – Breaking the climate silence

“Fridays for Future,” “There is no planet B,” “Like the sea we rise,” “Science not silence” – the world is shaken up by the voices of a young generation that is urging action against the climate crisis.

Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenage climate activist, created waves around the world with her school strike for climate. Just a year after she started her campaign, millions are taking to the streets in cities all over the world to protest against the complacency of governments. Greta created awareness on global warming and gained solidarity around the world, but in fact, she was never alone. For some time, other activists and citizens, young and old, have been, working at the local level all around the world – clearing garbage from rivers and beaches, or even from Mount Everest; developing tools for cleaning the oceans; planting trees and growing entire forests, and protesting against unsustainable investments.

For more than three decades now, scientists have been warning about the impact of burning fossil fuels. The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change illustrates the dramatic impact rising temperatures will have on people all over the world. In the meantime, corporations and banks express a willingness to tackle climate change through,

for example, “Science Based Targets” that are meant to reduce emissions. However, they fail to implement environmental policies that are already in place. Governments also do not live up to their full potential; for example, Germany, once considered a forerunner in climate action, recently disappointed the international community with its lame climate package.

When the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change meet for their 25th conference, they will have no excuse to further delay drastic decisions. Scientific evidence, as well as the voices of people, are calling for urgent action.

While Asia is home to some of the fastest growing economies and some of the world’s top polluters, it is also one of the regions worst hit by climate change. Erratic weather patterns, extreme floods and droughts destroy people’s livelihoods, creating an increasing number of climate refugees. Climate change is not a distant problem; it is right at the doorstep of many Asians.

This edition of *Perspectives Asia* presents the work of climate change activists in Asia who are calling their governments and people to action. They are raising their voices, some of them despite severe restrictions on the right of free assembly and freedom of speech. These

activists show immense courage and they deserve international recognition for their work.

Nanticha ‘Lynn’ Ocharoenchai, a young activist from Thailand, blogs about her own “Climate Strike Thailand,” and the frustration about the complacency among her age group. Out of this frustration, she keeps on professionalizing her work, while trying to make climate action “cool.”

Artist activists in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, are using the walls of the city’s buildings to create urban art on climate change and clean energy, which they believe has the power to inspire people to act against environmental pollution and climate change.

Ms. Zheng Xiaowen from the China Youth Climate Action Network reports about her work, encouraging young people to take action by empowering them with knowledge. The organization is pointing out that the climate crisis is not happening far away at the poles, but that it has an impact on their communities, which means it is everybody’s responsibility to act.

The Malaysia Youth Delegation is pointing out the dilemma of a prosperous middle class that enjoys the luxuries of growth and capitalism instead of fighting global warming.

From Myanmar comes a very encouraging interview with young activists Kyaw Ye Htet

and Zay Hlin Mon who, despite the challenging political situation, are mobilizing networks and resources to create awareness on climate change at the grassroots level.

In a very impassioned statement, the Chair of the Climate Change Initiative of the Green Party Korea, laments that society has remained voiceless on climate change and calls on his compatriots to “break the silence.”

In their contributions, eleven activists and intellectuals from India, highlight the complexity of climate activism, reflecting on a wide range of aspects, from policy making to grassroots activism, the role of culture and media, to feminism and migration.

The authors from Hong Kong report about the world’s first museum solely dedicated to climate change. This institution promotes research through its sustainability hub and mobile exhibitions, advocating for clean energy and waste reduction.

Young Asians, even if they do not make international headlines like Greta Thunberg, are fighting against climate change and taking action for their future and that of the planet.

Gitanjali More

Project Officer | Asia Division

Heinrich Böll Foundation, November 2019

“You want people to become environmentalists? Make it practical and logical. Make it a trend.”

Thoughts of Thai climate activist Nanticha ‘Lynn’ Ocharoenchai

I stared at the computer screen. What I saw was a whiny girl, talking through a megaphone and telling people what to do. That girl was me, leading the Strike for Climate Change in Bangkok, which I organized as part of the global #FridaysForFuture Climate Strike on May 24, 2019, when 1.3 million young environmental activists skipped school to demand climate justice and a sustainable future.

Many people had filmed me during the march in Bangkok and sent me the recordings. In the video, I looked furious – and I was. I have always been, considering how my city deals with environmental issues. I demanded that more trees be planted and that all necessary measures be taken to accomplish climate justice. I like to think that I was doing my job as an environmentalist and activist, but when I re-watched the video, I felt I sounded like a frightened teenager, yelling in the streets of Bangkok with a megaphone and having only a few hundred supporters behind me. We criticized politicians and corporations for their environmental destruction and human exploitation – for valuing economic growth over sustainable cities. We walked through Bangkok’s busy Sukhumvit Road and admonished passers-by for their unsustainable lifestyles and wasteful consumption, which values quick, cheap, pretty, and easy, thus fueling an industry driven by the exploitation of natural resources. Bangkok is one of the cities with the lowest number of public green spaces¹. Consequently, I demanded more parks and spoke out against shopping malls. In a country that is one of the biggest producers of ocean waste², I advocated for marine life conservation and shamed plastic consumption.

Climate Strike Thailand³ was founded out of frustration. I figured if no one was going to talk about what is wrong with our government’s priorities, then I would. Since I first fell in love with nature on an environmental science field trip in high school, I have spent a huge chunk of my time convincing those around me to feel the same. Throughout my time in university, I have exhorted my family to recycle more and bugged my friends to eat less meat. Each day, the importance of sustainable living grew on me and I shared more about it too. Those who read my articles care for the planet. In fact, they always have. Some people truly care and it is not easy to convince those who do not.

The night before the global climate strike, I thought up a list of five feasible and effective developments for the environment that I wanted to see most in Bangkok: 1) declaring a climate emergency, 2) improved public transportation, 3) more renewable energy sources, 4) more economic incentives for sustainable businesses, and 5) more green space. I tried my best to consider all regulatory and technological limitations, asking experts and consulting the internet about each of my demands. I posted a petition on social media, and my followers shared it. I repeated the demands during my strike – and people listened. Reporters interviewed me and I told them why our systems have to change and how our politicians do not care. But what do I know? I am just a communications undergrad student who loves trees and wants more of them. I do not know if I could tell you exactly on what areas our government should spend the budget or how to build a new urban forest. These self-doubts racked me.

The other day, I sat down for dinner with my uncle. “I need to know everything about Thailand’s Energy Master Plan,” I told him. I

Nanticha ‘Lynn’ Ocharoenchai is a 21-year old Thai climate and environmental activist and the founder of Climate Strike Thailand. She organized the first Fridays For Future in Thailand, and she enjoys writing and volunteering for green causes. Lynn has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communication Management from Chulalongkorn University.

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https://www.instagram.com/climatestrike_thailand/

was beginning to question my critique of our country’s environmental management. Sure, I used to intern at Greenpeace and read a lot of environmental and science news, but in the end I must admit that I am not an expert. However, I need to be informed, if I am to follow one of the few rules that I have for my climate strikes: Do not say things you do not know to be true. Do not accuse people of things they did not do. And do not underline problems no one can fix. We do not want to become one-sided activists fighting against politicians, but rather their friends, pointing out what they can fix and how we can help. This is not just limited to climate justice protests. This applies to our daily lives. It is true for philosophical debates with your friends and discussions about life-changing decisions with your parents. It should be a guiding principle when you argue with some stranger on the internet or talk politics. Unlike me, my uncle is not a 21-year-old who mostly works behind a laptop. He is the president of a renewable energy company with 30 years experience in the energy market. He has seen the industry’s development and contraction, its politics and economics. He has seen how it has changed and how it can change.

The energy business is a complex and complicated one, and certainly not an industry that can be understood with just a few hours of online reading and headline skimming. My uncle tells me that many in Thailand’s public and private sectors are shifting to renewable energy sources, and before he said that, it did not occur to me how much progress we have already made. To be fair, adults are trying to make the world a better and more sustainable place. In fact, they have tried for a long time. They spent decades fulfilling our science-fiction fantasies of flying machines and wireless devices. We kids need a power grid that is up

24/7 in order to post our daily Instagram stories. We need fossil-fuel power plants to run the cars we drive on the road trips we dream of. If they took away our smartphones, which rely on mining metals, we would all be com-

So, how is an environmentalist like me supposed to persuade millions of Bangkokians to stop using plastic straws and hurting turtles, plant more trees and reduce carbon emissions? Do people even care about turtles, or do they just want to make sure their iced latte does not spill on their shirt as they sip it?

plaining. Without their inventions, we would still be cave dwellers. Now it is our turn to try and improve the world the older generations handed us, as they did in their time.

Still, for most people in countries like Thailand, there is far more to worry about than distant polar bears living near the melting North Pole. There are minimum-wage construction workers who worry about making ends meet, and students who worry about getting good grades. There are rich business owners who worry about the unstable economy and their unpredictable stocks. There are busy parents who worry about their careers and the future of their impulsive teenagers. And there are the impulsive teenagers who worry about the number of likes on their Facebook photos and their number of Instagram followers. Not everyone in Bangkok prioritizes the fate of a forest over the construction of a skyscraper. Not everyone prefers hiking and camping to window-shopping and fine dining. Not everyone likes reading about the evolution of animals and the biology of plants better than watching blockbuster films and Netflix thrillers. Not everyone



Nanticha 'Lynn' Ocharoenchai

Photo: Kittichai Jirathientham

understands the science of climate change or the impacts it has on us, and not everyone cares. Not everyone has the money to install solar panels, and not everyone has the time to contemplate a man-made mass extinction.

So, how is an environmentalist like me supposed to persuade millions of Bangkokians to stop using plastic straws and hurting turtles, plant more trees and reduce carbon emissions? Do people even care about turtles, or do they just want to make sure their iced latte does not spill on their shirt as they sip it? Do people even like trees and parks any more, or do they just want to look at their phones and drive around in their cars all day?

As someone who grew up attending international schools, hanging out with foreign friends, and consuming Western media, I figured I was not the best person to be telling Thai people what to do. Despite my Thai nationality, I am only an outsider trying to convince others to care about something. Changing an entire culture and the mindset of a people is not easy. So today, I ask myself: How can I help them, so that they can help me? What can I do for them, and what can they do for me? What do we all want – whether we are rich or poor, young or old, student or parent, janitor or entrepreneur,

religious or atheist, local or expat? What are our main motivations and core values? How can I frame climate action as a win-win situation for everyone? How can people benefit from environmentalism while achieving the same things they want and remaining the same people they are? I know, we all like to eat good food and breathe clean air, and I have tried that simple approach. But as long as the supermarkets are stocked and the air conditioners working, environmental conservation will appear unnecessary for most people in Bangkok – and probably also in those parts of the world that are not on the front lines of climate change. The world is not going to blow up today, and it probably will not blow up tomorrow either. But for those who are bothered by the fact that it will some day, and that we can only prevent this from happening by acting now, the question is: How can we show the people what they can have now, instead of threatening them with what they will lose later, that is, how can we present climate action as the better alternative?

Let us start with a simple example. As long as they keep their jobs, most people with an average income do not have to worry about their basic needs. On the other hand, low-income laborers are struggling to put food on



Climate Strike in Central Bangkok

Photo: Kittichai Jirathientham

the table and a roof over their heads. While harvesting enough crops during a drought period may not be what most people worry about, earning enough money for groceries and rent during a recession is. How can we help make sustainable living more economical and accessible for those who already have hundreds of problems to worry about every day? Instead of telling busy workers to buy less single-serving snacks so that whales won't swallow the garbage, it is better to tell them that buying in bulk will help them save money in the long run. Instead of telling exhausted office employees to stop driving to work, tell them how public transportation can save them time. Make environmentalism cheap and easy. Make it quick and convenient.

Meanwhile, middle-income office employees and students may be more focused on their psychological needs. Teenagers buy new clothes to express their personalities and frequent hip cafes to fit in with their friends. White-collar workers seek out the cheapest flights to travel the world and post photos on social media to impress their colleagues. How can we make sustainable consumption cooler, hipper, prettier and trendier, while also making it easy and affordable? Instead of telling

college kids to stop going on shopping sprees to reduce production, tell them how minimalism is trending. Tell them why fast fashion hurts people and the planet. Instead of telling backpackers how cheap flights pollute and why wildlife tourism sucks, tell them how traveling by train is now cool and volunteering to plant trees is hip. Better yet, show them how easy it really is to travel by train and how meaningful it can be to plant trees. Make environmentalism cool. Make it a trend.

As for high-income entrepreneurs, chances are they want an even higher income. Corporations want more revenue, while governments want a better GDP. How can we make sustainable industries and systems better for business? Instead of pressuring corporations to stop exploiting natural resources, support businesses that source eco-friendly materials. Instead of demanding that governments divest themselves from fossil fuels because of their ecological impact, tell them to invest in clean energy as this brings economic advantages. Make environmentalism practical and logical. Make it profitable.

It is a challenge to advocate for climate action because it involves every aspect of our daily lives – from the food we choose to eat, the



'Lynn' leading the Climate Strike

Photo: Kittichai Jirathientham

clothes we choose to wear, the ways we choose to commute, to the houses we choose to live in, the jobs we choose to do, and the words we choose to speak. At the same time, it is an opportunity because we can effect change in just about all of the areas mentioned. We cannot expect to reach everyone with a single solution to climate change, and thus we should try to engage people with approaches that are tailored to their lifestyles. The key is to find out what they value most, how they are affected, and how we can get them on board for the fight

against the climate crisis. The key is to make everyone wanting to do it, not forcing everyone to do it, and to understand what they really want each day, rather than telling them what they will need in the future. It is to offer everyone something they can gain, regardless of who they are or where they come from, instead of intimidating them with what they may lose due to climate change. In such a way, we can make environmentalism a win-win situation for everyone. ■■■

¹ Chandran, Rina, 2019. "Mall or park? In crowded Bangkok, 'last' open space stirs debate" *Reuters* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-land-rights-planning/mall-or-park-in-crowded-bangkok-last-open-space-stirs-debate-idUSKCN1Q002J>

² Styllis, George, 2018. "Thailand falling behind in global battle with plastic waste" *Nikkei Asian Review*. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Thailand-falling-behind-in-global-battle-with-plastic-waste>

³ Rujivanarom, Pratch, 2019. "Thai environmentalists join worldwide climate 'strike'" *The Nation Thailand* <https://www.nationthailand.com/national/30369970>

“The climate crisis is currently the biggest threat to all beings on earth”

Interview with Kyaw Ye Htet and Zay Hlin Mon from Myanmar

Climate change is going to have severe impacts on Myanmar, as sea level rise threatens vast stretches of low-lying land, especially in the Irrawaddy Delta, and deforestation continues on a large scale in the hill areas. At the same time, climate change and adaptation policy has remained largely the business of the government and its development partners. Most people in Myanmar feel helpless about climate change, just as they feel helpless about natural disasters, as both issues are overshadowed by the necessity of making a living in what is still one of the world’s least developed countries. However, a few voices have begun to criticize the status quo, among them groups of youth that have been encouraged by the global Fridays for Future movement. Heinrich Böll Foundation Yangon Office, Myanmar talked to two of them.

How did “Strike for Climate Myanmar” start?

We are a group of individuals from youth and environmental organizations and student unions. We have been organizing climate strikes here in Myanmar since May 24, 2019. We started by joining the second global climate strike organized by Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion and some other environmental organizations. We call our movement “Strike for Climate Myanmar.”

How does “Strike for Climate Myanmar” relate to the global climate strike movement?

At first, we called our movement “Fridays for Future Myanmar” because we were inspired by the Fridays for Future movement initiated by Greta Thunberg.

But it was difficult for us to organize climate strikes only on Fridays, because some of our people are working at NGOs and they have to go to the office Monday to Friday. Thus, we decided to name the movement “Strike for Climate Myanmar” – and to campaign not only on Fridays, but also on other days, especially Saturdays and Sundays. On June 5, we did campaign at a World Environment Day event that was organized by the Yangon regional government and also a climate strike (a march in downtown Yangon) to mark World Environment Day.

In the global movement, there are two major groups: The first one, Fridays for Future, consists primarily of very young people, teenagers, who have been inspired by Greta Thunberg. Fridays for Future mainly involves high school students. And in the UK, there’s Extinction Rebellion, a movement with more adult members. They have a good relationship, but they are separate groups. We endorse both, Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion.

The interviewees:

Kyaw Ye Htet (21) studies social science at the Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon.

Zay Hlin Mon (23) is a student of computer science at Myanmar Computer Company Institute in Yangon.

After having been active in various youth and environmental organizations in recent years, they are now among the organizers of “Strike for Climate Myanmar.” The interview took place on July 26, 2019.

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What are your demands?

We have three main objectives for the movement.

First, we demand that the government recognizes that the climate crisis is happening here in Myanmar and in the world, and that they take action against the climate crisis.

Secondly, we demand that the government immediately stops mega-projects that harm the environment and the climate, especially the Myit-sone Dam hydroelectric project¹ and coal-powered industries.

And third, we demand public participation from different sectors to tackle the climate crisis.

What concrete action do you expect from the government?

We demand that the government and parliament declare a climate emergency or officially recognize that the climate crisis is happening. And we demand that the government immediately stop projects that cause environmental breakdown and commits to never resuming these projects.

How do you operate?

We are about 20 people in the organizing group and, depending on the day, our number can increase to 30 or 50.

Local authorities will often ban our protests or place restrictions on what we can do. Most people in Myanmar don't want to join as long as we don't have permission. Most people in this country, especially the adults, think that striking is a bad thing. They just see it as an action by jobless people and gypsies. The common perception here in Myanmar is that if someone is staging a strike or protest, then that person is very lazy and wants more welfare support from the government. That kind of perspective is affecting our movement.

People may also think that we are doing this for personal gain, in order to get money or the support of a particular organization.

On the other hand, we also get support from some people who are aware of environmental and climate issues and from some organizations.

Do you get outside support?

When we organized the movement, the organizing team decided to be independent in terms of finance. We do not need much funds to do climate strikes, and we decided not to apply for financial support. However, we accept and get technical support, such as training and some consultations. Once we formed our group, we contacted the Fridays for Future core group, which is based in Europe. They have a website to register local climate strike movements. We registered our movement there, so that they are aware of us, and later they contacted us for further collaboration.

Some organizations like 350.org and Greenpeace are also playing important roles in supporting climate strikes. They provide technical assistance, especially with mobilizing. They have regional offices and contacts with local stakeholders. The 350.org East Asia office contacted us and offered training and to connect us with other climate strike mobilizers. Also, some local organizations here in Myanmar are offering technical assistance and further collaboration. We are now discussing partnering with Turning Tables Myanmar, an organization that provides training to young musicians and that wants to raise awareness through music.

We are working with them to create a Myanmar climate anthem, a new song with new music. We would like to use this anthem for the global climate strike that will take place between September 20–27.

What do you actually do when you strike for climate?

There have been five climate strikes in Yangon. In our strikes, folks joined us and sang songs. A poet also joined and recited poems about the environment. We shouted our demands: no coal, no mega-dams, climate action now. It’s almost the same in all climate strikes – we just organize activities and demonstrations.

We follow some general agreements or ground rules of the global climate strike movement: We do not cover our faces, we do not use violent action. In Myanmar, we also realize that we need to do other activities such as in-door training and workshops, yet we will not do this under the name of Climate Strike. Instead, we plan to establish a network called “Alliance for Climate Action.”

But you don’t use Extinction Rebellion’s methods such as blocking the traffic?

[laughing] No. Maybe we should? Here, the traffic is super busy already. Since we have just started and are trying to get public support, we do not promote activities that the general public would not be happy with. But that doesn’t mean we will never use such methods.

How do people, bystanders, parents and the government react?

Some people think that we get money from Western NGOs, and one government official that we talked to said, “You do this as a project of UNEP,” which made us really mad. There are people who say bad things. We always inform the government about our strikes in accordance with the peaceful assembly law, just to avoid conflict with the police, and for the sake of the people who join us, although we, individually, do not agree with this law. For each strike, we have to inform the police and the local authorities 48 hours in advance. However, they never grant us permission, and whenever there is a protest, there will be police and somebody from the Special Branch (police informers) – and they will record who is participating in the protest and keep track of us. If they don’t grant us permission, they can always sue us based on Article 20 [of the Right to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act].

They do not have the right to refuse permission, yet they still do.

And you go ahead in spite of that?

Yes, we do.

... and then what happens?

Nothing special has happened yet, but there have been incidents such as in Tamwe in May 2018.² There, a peaceful protest was organized, however the authorities refused permission, and when the day came, the police cracked down on the protesters. Subsequently, those people were prosecuted according to Article 20. Maybe they will do the same to us, we just don’t know.

What is climate change for you? What is your own experience?

As a personal story, I was born in the Irrawaddy Delta region. There, during Cyclone Nargis in 2008, many people were killed. Some were killed by Nargis and some were killed by the government, because the government failed to take emergency measures. I personally believe that some were killed by Nargis and some by the political system. It is hard to imagine the

consequences when the next cyclone will strike the Delta or Rakhine. The government has done little to tackle the climate crisis. So, once the next major cyclone hits, we will probably just have to die. I think we will be killed by the storm and the government. That’s why I claim we are facing extinction – we in Myanmar and all people worldwide.

For me as a young environmental activist, the climate crisis is currently the biggest threat to all beings on earth. Climate change has been happening for many decades, and the governments and respective stakeholders have failed to tackle it, and they were unable control it. Now, as a consequence, we are facing a climate crisis.

We all need to take responsibility to tackle this climate crisis. The climate crisis is happening because of all of us – because of people. It is us who are exploiting the resources of this earth.

As a least developed country, and similar to other developing countries, Myanmar is very vulnerable to climate change. We do not have enough infrastructure, such as roads, buildings, information systems and so on. Therefore, once a natural disaster happens in a particular region, the people from this region will not know how to escape, and the government can not save their lives. Myanmar is very vulnerable, because of this lack of infrastructure, information, and education, however the government also lacks the political will to protect people from disasters.

What about global climate justice?

Climate change is a global matter. Even if the Myanmar government took action on climate while others didn’t, the effect would be negligible. This is why we collectively campaign for global climate action. In our manifest, we demand that the government recognizes that climate change is happening not only in Myanmar but in the entire world. Myanmar is part of ASEAN and part of the UN. They can advocate for regional climate action in ASEAN and other international forums.

In our neighborhood, China has well-developed industries and is a major polluter. If the Myanmar government is going to do its part for the climate, it will be able to ask China to take responsibility too.

If the government says, let’s build some coal power plants ...

... this is not sustainable, because of CO₂ emissions.

But what about dams – aren’t dams good for the climate?

No. I don’t really have a deep academic understanding, but as a young activist I think mega-dams will cause natural disasters. When the walls of a dam break, people living nearby will suffer. That is why we reject mega-dams; they are not sustainable.

So where should Myanmar get its power from?

There should be small hydro-electric projects, small dams – not very big ones that may harm the people. We also promote solar energy – in central Myanmar an NGO has already promoted solar for home. Also, we have a very long coastline where to produce wind energy.

What about the expansion of gas power that the government currently pursues?

Most of the gas pipelines are Chinese projects and have a political background. Coal or gas power is never meant for our country, as the energy produced will be sold cheaply to China or Thailand. This does not benefit our people; it benefits other countries.

Gas is also dangerous, as gas leakages could harm people.

What is the way forward?

Currently, we are networking, that is, we are trying to expand our network to other cities. We have a milestone – the third global climate strike in September 2019. For this, preparations are underway in different parts of the country. ■■■

¹ In 2011, after many protests, Myanmar’s government suspended the large-scale Myitsoone hydroelectric power project in Kachin State. Recently, however, there have been attempts to revive it.

² See <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/yangon-police-squash-unsanctioned-peace-march-tamwe>

“It’s time to take action”

Interview with Lim Kimsor, Monorom Tchaw and Sok Lak from Cambodia

In Cambodia, for many years, climate change was regarded as a phenomenon generated in the West, and that could not be influenced by a small country like Cambodia. This perception is slowly changing, and especially Cambodia’s youth is making the connection between environmental protection and climate change. Heinrich Böll Foundation Phnom Penh Office, Cambodia, sat down with three young activists to hear about their points of view and ideas.

How does Cambodian society react to climate change and the problems that come with it?

M: Few people are educated on this topic. The good news, however, is that there are many young people in Cambodia; 70 percent of the population is younger than 30, and a lot of them are starting to be aware and feel concerned about this. It is a growing trend.

LK: In Cambodia, not many people care about climate change. Also, there are many other problems such as land grabbing, and usually few people will join the protests.

SL: Currently, the younger part of the population is starting to become aware of climate change. The problem is that the level of education among young people is still low; according to an OECD report, 46% of young people are undereducated and, as a consequence, most people only have limited knowledge about issues such as climate change. One reason is that some people are still not really aware of it, while others assume that it is not really a threat. They think it is just a natural change and don’t take action. If we think about the economic perspective, some people are starting to be concerned because they have to spend more money on healthcare for conditions that are caused by climate change. Another aspect is that a part of the population is relying on agriculture and has recently found it difficult to irrigate their crops. Thus, awareness is growing for economic reasons, since people feel the pinch.

LK: Just today I met some people along the river who are having problems with using the river water because there’s sand dredging. Previously, those people used the river water, but now they have to buy drinking water. There is also sand dredging along the coast, which impacts the mangrove forests, and a lot of fish and crabs are lost because of this.

What kind of strategies do you apply toward climate change? How can people get active if they don’t even have the knowledge?

LK: Together with people in the community we try to stop sand dredging. We also try to educate people on how to dispose of their garbage because many don’t know how to do this in an eco-friendly way. We produce videos and, that way, provide information.

The interviewees:

Lim Kimsor (LK) works for Mother Nature as an environmental activist. Her job is to educate the community and to empower women. She also holds workshops and training sessions on environmental issues.

Monorom Tchaw (M) works as a sustainability coordinator at a restaurant called Farm to Table. Among other things, she does staff development and also organizes some events. She is trying to create a community around Farm to Table that is educated about sustainability.

Sok Lak (SL) is a co-founder of the scholar library. He mostly works with young people to raise awareness about environmental issues. He works within the library field as people with a higher education tend to think more about sustainable development.

SL: We try to work with the library to make information and knowledge more accessible, especially to younger people. We also try to encourage them to read about the environment. Another point is that we are trying to raise awareness about how important education is, in order to understand the issues. We are cooperating with international organizations in order to connect international knowledge with the local knowledge to make them aware of the problems.

M: What we do at Farm to Table is that we try to promote more seasonal products and to find more local resources. Additionally, we try to reduce plastic use, for example by using drinking glasses made from recycled materials or metal straws. Furthermore, we promote eco-friendly products. We also create some events around environmental issues, like having meetings with our staff to educate them on the issues.

Does the younger generation react differently to global warming?

LK: They do because there is a lot going on via social media. We encounter many problems when promoting our projects, however social media is very helpful for reaching an audience. For example, we do videos on corruption in Cambodia to help stop it and post this information on social media. We also organize workshops and invite young people to join and explain to them what we want to do. Older generations were born into or lived through the war in Cambodia, so they don’t understand much about today’s environmental problems. They know more about the problems that occurred back then.

M: Of course the younger generation is much more sensitive on this topic. I think, environmentalism is also a very new subject. The older generations in the countryside had to live with nothing back in the 1970s and thus are more likely to accept materialism since it is all they know. So, I don’t think it is really older people’s fault to not be as concerned as younger people are about this topic. Also, when the Cambodian economy opened up in the 1990s and 2000s a lot of packaged stuff, a lot of plastic was used. This is why it is such a new problem and why it is mostly the younger generations that are more sensitive to the problem.

What motivated you to become an activist?

SL: We are aware that the current developments are not positive, and we are aware that we have to fight such changes for the worse. From an economic perspective, we now have to spend a lot of money on natural resources such as water. We also need to spend more on healthcare because of pollution. It is time to take action. When I studied at univer-

sity, I gathered a lot of new knowledge about economic development and environmental protection. I became aware that if we don’t take action, we will live in a very degraded world. We have already lost half of the world’s natural resources, and the cost of living is becoming higher and higher – so high that some people cannot afford it any more.

LK: For me, it started with investments in Cambodia. Today, the government invests in foreign companies, but they don’t discuss those investments with the people and don’t listen to their requests. I see that all the time – the government is doing something and doesn’t care about what the population wants, that is why I try to teach people how to get information about the way the government invests. We cannot hand the decision to the government, we need to decide ourselves. This is what got me involved.

M: I don’t consider myself an activist. I started to be interested in the environment from an economic perspective. I was really thinking about things like development, developing and developed countries. What do those things mean? In the end, it came back to how we distribute resources. Before, I was interested in microfinance and that was all about money. Then I realized that it is not about money at all. It is really about resources. That is when I started reading about natural resources. After that, I began to understand that it was important to look at the way that we are sharing natural resources among human beings. Subsequently, I started to be really interested in waste management because I feel that the way you treat waste reflects the way that you treat yourself. Right now, I think that we are not really treating waste properly, so something needs to be done.

What problems have you encountered with your work?

M: It is quite hard to understand whether something is chemical-free or not. There is not a lot of transparency around this, which makes it more difficult to fight against it. Also, sometimes environmental topics are too confining for some people, with all the rules about what you should do and what you shouldn’t do. I try to avoid telling them what to do because I believe that if the way you do something makes sense to you, then you should continue doing it like that.

LK: For me, because I’m an environmental activist and especially campaigning against land grabbing, it is very difficult to work with the community. If I want to hold a workshop, or if I just want to educate people, sometimes the authorities in such communities will not allow us to do so. It also happens that when we go to forests to protect the trees we are not allowed to go inside the forest. Officials often ban workshops or meetings if we don’t have explicit permission from the government.

SL: The big challenge for me is people’s limited knowledge. Most people know very little about the issues because they only have general information and don’t look deeper into things like pollution. Another problem is that we have issues with spreading the facts. The education system is problematic as well because most of the teachers only have limited or outdated knowledge. The questions we have to ask is ‘How can we ensure a higher education? How can we improve the quality of knowledge for younger generations?’ We try to teach the students how to seek out knowledge independently, rather than to rely on teachers. Most investment in education is short-term rather than long-term.

Why do you think there aren’t more people in Cambodia who work against climate change?

M: I think that, like in most countries, it is not such a big priority. When we had a country briefing in France, in 2015, everyone clapped and reacted positively – but in reality nothing much was done. They talked about the problems, yet nothing happened. The way we perceive the economy,

namely that it needs to grow, makes it really difficult to achieve environmental objectives that will sustain the planet. The scale of growth is too fast and too big to connect with the rhythms of nature.

SL: I think few people fight against climate change because the people that have a lot of money and resources and thus could make a difference are only 1-5% of the population. For the rest, they don’t have the power and the resources to change anything, and often they also don’t have the knowledge to consider these things. Not many people get a higher education and not many people get rich, which is one of the reasons why not many people take action against climate change. Additionally, climate change is a long-term issue, people however live for less than 100 years, so they ask themselves why they need to care, if they are not really affected by it. They care about their own generation but not about the next one.

M: I don’t think it’s a matter of higher education because a lot of people who are millionaires and who are very highly educated, for example Elon Musk, have another option, a plan B, so they don’t need to care that much about the environment. They are all very highly educated. However, the problem is that they don’t want to share the resources. The economy today teaches the population that we should be like those rich people and obtain as many resources as possible for ourselves and grow. I know you asked about Cambodia, yet I feel that this is a worldwide issue.

LK: The ministry and the people in the government don’t care much about education, which results in people being less educated. For example, I heard something from a rich person about digging for gold, and when I asked why they did this, he said that there is a lot of gold in our country, and we can use it for a long time and grow. That is why they don’t care about it; they think it is not that important if they have something that seems like a good alternative and that will last them for a long time. Some of the younger people may not act because they are not educated enough to understand the problems. They don’t have the ability to fight against it. We conduct a lot of workshops and explain how to join the cause. However, because of their low level of education they still don’t know how to actively fight climate change. Often times people show up and listen and understand what we are saying. When they leave, however, they will continue with their habits and not change their behavior.

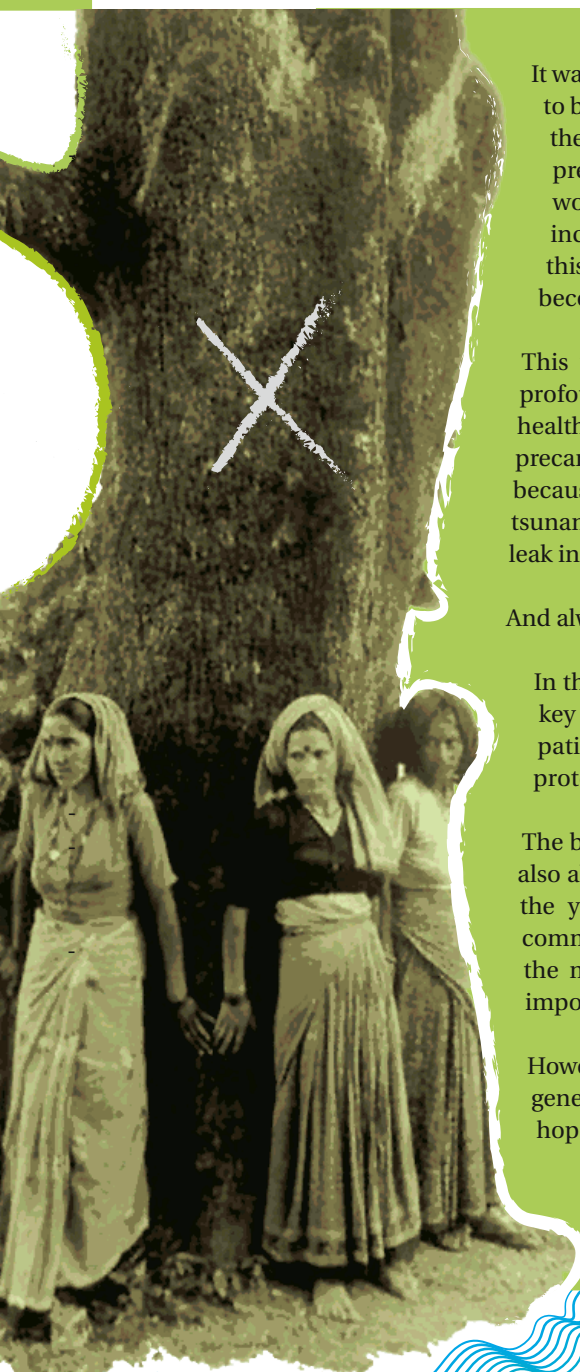
Is there anything you would like to add?

LK: It’s very difficult to make people aware of climate change, still we are trying to do a lot in order to distribute knowledge. Even if we can’t make people aware of everything, we can change at least something. Many people don’t know how to properly dispose of garbage, but we have workshops to teach them how to do it correctly. We can’t do more than organize such events and meetings and invite people to join us. At this, however, we work very hard.

SL: When people have a higher education they will become aware of the long-term issues, especially the environmental issues, so we encourage people to educate themselves and seek knowledge. We need a lot of people to help us because it is a very big challenge. We invite everyone to join us. ■■■

Poetics of Climate Crisis in India

The debate about climate change and the climate crisis brings together a multitude of perspectives, in Asia and worldwide. The following pages show a collage of reflections by various experts on aspects of this debate in India, covering policy making and economy, gender and feminism, grassroots, civil-society and youth-activism, media, energy and migration, arts and culture.



It was a long time ago that, as young activists in the women's movement, we began to be aware of environmental issues. It was the *Chipko* and *Appiko* movements of the mid-seventies and eighties – in which village women embraced trees to prevent them from being cut – that drew our attention to the consequences, in women's lives, of the devastation of the environment. Well aware of the increased distances they would have to walk in search of water, women chose this unique form of protest. Later, water and water scarcity would go on to become major issues in the movement.

This was our first glimpse into an issue that would, over the years, become profoundly serious for women. Unpredictable seasons meant forced migration, ill health, the loss of education, and precarious work opportunities. Sometimes this precarity led to women being trafficked for sex work and domestic labor. Always, because they are more vulnerable, in 'natural' disasters, such as earthquakes and tsunamis, or indeed more urban tragedies such as the Union Carbide factory gas leak in Bhopal, it would be women who suffered – and resisted – the most.

And always, they were the ones largely left out of planning and rehabilitation.

In the decades since *Chipko*, climate change and its consequences have become key issues for the women's movement in India. Women's mobilization and participation in the battle for a safe and stable environment has changed the nature of protest movements.

The battle isn't only about the loss of forests or rivers or seasons or ozone, but it is also about how these are linked to poverty, jobs, education, health and more. Over the years, as globalization sweeps across India and resources are privatized, community lands are purchased by global companies and jobs offered in return, to the men. Women lose subsistence land and access to resources, and are thus impoverished.

However, protest movements – as against the building of the Narmada dam, have generated a rich culture of songs, plays, ballads and stories that continue to give hope and solace to people in the midst of what seems like an uncertain future.

Urvashi Butalia is Director, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Zubaan, a renowned feminist publisher in India.

Feminism

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There was a time when middle class Indians grew up on the dictum of 'simple living, high thinking'. It was the introduction of economic liberalization and globalization, in the early 1990s, that transformed this assertion of a moral value to a symptom of failure. Simplicity came to be treated as a form of denial in the face of scarcity. This transition happened in the same three decades in which climate change came to be recognized as an accelerating crisis.

Today if India's per capita carbon footprint is still among the lowest in the world, it is because the vast majority of our people still do not have a big enough income to be large scale consumers. Anyone who is committed to egalitarian and democratic values cannot support such forced simplicity.

However, the grim reality of forced simplicity also cannot be allowed to obscure two key questions: Why is voluntary simplicity liberating? Why should the global-south live simple when it is the carbon spewing excess consumption by the global-north that has severely disrupted the ecological balance of our planet?

M.K. Gandhi would answer the first question with one word: *Swaraj*. This means having the strength to rule over one's passions. *Swaraj* as control over the self makes it possible to distinguish between needs and wants from a position of wisdom rather than external compulsion. This remains true whether you are part of the global-north or global-south.

Therefore, a tit-for-tat answer to the second question is unviable. *Swaraj* as an intrinsic value cannot be made contingent on what 'others' do. This is why the structural violence that has led to the climate crisis calls not for counter violence but *ahimsa* (nonviolence) as method and *swaraj* as goal. Only then can both production systems and consumption patterns be reconfigured to serve our 'needs' in such a way that having fewer 'wants' becomes the highest freedom.

Rajni Bakshi is a journalist and author of several books including 'Bazaars, Conversations and Freedom: For a market culture beyond greed and fear'.

Economy ”

Culture is the human response to geographical context. The manner in which communities dress, design houses, eat, celebrate and even the manner language sounds have evolved are inspired by surrounding natural environments. The manner in which social groups traditionally create livelihoods depends on harnessing available natural resources. Climate crisis is a manmade circumstance that inevitably impacts geographies and, in turn, implies pressure to reconfigure or recollect cultural responses in order to survive.

The fact that the pace of global warming is increasing in India has impacted communities such as those in the Himalayas. In the last decades, glaciers have melted in Ladakh. These communities have suffered flash floods that have washed away their homes and crops, leaving them displaced and in utter poverty. Many of them have moved higher up from the river or migrated. However, the older members remain helpless.

The growing cultural mindset, more aligned with the capitalist economy and a distorted version of development, has impacted the traditional fabric of several Himalayan societies including marginalization of traditional wisdom that was in sync with

maintaining a balance with the environment. Recent projects to widen roads have led to deforestation and tampering with river beds. There is a dependence on tap water and western models of development have resulted in delinking community environmental cultural practices. For example, many areas had community ownership (like sacred groves), rituals, and participation regarding women and water. For instance, in Uttarakhand, the night after the wedding a new bride was taken to worship a spring, lake or river from where her home acquired water. Even today, women join to perform *Jal Yatras* (water pilgrimages).

Climate crisis, distorted contours of 'development' is human-made, and it is only the recollection of traditional wisdom that will allow communities to come to re-group, to own responsibility and collectively address this approaching apocalypse.

Dr. Navina Jafa is Vice President of Centre for New Perspectives, a non-profit think tank, and is a well-known curator, writer, interpreter, and presenter of and on Indian heritage and culture.

Cultural Expression



भारतीय रिजर्व बैंक
पॉलिसी रिजर्व बैंक



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The Indian media's response to the climate crisis has been tepid. Coverage is largely event-centric and not process-centric. This enables an unfortunate delinking between long-term processes, such as climate crisis, and the events that showcase symptoms of these processes, such as increased intensity of drought, heat waves or changes in weather and climatic patterns.

Media

The Indian media's commercial model, which earns a majority of its revenue from corporate and government advertisements – and not subscription – further skews the areas it focuses on, and it is blind-sided too. The issues of more vulnerable sections of rural population, with relatively lower purchasing power, consequently find lesser reflections. Climate change's impacts, faced disproportionately higher by this segment of population, fall within this ignored set of issues.

Traditionally, the newsrooms are hardwired to work in silos. Climate change is tracked by journalists who cover the 'environment ministry' beat. Pursuing policy level reportage on climate change requires a more cross-silo and thematic approach that cuts across traditional

'beats'. I believe journalists also need to understand the energy and power sectors better for a more holistic reporting approach.

That said, the heightened sense of alarm about air pollution in the urban areas has brought to bear somewhat more focus on the subject of climate crisis. Although, coupling of the two – the challenge of localized air pollution with the challenge of climate crisis and greenhouse gas emissions – has led the media to unidirectional approach to the subject in its coverage.

Over time, even though coverage may have improved, quality remains a challenge. This can be partially overcome by carefully crafted and more concerted engagement to enhance capacities of the traditional media and the journalistic fraternity. The social media engagement with the climate crisis is bound to gain with such a deeper and more carefully crafted support that addresses the peculiar weakness of Indian media-scape.

Indrajit Bose is Senior Researcher with Third World Network. He works on global climate policy.

Grassroot Activism

At any given moment in India, there are hundreds of sites of people's resistance against the imposition of state and corporate-sponsored 'development' projects: Mining, big dams, highways, industries, tourist resorts, and the like. This builds on an ancient heritage of community protests, from feudal and princely times, through the colonial period and now into independent India.

Many people's movements assert their rights to land and forests, and water, but they also raise the issue of the destruction of nature being not only a matter of their own survival but also an ethical and spiritual issue. For instance, the 300-year-old protest by the Bishnoi community against the ruler's order to cut trees to make his palace in Rajasthan was prompted both by livelihood and cultural concerns, since the tree in question (*khejadi*, *prosopis cineraria*) was considered sacred. More recently, the Chipko movement against deforestation in the Himalaya was led by women concerned not only about the impacts on their farming and water sources, but also because the forests were culturally important for them. The same goes for what is possibly India's most well-known recent movement against the dams on the Narmada river, motivated by opposition to

being evicted from their lands as also by the violation of the river's sacredness.

Most such movements do not identify themselves as climate actions; they are more about livelihoods, land, nature, and an assertion of local democracy. One should not make the mistake of boxing them into climate movements. But they are nevertheless crucial for the desperate struggle to counter the climate crisis. They help slow down the bulldozer of destructive 'development' (several dams and mining projects that would have added to the crisis have been stopped); they help conserve vital ecosystems (forests, grasslands, wetlands, marine/coastal areas) and biological diversity (including in agriculture) that are crucial for mitigation and adaptation. Most importantly, they assert ways of life and worldviews that challenge the ideology of developmentalism (and its roots in patriarchy, capitalism, modernity, and racism), and provide clear alternatives to it that can help humanity achieve well-being without trashing the earth and without leaving billions of human beings in deprivation.

Ashish Kothari is with Kalpavriksh, Vikalp Sangam, and the Global Tapestry of Alternatives.

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Youth Activism

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Over 70 percent of India's population is under the age of 35. Undoubtedly, the burden of climate crisis is mostly on the young, both in terms of impact of this crisis as well as responsibility towards fixing it. Sustained bad policies have led to the crisis, though governments try to put the blame on natural factors.

At the same time, India is undergoing its worst phase of unemployment of youth in last 45 years with deepening agrarian crisis and large scale migration of young people from rural areas to the urban areas. Climate crisis is one of the main reasons for this large scale migration, often affecting the economic, social and physical wellbeing of the young people. Erratic rains and floods, large scale drought and water crisis, and widespread air pollution are symptoms of climate crisis, either cause or effect, killing thousands of young people every day.

Youth of India however have been organizing themselves in the most innovative way possible to address the issue of climate crisis. This has been happening at two levels – personal and collective, and personal and political. Despite overwhelming pressure from the consumerist market forces, several young people are adapting to sustainable lifestyles – be it in the sphere of mobility, leisure or food. We have seen the youth anchoring several campaigns such as ‘say no to plastic bags’, ‘say no to fire crackers’ and tree plantation drives.

At the political level, campaigns and protests like Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future have gained adequate steam in several cities of the country. In last few months, we have seen young people boycott their school and participate in climate protests, demanding swift and credible response from the local governments. It is a phenomenon yet to become a force to reckon with but the fact that young people have hit the streets is a sign enough to state that they are not taking climate crisis lying down.

Youth activism plays an important role in addressing the problem of climate crisis. Young people need to demand climate justice and climate friendly policies and action from the government. We have seen widespread protests in India with respect to agrarian distress, felling of trees and forests, issues of air pollution, drought and water crisis.

Young people are at the forefront, of facing the brunt of climate crisis, and also fighting climate crisis.

Vimlendu Jha is an activist and social entrepreneur known for his innovative and unconventional approaches to contemporary environmental and social issues.





Civil Society

Despite having a vibrant civil society, India could not make climate crises a critical issue in the environment and development discourse. While the policy engagement on green technologies has gathered pace since 2008, the actions related to tackling climate impacts remain on the margins.

The response of both government and civil society to recent heat waves, drought and water crisis lays bare the country's lack of preparedness. For decades, the Indian government fought a fierce battle at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to "protect its development space" so that it is not compelled to take inequitable emission reduction targets. Even though the civil society supported the government's position in the international fora, it challenged India's poor environmental protection record back home.

At the global platform, the government's narrow focus on mitigation did not bring to light its vulnerability owing to climate sensitive economic sectors and fragile geo-climatic zones. It marginalized work on adaptation and addressing climate impacts (known as loss and damage under UNFCCC) such as sea level rise, drought and increasing extreme weather events. Few policy focused environmental institutions – both homegrown and international – prioritized clean energy and air pollution issues confining to cities, whereas adaptation came much as an afterthought, ignoring impacts on the other rural half.

To my observation the situation, however, is beginning to change as many development organizations and UN agencies have started integrating adaptation into their development and disaster risk reduction strategies. Lack of foreign funding due to government's regulations means that majority of adaptation implementation work need to be shouldered by Indian organizations with some policy and capacity building support from the international community.

Civil society must not only play watchdog role in implementation of India's ambitious mitigation targets but also assist in demonstrating and scaling up actions to deal with devastating climate impacts. It needs to start making a stronger case in favor of renewable energy options so that dependence on fossil fuels can be minimized and it needs to work to add resilience against 2-degree temperature change to have an inbuilt mechanism in development agenda.

Sanjay Vashist is Director of Climate Action Network South Asia interacting with 196 NGOs in South Asian Countries.



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Arts

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India despite having rich indigenous knowledge has witnessed an erosion in the practices that sustain oneness with ecology.

There is a need to decolonize ourselves and relearn, re-align and regain these practices, and in turn begin to break military, neo-capitalist and technocratic models and discourses of top down development, poverty, progress and nationalism that brought on the climate crisis in the first place.

The climate crisis confronts us with a dual challenge firstly in itself and secondly in the way it is presented to us- it denotes an unsolvable crisis and apocalyptic future. However, instead of being confounded and incapacitated by the constant feed of the dystopian nightmare that awaits us, we need to act and step outside the older frames of reference in order to address a challenge that is complex, systemic, and long-term. This is something that the art community in India, has been unable to do. Understanding the scale and scope of crisis has been slow like in other disciplines. At most, responses have been around the understanding of the Anthropocene as being limited.

As desire machine collective's practice, the project "Periferry" was a response to the crisis as a platform on a disused ferry for people to come together and form temporary communities to share their concerns about the larger environment one occupies, both human and non-human. "The Narratives of Brahmaputra" was a collection of different stories,

tales, songs, sounds and maps of the river. "Inner Lines" was an audio-visual response to the plan of building 168 dams on the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. The necessity to create a shift in oneself, one's life and ways of thinking, and not only the content of thoughts, was a powerful motivation to reach a point where one is now.

I see art and creative ways of thinking as having a central role in understanding the inter-dependence of ecosystems. Connection, compassion and inclusion, rather than escape and immortality are the keys to a genuinely better future. Developing systems that are not just sustainable but also regenerative.

Ingenious methods and approaches, learning from indigenous knowledge systems and integrating them with art, design, system and critical thinking, ecology and science is required. A paradigm shift is needed in not just our thinking but in the very way we think about our relationship with the non-human world well beyond the Western discourse of the Anthropocene.

Sonal Jain works with the intersection of film, art, ecology, technology and activism. Her practice spans film, video, photography, digital media, public intervention, curation and writing.

Renewable Energy

India's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have been growing at a steady rate, with the electricity/energy sector being the largest contributor to India's total GHG emissions, to the tune of 78 percent.

Therefore, any reduction in India's GHG emissions will have to come from its energy sector, which also has a huge potential to reduce its carbon footprint.

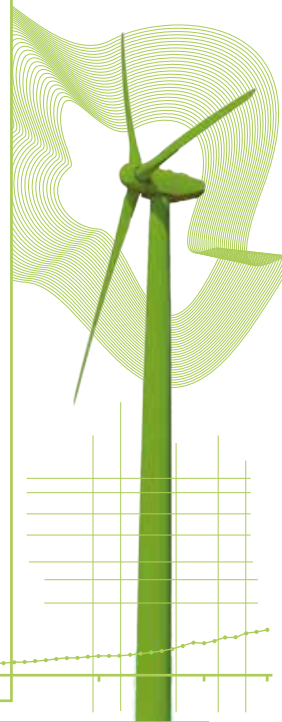
The silver lining for India is that it has already embarked on a pathway to control its GHG emissions from the electricity sector, with very ambitious renewable energy targets of 175 gigawatts (GW) by 2022 and is already on track to achieve the targets. This in itself is a clear indication in terms of numbers as to the link between electricity and energy sector in India and GHG emissions.

In its Nationally Determined Contribution submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and specifically under the Paris Agreement, India has amongst others, agreed to increase its share of energy from non-fossil fuel power generation to 40 percent by 2030, which is a very clear indication that the

government recognizes and acknowledges the link between renewable energy (non-fossil fuel energy) and addressing India's climate crisis. However, it is imperative that the country soon embarks on a pathway that further reduces its share of electricity from fossil fuel and goes well past its 2030 target of 40% electricity from non-fossil fuels. From a climate angle, this is extremely imperative, as continued dependence on fossil fuel also impacts other natural resources including water, as most fossil fuel power plants require huge quantities of water for electricity generation. The climate crisis can further worsen the acute water shortage situation in India in the coming years.

In my view, this is the right path, as the country while being the third largest emitters to GHG emissions is also a country with a very high vulnerability to climate crisis. The country has been facing high incidents of frequent droughts, floods, and other natural disasters, many of which can be attributed to climate crisis.

Srinivas Krishnaswamy, an economist by training is Chief Executive Officer of the Vasudha Foundation, New Delhi.



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Policy Making

In India we know that the threat of climate crisis is real, it is urgent and emissions already accumulated in the atmosphere are changing our weather in dangerous and catastrophic ways. The poor in India and many other parts of the developing world are already victims of climate change. Farmers may not know the word climate crisis. But they know that the weather has changed, and for much worse.

Our response to climate crisis is also based on our reality; we are taking actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions because it is in our interest. This last winter Delhi shut down its only coal based power plant; the country has introduced new emission standards for coal, which it is working to implement as early as possible. The urgency is to make a massive move to cleaner fuels like renewables or natural gas. This is essential and we will push for it – not for climate crisis reasons but for cutting air pollution. But it is also clear that countries like India will need more energy – there is the unmet need for energy and development for large numbers of its people. This remains our challenge.

I believe that my country must take the lead to putting forward our vulnerability to the global stage. We must demand that the world acts – at speed and scale. And even as we push for the world to take climate crisis seriously, we must put forward our own plan to cut emissions for local air pollution, which we have co-benefits in terms of climate crisis. We must have something to show. We need to be decisive in our words and our actions. This whimpering and simpering will not work in our climate-risked world.

Sunita Narain is the Director General of the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi and is also a writer and environmentalist.

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Migration

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In 2018, an HSBC Bank report ranked India as most vulnerable to climate crisis after assessing a total of 67 developed, emerging and frontier markets, on vulnerability to physical impacts of climate crisis, sensitivity to extreme weather events, and ability to respond to climate crisis.

In the same year, disasters displaced 2.7 million people in India – highest in the region – out of which 2 million were weather related, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

By May this year, 43% of India experienced drought, with failed monsoon rains seen as the primary reason forcing about eight million farmers in just two states of India to flee.

Despite all these, the government’s budget of 2019-20 turned a blind eye to climate crisis and was far away from even recognizing the challenge of climate induced displacement. There is no protection available to those who migrate for survival and are compelled to live in informal settlements without proper access to basic services such as water, sanitation, waste management, healthcare and education. Young women, who are forced to

cross borders to India alone from neighboring countries, can be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

The report, *Climate Change Knows No Borders*, by ActionAid, Climate Action Network South Asia and Bread for the World, Germany, highlighted “push factors” include conflict, poverty, land access and ethnicity, while there were also many “pull factors” such as development, livelihoods, seasonal labor, kinship and access to health or services.

I would like to underline the recommendations of the report that governments must collect climate migration data, develop gender sensitive policies and strengthen resilience. It is important that the government must also involve civil society and neighboring governments to take measures such as establishing regional early warning systems, creating food banks, reskilling young people and ensuring equitable approaches to trans-boundary water governance to avert, minimize and address forced migration while safeguarding human rights.

Harjeet Singh is the global lead on climate change for ActionAid. He is an expert on issues related to climate impacts, migration and adaptation. ■■

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“Climate change is a serious problem, yet one that seems to be remote”

Interview with Zheng Xiaowen from China

In recent years, as the world’s largest emitter, China has shown ambitions to fight climate change. For young people in China today, the emphasis on environmental protection creates a societal perspective that is very different from what their parents knew when they were young, giving them a new outlook on the relationship between humans and nature. Zheng Xiaowen from CYCAN spoke with Heinrich Böll Foundation Beijing Representative Office about how Chinese youth view and address climate change and about her organization’s work to strengthen these efforts.

What is CYCAN? Can you give us a short introduction to the organization?

The China Youth Climate Action Network (CYCAN) was founded in 2007. Our mission is to encourage more young people in China to care about climate change and to take action. In China, back then, not much was known about climate change, nor was it discussed by the younger generation, especially when compared to their peers in other countries.

The first full-time staff of CYCAN started in 2010, and the organization was registered as an NGO in 2012. On the 10th anniversary of CYCAN, in 2017, we undertook a strategic planning process to restructure our activities since we realized that today young Chinese know a lot more about climate change

Currently, CYCAN’s strategy has three layers: inspiration, empowerment and influence. “Inspiration” entails advocacy and education, and the goal is to educate young people about climate change by using interactive formats. “Empowerment” provides capacity building and training opportunities for young people so they can take actions. “Influence” refers to tailored support for a small group of youth who have been “inspired” and “empowered” to study or work in areas related to climate change and do that with a long-term perspective.

Why did you join CYCAN? In your work, what encourages you most?

In 2013, I was offered the opportunity to join CYCAN, which I did because I enjoy working with young people. Concepts and knowledge you pick up in your youth can change your whole life. I constantly reflect on our work and I am trying to provide different perspectives, so that young people can make their own choices.

Feedback from young people encourages me the most. For example, when they tell me that they have learned something or even changed some of their behaviors after participating in our projects or events.

The China Youth Climate Action Network (CYCAN, registered as a Chinese NGO Guangzhou Yuexiu Kelaimete Environmental Protection Exchange Center) was the first non-profit environmental organization in China to focus on empowering China’s youth to take action and provide a voice for university students and young people in the fight against climate change. CYCAN has engaged more than 500 Chinese universities and hundreds of thousands of Chinese youth in the fight against climate change and has raised awareness that such efforts may be part of their future careers.

The interviewee is **Ms. Zheng Xiaowen**, Executive Director of CYCAN.

How does your organization work with young college students?

We provide opportunities for different levels of engagement. First, in addition to our full-time team, we have a core group of interns who take an active role in designing and coordinating our projects, such as the International Youth Summit on Energy and Climate Change. This core team of about 15 people is recruited on a project basis and, as part of our “empowerment” and “influence” approach, we provide them with training in capacity building and mentoring. Second, for the Youth Summit and campus projects, there are volunteers who contribute through logistical and communication work, which is relatively short-term. Third, students participate in our events and workshops on campus. For example, hundreds of college students participated in the 2019 Shenzhen Youth Summit. Furthermore, we are exploring new and interesting online communication channels and formats, such as *WeChat* and other social media, to reach the younger generation.

Are young people aware of climate change? How do they view the issue?

The young people I’m in contact with every day have beyond-average awareness and knowledge of climate change, otherwise they would not be a part of our team. They are also more interested and eager to learn about climate change. It is evident that, compared to five or ten years ago, more young people are becoming aware of climate change and they are willing to take action. There are some recent domestic surveys showing a high rate of awareness among China’s public. It is interesting to note, however, that there were occasions where students were not aware of Sustainable Development Goals and they reported a limited understanding of climate change. It is possible that the term “climate change” is accepted, yet that people are still not familiar with the causes and consequences. This year, we are working on a survey to find out how Chinese youth understand climate change. Hopefully, after that, we will have a more comprehensive picture.

The images of the melting ice caps and trapped polar bears are broadly spread across China’s social media. Chinese youth do consider this a serious problem, yet possibly as one that is remote. After engaging with us, young people who had not been familiar with climate change usually ask us: “What can we do?”

Does climate change influence and affect the lives of Chinese young people in general?

Climate Change does not impact young people in obvious ways, so they perceive of it more in terms of environmental policies, such as the sub-

sidy for alternative fuel vehicles. Most young people know more about environmental protection than about climate change. Accordingly, they are more willing to protect the environment. Today, we observe a trend that more people consider being environmentally friendly a good thing. However, when talking about climate change, young people tend to view it as an important topic, yet one that is highly politicized. This perception sometimes will let them shy away from further engagement. I suppose this is because most coverage of climate issues relates to negotiations and international politics. Still, they are eager to know what kind of actions we can take to address the problem.

In Europe, many young people are trying to consume less or to lower their CO2 emissions. Especially the young people participating in the Fridays for Future movement are willingly making sacrifices in order to save natural resources. In what ways are young people in China trying to make a personal contribution to protect the environment?

Since I am involved in environmental protection, I do notice that more young people who care about the climate and the environment are willing to make personal changes. Specific actions include being vegetarian, ordering less food for delivery and bringing your own utensils when dining outside. There are specific challenges like “one-month without ordering out” and “cutting plastic consumption.” As the idea of protecting the environment is widely accepted by young people in China, more and more of them are willing to purchase products that are environmentally friendly.

From where do they get their knowledge and information?

Not many schools offer courses on climate change to students who study subjects that are unrelated to climate or politics. However, there are many online courses offered by international organizations such as the World Bank and MOOCs [Massive Open Online Courses] provided by foreign universities. Young people who are active and interested can use such resources. Social media plays a key role in addressing a broader audience – be it as an active learner or as a passive consumer. *WeChat* articles, *Zhihu* [the Chinese version of *Quora*], *Weibo* and emerging video platforms are major information channels. Generally, visual messages such as images and videos are becoming more and more influential, which is why melting ice caps and trapped polar bears are so well known.

Do young people in China frequently talk about the “climate crisis”? Do they follow the Fridays for Future movement – or is there anything similar in China?

Overall, “crisis” is not a favored word in Chinese politics. We barely hear of “the climate crisis” in public discussions. In order to make people act, mainstream media and civil society prefer words that are less dramatic. Due to the political environment there is no Fridays for Future movement in China. Some young people, however, are seeking different ways to encourage more debate on and attention to this issue, such as the online campaign by “Act Now” and climate education activities.

When people talk about melting ice caps and submerging islands, they do view this as a crisis, yet as one that is remote, and consequently they lack a sense of urgency.

What leeway is there for the younger generation to take action and address climate change? Have you seen any changes over the past ten years?

Young people today have more options. There are groups and organizations on campus, as well as NGOs. There are also internship platforms sharing information on relevant opportunities. Most young people start

by participating in projects or events. Today, we see more young people building their own businesses in areas to do with environmental protection – and some of them are doing quite well.

Is there anything else you would like to share about the role Chinese students play in addressing the climate crisis? What are their motivations, how do they view it and how do they act?

Students who are only consumers of information will remain passive – or become even more passive than before. Today, there are so many different channels providing information that attention is easily diverted to topics other than climate change. The challenge we face is to rethink our communication strategy. Among post-graduates and young professionals who actively participate in our programs, we do see attempts to start businesses with a “green” emphasis, for example teaching about nature, providing renewable energy and developing other such technologies.

How do people outside of CYCAN view the movement, especially parents and politicians?

Regarding Fridays for Future, there were no major public discussions among young people in China, as the political space for such actions is limited. Outside of CYCAN, there were mainly two attitudes: One, support for young people who are voicing their concerns, and, two, insisting that the priority for young people should be that they go to school and get an education. At our Youth Climate Summit, two speakers mentioned the movement, citing it as an example of how much the younger generation cares for the environment. As far as I know, there is no official comment from any politician.

How is climate change being discussed in China’s public life? Do you notice any new trends or interesting formats?

Most people link climate change to melting ice caps and polar bears losing their home, and some people may say things like that they “have to visit the Maldives before they drown.” It is either something that is broadly circulated or that directly impacts their interests. This is largely related to media messaging because nowadays most people get their information primarily from social media. Furthermore, the Chinese public views climate change as an international issue that is far beyond their scope as ordinary citizens. Media coverage of international negotiations and global debates enhances such a perception. On the other hand, being “international” sometimes also attracts young people and will make them want to engage. The latest format are short videos, for example *vlogs*. CYCAN has produced some short videos during the last UNFCCC COP and disseminated them through *WeChat* and *Weibo*. There was also cooperation with another Chinese NGO to make short videos about climate and vegetarianism, which were circulated via *Tik Tok*. However, due to a lack of capacity, we haven’t done this recently.

In your opinion, what needs to be done for China to react adequately to this climate crisis?

Increasing awareness is still the key. We need to explore how we can change individual behavior through technological development and social policies in order to reduce environmental impacts. CYCAN will have to adjust its strategies to its target groups and to the respective social context. We have to develop practices and actions that will make change happen. ■■■

“Young people know that the climate crisis is an existential threat to human civilization”

Interview with Malaysian Youth Delegation

Established in 2015, Malaysian Youth Delegation (MYD) is the only youth-led organization in Malaysia that focuses on climate change policy and negotiations, providing a platform for curious and interested youth to explore the world of climate agreements at the United Nations. In this interview – conducted by Heinrich Böll Foundation Southeast Asia Regional Office – MYD explains how young Malaysians view the climate crisis and how they educate the public on climate change policies.

Is climate change a pressing issue for Malaysia as a developing country?

Malaysia may still be a developing country, nonetheless the current climate crisis is of great concern to many Malaysians. In 2016, a survey found that a whopping 80% of Malaysians are aware of climate change, and that they are not satisfied with the efforts taken by the Federal Government to curb this crisis. Never before has civil society in Malaysia played such a crucial role in shaping public opinion and discourse. Yet, there still is room for improvement.

What has led to this new discourse about climate issues, and how have discussions changed over the last few years in Malaysia?

Since 2015, we have seen a development in terms of political accessibility. It has become easier for civil society actors to engage with the government of the day and to talk about climate issues that concern Malaysians. Grassroots movements have become a growing force in reminding the government to treat climate change as a global crisis, and this was influenced by the Fridays for Future movement initiated by Greta Thunberg. The birth of national grassroots movements such as Klima Action Malaysia (KAMY) and Bangkit4Iklim means that today political leaders have to treat the issue seriously.

All around the world young people like you are demanding new climate policies. Why do you think young people have become such a driving force in the global climate debate?

The youth of today was brought up to think that the system they grew up in was invulnerable and that their lives would be better than their parents', if only they would perform largely the same economic activities as their predecessors – though on a grander scale. The climate crisis as an existential threat to human civilization shattered the myth of progress and economic prosperity for many young people. Faced with the prospect of a nightmarish future, young people are at a crossroads: Either, you practice the axiom “ignorance is bliss” and enjoy the ephemeral present, or you agitate for change within the window of time we have before our earth reaches a tip-

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MYDclimate/



The Core Team of Malaysian Youth Delegation

Photo: Malaysian Youth Delegation (MYD)

ping point. The global protests indicate that young people have taken the later road and will no longer accept that profits are put before the interests of the people and the planet.

How are young Malaysians mobilizing their peers? What is the best way to make them join the climate movement?

Malaysian youths are extremely clued in to social media platforms, and this connectivity has led to grassroots coalitions such as Klima Action Malaysia (KAMY¹), which has held three rallies over the course of three months, and is calling on the Malaysian government to declare a climate emergency. Many NGOs are also headed by young activists, and they demand, for example, that the government opt out of a land reclamation² project in Penang Island or stop monoculture plantations on indigenous lands³. Other groups, such as Malaysian Vegans, engage the public regularly⁴ to promote a plant-based diet. The best way to attract young people to join the climate movement is for existing groups to regularly engage the public through events such as rallies, picnics, talks and screenings. Participants also need to be empowered to perform their own outreach and activism after attending these events in order to create a knock-on effect. However, with open protests being a relatively new phenomenon in Malaysia, young people may not feel comfortable with publicly supporting organizations that hold positions contrary to those promoted by the Federal Government.

How is the Fridays for Future movement viewed in Malaysia? Did this movement inspire young Malaysians?

The worldwide Fridays for Future movement was the starting point for many young Malaysians to take their anger to the streets. The first Fridays for Future event on March 15, 2019, mobilized considerable support especially from youths in Penang and Kuala Lumpur. In Penang, about 60 people turned up, while in Kuala Lumpur about 40 young people gathered and called for greater awareness and action against climate change. Ever since this first event on March 15, a few youth climate action groups, both national and regional, have emerged across the country. The most recent peaceful protest, #MYClimateRally, happened on July 7, in Kuala Lumpur, where young participants rallied to calls for climate justice and to stop the logging of our rain forests.

What are the main climate issues in Malaysia – and is it possible to address them?

Malaysia will likely face the adverse effects of climate change by the middle of this century. Tropical cities such as Kuala Lumpur are expected to experience unprecedented climate conditions, resulting in extreme weather events and intense droughts by 2050. Significant adaptation efforts are required for Malaysia to adapt to the new reality of a world disrupted by climate change. Since the energy sector is a primary contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, Malaysia has set a goal of increasing its share of energy from renewables by 2030 from 2% to 20%. Such adaptation will require significant investment. Deforestation and changes in land use also contribute to Malaysia's greenhouse gas emissions. However, logging is an important source of revenue for some states in Malaysia. Malaysia would therefore need the support of international climate finance to successfully achieve its adaptation goals. Malaysia would also need to ensure that no one is left behind during adaptation efforts. Effective adaptation measures will need to be implemented across Malaysia. Doing so will be a significant challenge.

How has Malaysian politics reacted to the climate crisis?

Before May 2018, there the political will to implement climate policies was lacking. Our climate policies looked amazing on paper, the implementation, however, was poor. Under the new government, which was voted into power in May 2018, some progress has been made and ambitious targets were set. Yet, we believe that things need to move faster. Therefore, we are constantly monitoring our government's decisions when it comes to addressing climate issues both locally and internationally. We speak out when we see decisions that are not going in the right direction, and we publish this on our website or via print and social media. This is our way of subtle advocacy, and this is how we are trying to make our voice heard as climate-conscious young people.

Conferences on Climate Change always take place at the highest political level, which makes it sometimes difficult for ordinary people to connect to climate issues. How do you deal with this?

MYD's role is not just to empower young people on climate change policy, but also to dissect information coming from high-level political forums and negotiations and turn them into something that is easy to grasp. That was one of MYD's objectives from the very start. Secondly, we need to spread this message to as many people as possible to make sure the word gets out. We do this through our MYD Training Series, Post-COP forums, roundtable discussions and social media engagement. These two elements, dissecting information and engagement, allows us to reach out to people so that they will understand and will be able to empower themselves through knowledge that makes them more 'climate conscious.'

Since climate change is a global phenomenon that affects certain regions as a whole, do you think ASEAN, as an institution, may play an important role in curbing the climate crisis?

As an institution, ASEAN could definitely play a bigger coordinating role in regional environmental management; its full potential as a bloc has arguably yet to be realized. Nonetheless, we feel that the consensus-based initiatives, which come with the ‘ASEAN way,’ should not be underestimated, as it is rather well-suited to a regional environment like ours with vastly different institutions. Other transnational institutions, such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC), show how instrumental regional institutions are in coordinating resource use in Southeast Asia. Institutions like the MRC are a beacon for cooperation as, unlike the European Union, Southeast Asia remains very fragmented in terms of regulatory regimes for environmental management and resource use.

Could ASEAN maybe live up to its full potential, once it is confronted with a regional climate movement?

This is what we are already trying to do. We, as MYD, also maintain good relations with peers in the environmental community abroad and benefit from frequent cooperations on various topics. For instance, we often work with the Singapore Youth For Climate Action group on capacity building initiatives. Further afield, we are currently working with the Asian Youth Climate Network on an Nationally Determined Contribution analysis toolkit for civil society stakeholders. This toolkit is still a work in progress, however, we are beginning to see the benefits of collaboration with our Taiwanese, Japanese and South Korean peers – not least because they have very different political economies, which has been extremely useful in lending us a holistic perspective on subnational Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) implementation frameworks. ■■■

¹ Klima Action Malaysia, <https://www.facebook.com/KlimaActionMalaysia/>, accessed September 11, 2019.

² Selamatkan Pulau Pinang! Tolak Tambak 3 Pulau!, <https://www.change.org/p/prime-minister-of-malaysia-save-penang-reject-the-3-islands-reclamation/u/24576277>, accessed September 11, 2019.

³ NGO, Orang Asli bantah projek ladang hutan, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/wilayah/2019/04/558810/ngo-orang-asli-bantah-projek-ladang-hutan>, accessed September 11, 2019.

⁴ Malaysia Vegan Festival, <https://www.facebook.com/events/publika/malaysia-vegan-festival-2019/482268415912335/>, accessed September 11, 2019.

“I will not stand their silence”

Eun-young Go from South Korea

In May 2019, South Korean President Moon Jae-in suggested in an op-ed for Germany's *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) that the South Korean government is trying to cope with climate change by building a sustainable society. However, in reality, this is not the case. The Republic of Korea is in a terrible state of climate silence, which is underpinned by conservative politics. In an attempt to break this silence, the Green Party Korea has pushed for climate action and has made a climate crisis response the core of its agenda for the 2020 general election.

On June 23, 1988, when I was only four years old, a group of lawmakers on the other side of the globe witnessed a groundbreaking testimony. Dr. James Hansen, a NASA scientist and climatologist, stated unequivocally before the US Senate, “So with 99 percent confidence we can state that the warming during this time period is a real warming trend.” His research findings, he stated, provide “altogether the evidence that the earth is warming by an amount, which is too large to be a chance fluctuation and the similarity of the warming to that expected from the greenhouse effect represents a very strong case, in my opinion, that the greenhouse effect has been detected, and it is changing our climate now.”

This was the moment, when science, led by Dr. Hansen and his fellow climate experts, declared that climate change can no longer be referred to as a ‘suspicion’ to be entertained, but that it is a ‘fact’ and has to be recognized as such. Despite the definitive nature of Dr. Hansen’s testimony, the general public’s reaction was lukewarm at best. Public school textbooks, which all Korean students read in their social science classes, eventually began to cover

events such as the international commitments to curb CO₂ (e.g., the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the subsequent 2015 Paris Agreement), and these became popular topics for school exams. Also, more and more science fiction films used storylines linked to the climate crisis. Additionally, many TV variety shows were applauded for being ‘environmentally conscious’ after airing skits, games and shorts addressing the regional effects of global warming. In the 31 years since the testimony, climate change has not moved beyond being a casually-consumed, highbrow issue – to the dismay of the scientists who warned the world of a “real warming trend.”

I was four then, and now I am 35. I live on Jeju island, a place of great ecological value, and a UNESCO-designated biosphere reserve. The island is, however, also facing serious environmental issues stemming from or exacerbated by over-tourism and touristification. Groundwater, which provides 97% of the freshwater used on the island, is currently at the lowest recorded level since observations began. The sea level along the coast of Jeju is rising at a rate that is three times the global average. The island is literally sinking into a major climate crisis. (For similar reasons, Jakarta, Indonesia’s capital, is in the process of relocating.) Paradoxically, however, plans were announced in 2015 to construct a second international airport on Jeju, which will only push us deeper into environmental disaster. In response, to highlight the seriousness of the problem, I ran for governor as a Green Party candidate in the 2018 provincial election (I finished third out of five candidates, and did better than the candidate fielded by Korea’s largest party, a senior politician). Now, in 2019, I am in charge of the Green Party’s climate change initiative.

Two months into my new job, summer began. My day starts with checking the number of heat-related illnesses on the website of the Korea Center for Disease Control and Prevention. This is equivalent to tallying the health records for those hit by heatwaves, including farmers, outdoor laborers and impoverished people living under tin roofs.

The Korean government recommends halting outdoor work once the temperature reaches 38°C, as the risk of heat exhaustion and heat stroke becomes too great. Sometimes I have a strange sense of apprehension, leading me to look into the oceanography reports for Jeju Island.

Indeed, there are other concerning news that I receive from around the world. A heat-wave with a record high of 45°C in France and the rest of Southern Europe has forced authorities to place the public on alert, urging children and the elderly to avoid outdoor activities. In Alaska, wildfires scorched a region already suffering from floods caused by glacier meltdown. Fifty-six sub-glacial lakes were discovered beneath Greenland's ice sheets, while sea ice the size of Mexico has melted in the Antarctic. The Mexican city of Guadalajara encountered a 1.5 m thick layer of ice created by a hailstorm. All of these catastrophes occurred within a week. Humanity has dawdled its time away, while the climate crisis has quickened its pace.

As a young member of Korean society, I was forced to compete in the job market even when the low-growth economy could not accommodate more workers. Despite of it all, I tried to live in an eco-friendly way in order to fulfill my environmental responsibility to the best of my abilities. Still, I now have to share the burden of the climate crisis. What is more painful than the sense of resentment and the exhaustion from explaining climate change

politics is having to bear the utter 'climate silence' of my country. A global and national crisis is upon us and yet our ministries and officials refuse to talk: The government will not reduce its greenhouse gas emissions; the National Assembly approves more coal-fired



Eun-young Go is holding a poster which says:
No second airport on Jeju Island

power plants and land development projects; and municipalities, media and education boards remain silent about climate change. The consequence is a feeling of helplessness and dejection.

According to the UK Overseas Development Institute, between 2017 and 2019, the growth of Korea's investment in coal-fired power generation was the third largest in the world. Such investment reduces the likelihood that old power plants will be closed. Also, in

Korean Greens

- The Green Party Korea was established in March 2012 and is a registered party in South Korea.
- Currently, the party has 10,500 members. For the June 2018 elections, the party fielded 32 candidates.
- In the 2016 general elections, the Green Party Korea won 0.76% of the vote. The party continues to work in the areas of electoral reform, denuclearization and sustainable energy, climate justice, peace, gender equality and minority rights.
- In the most recent elections (2018), two candidates had a significant impact on Korean politics. GP Korea candidate Ji-ye SHIN ran for mayor of Seoul on a feminist platform, winning 1.7% of the vote, thus coming fourth in a field of nine. GP Korea candidate Eun-Young GO ran for governor of Jeju island with a platform that demanded a basic income, ecological tourism, gender equality and the development of Jeju as a peace island free of naval bases. Eun-Young received 3.5% of the vote, coming third.
- Although no candidates were elected to office, the 2018 elections have laid a foundation for Green Party Korea, which will enable it to make further steps in the 2020 and 2022 elections.

June 2019, the prime minister rejected the Ministry of Environment's report recommending the withdrawal of internal combustion engines for cars by 2040. The reason for his rejection is that it could be a shock to the auto industry. Meanwhile, China, India, Britain and France, the major buyers of automobiles produced in Korea, have agreed to ban the sale of internal combustion engines by 2040. Thanks to this foolish policy decision, the Korean government has been rated “highly insufficient” by the Climate Action Tracker (CAT), which assesses whether countries are on track to meeting their climate change mitigation commitments or not. Although the carbon-free legislation needs to be reviewed by 2050 to implement the Paris Agreement, the government initiative is run by businesses and the research institutes are pro-government. No one, except the Greens, condemns this climate silence in Korea, and members of Korea's only progressive party with seats in the National Assembly, who pledged support for climate-friendly policies, have lost their seats in the last elections.

The laws and the social order perpetuated by conservative politics produce this cartel of silence. All of those who acknowledge the deepening climate crises, including a Korean director of documentaries about climate change, have confessed to experiencing similar feelings of extreme heavy-heartedness. Perhaps, this is a form of collective depression among those of us who recognize the generational, economic and regional discrepancies caused by climate change.

The only way for us to overcome this distress is to break the climate silence. Only citizens can act and change the old ways of politics. All of us across generations need to call for action to make zero-carbon policies

a reality. Around the world, young people are out on the streets already. As in Europe, the first climate action in Korea to break the silence was led by young people between the ages of 13 and 18. “Survival over growth” was their motto, and they wanted to protect their communities, while adults, on the other hand, were adding another layer of debt for young people to live with. This is the legacy of decades-old, archaic, incompetent politics. The youth of the world has announced another climate strike for November 29, 2019. It is not just young people, this time it is for all of us, for all who want humanity to survive, to join them in the streets. At the center, the Green Party of Korea is the most progressive and politically moving. For Jeju, for Korea, for the earth, for all this climate, let's end the silence. ■■■

“We believe that art is a powerful tool that can help to save our earth”

Interview with Henna Nguyen and Trung Phan from Vietnam

Vietnam is one of the countries most affected by climate change. Its Mekong Delta is one of the world’s three river deltas most vulnerable to sea-level rise, the other two being the Nile Delta in Egypt and the Ganges Delta in Bangladesh and West Bengal. Nevertheless, Vietnamese public awareness of the causes, impacts and mitigation of climate change is still very limited, especially knowledge about fossil fuels being the leading cause. Through mural street art, visible to hundreds of thousands of city dwellers, messages on the causes and impacts of climate change, and on renewable energy as the ultimate solution for Vietnam, are conveyed in an inspirational way.

In 2017, CHANGE/350.org Vietnam organized the mural painting contest “City 2030: Climate Change and Clean Energy” to raise the public voice against fossil fuels and promote renewable energy. The contest attracted more than 30 young artists who submitted 34 entries. The top ten drawings were painted on public walls in District 1 and District 10 of Ho Chi Minh City.

In 2019, CHANGE/350 has revived the mural art project, this time with a focus on air and plastic pollution. Taking part in this year’s campaign are artists Trung Phan and Henna Nguyen. Despite their difference in age, specialty and style, they both share the same purpose: using their paintings to engage the community in protecting the environment. In order to better understand the project, Tuong Nguyen asked them how and why they participated and how they view climate activism.

Why are you involved in this Mural Street Project?

Henna: I have known CHANGE VN for a long time and I am a big fan of the founder, Mrs. Hong Hoang. I often take part in their campaigns and support them wholeheartedly. I am also deeply concerned about the critical state of our environment; therefore, I’m very eager to join this project to promote a more sustainable future through the use of mural street art.

Trung: To me, CHANGE’s Mural Street Project is fascinating. Not only does it provide an opportunity for me to express my artistic passion, it also gives me a deeper understanding of climate change, which is currently one of my main concerns.

What is the title of your mural art, and what is the message that you are trying to convey through it?

Henna: The concept behind my mural is a simple comparison between two contrasting worlds: a world that is filled with plastic products versus the natural world. I imagine a dark world made entirely of plastic, where trees are replaced by plastic trunks, leaves are made of plastic bags, and

The interviewees:

Henna Nguyen is an alias. Her real name is Huong. She mostly works using traditional and digital art. She started out as an art teacher, then was an intern as a 3D artist for a production house. After graduating from the Fine Art University of Ho Chi Minh City, Henna became a storyboard artist and visualizer/illustrator for multinational advertising agencies. Recently, she opened her own studio, where she focuses on her own creative projects, teaches art and craft classes and organizes creative workshops.

Trung’s full name is Phan Dinh Trung. He is an architecture student and urban sketcher.

black smoke from burned plastics covers the sky and there's no greenery on the ground. The ocean would also suffer from this epidemic where there is all sorts of plastic waste; sea creatures would struggle to survive and some are trapped by plastic rings. In contrast to the sad reality of plastic pollution, parts of our beautiful and natural world still remains, which makes us wonder about the possibility of saving it in time. Along with the slogan of iCHANGE Plastic Project: 'Say NO to single-use plastic products,' I believe that everyone can be a hero and save our earth through small but impactful actions.



Henna is drawing her mural

Photo: CHANGE VN

Trung: The name of my painting is "Không Khí Sạch - Bầu Trời Xanh," which means "Clean Air - Blue Sky." Ho Chi Minh City is one of the major industrial cities in Vietnam. There are plenty of factories and crowded streets filled with vehicles. Such inexorable growth has led to increasing air pollution in my city. I hope that through my mural street art, people will understand how critical our role is in the fight against climate change and that we should take immediate action to reduce air pollution for our future generations.



Phan Dinh Trung – Artist of the mural artwork "Clean Air, Blue Sky"

Photo: CHANGE VN

How do you see climate change? As a global issue, or as national/local issue in Vietnam? From an environmental perspective, if you could change one thing in your country, what would that be?

Henna: I believe that everyone knows this is a global issue, yet we still have to find a plausible and effective solution. In Vietnam, the issue has only gained attention in recent years. In my community, people began taking this issue seriously once they started to get more information through different environmental workshops. They changed their daily behaviors and opted for a more sustainable and green lifestyle. I believe Vietnam needs to increase the use of public transportation, such as trains, metro, electric buses and electric ferries. We also need to shift to a more renewable source of energy. For instance, we should implement solar energy on a mass scale to provide sustainable energy for households and offices.

Trung: Climate Change is a global issue. If I could change one thing, it would be the quality of public transportation in the city. Motorbikes are the most popular means of transportation in Vietnam. It’s the easiest way to get around our city, but with such a large amount of motorbike users, it releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere at an alarming rate. By improving the quality of public transportation, we can surely attract more people to use it and this, in turn, would reduce the amount of carbon dioxide produced by fossil fuels and energy consumption.



The anger of Mother Nature – the runner up of the competition 2017 describes how Mother Nature was getting angry at human activities and was trying to save the last tree on Earth. Photo: CHANGE VN

Climate change / environmental awareness is still not an issue for common people, as they feel it is far from removed their daily lives. Can art help to save the planet?

Yes, we do believe that art is a powerful tool that can help save our earth. In general, artists are more sensitive to these issues, so they can depict environmental messages for their community in ways that are more interactive and engaging, making them easier to grasp.

How do you view the power of art, in this case murals, to spread climate change awareness and change people’s daily life?

Henna: I think that art has the power to explain and make people aware of their surroundings. The message conveyed by paintings is thought-provoking and powerful, with no cultural or geographic boundaries. We can use painting, posters or infographics to spread the message of sustainable development and encourage people to change their daily habits. Murals



Clean Energy for Vietnam – the winner of the competition 2017 featured the dream of a young boy towards a clean and green city where he could play freely in nature. Photo: CHANGE VN

are a good example for effective art, as they are turning empty walls into beautiful street art to convey meaningful messages. Years ago, I teamed up with others, and we created and then donated paintings and also sold postcards in order to raise awareness and money, with which to support the people who had been affected by marine pollution stemming from the Formosa incident back in 2016.¹

Trung: I believe that meaningful street paintings can be engaging and can speak to an audience through the artist’s perspective. By viewing this street art, passers-by will realize the negative impacts climate change has, and consequently their attitudes and their mindset regarding environmental issues may change.

Do you think that the creativity of art can be transferred to other aspects of people’s lives such as energy consumption, waste reduction and reduced carbon emissions? Can artists be role models, raising awareness and advocating for change? What are your thoughts on the global green movement, student protests, school strikes, Fridays for Future?

Henna: I do think that the creativity of art can be transferred to other aspects of daily life. Creativity usually breaks habits and routines, and very often artists use the lens of art to question the norm. In history, there were artists that helped raise awareness and that put people in touch with their surroundings, with their environment. I think that this movement is still taking place in modern times.

I see many artists from around the world sharing and teaching D.I.Y approaches to daily life as well as craft and maker skills. Many are active within their communities, encouraging people to start recycling, reinventing and re-using instead of throwing used products away. In this sense, artists already “function as role models that raise awareness and advocate for change!”

I am an artist and I use my creativity to transform ordinary and ubiquitous materials. I apply my creative ideas to craft things by using recycled materials. For example, I apply recycled plastic to fashion and create reusable shopping bags. Others are creating building bricks from plastic bottles. And many architects actively design houses and facilities that use recycled materials and exploit renewable sources of energy so as to avoid waste.

Many fashion designers are re-using plastic bags to make thread, which can be used to crochet rugs, bags, hats ... and more.

Another example of artists raising awareness for change in Vietnam is the art installation “The Parting of the Plastic Sea” made by Benjamin Von Wong using 168,000 recovered straws.

Trung: Of course art can be transformative. However, such artwork needs to carry a powerful message and it has to in a suitable location in order to impress the community. I believe in the power of art and that it can create momentum in our society. There are examples from the past where artists created controversial yet revolutionary pieces of art to make bold statements on social issues. Nowadays, it is more liberating for artists to voice their opinions, thanks to the widespread existence of social media. As an artist myself, I often engage my viewers in discussions on social matters through my artwork.

Are you aware of the millions of students protesting worldwide, pressuring governments and companies to act, and raising awareness on climate change? What do you think of this movement – and would this be possible in Vietnam?

Henna: I admire the courage of the students who are protesting worldwide. In the past few years, our country has witnessed a lot of peaceful street protests, such as the “saving trees” campaign, where people protested against the felling of trees to make way for a new underground line – or the protests against the Formosa incident, which promoted the message of protecting sea and fish from chemical pollution.



A piece of the mural art work by Henna Nguyen

Photo: CHANGE VN

Trung: I think it would be difficult to make this happen in Vietnam. First of all, protests are prohibited. However, we could organize an opinion poll and make the government listen to our concerns. Unfortunately, a referendum would not have any substantial result, if the Vietnamese people lack fundamental information about climate change or environmental issues. Therefore, it is more effective to make people aware of the problem than to hold a protest.

According to the revised Vietnam Power Development Plan 2011-2020, coal is projected to be the country’s main source of electricity, accounting for 53% in 2030. Furthermore, a study by Harvard University, Greenpeace and the University of Colorado, titled “Burden of Disease from Rising Coal-Fired Power Plant Emissions in Southeast Asia,” found that by 2030, premature mortality due to coal pollution will result in 19,220 excess deaths per year, an almost five-fold increase from the 4,252 excess deaths in 2011, thus making Vietnam Southeast Asia’s second most affected country. Vietnam is also one of the top five ocean plastic polluters.

In April 2015, serious coal pollution caused by Vinh Tan Coal Power Plant in Binh Thuan Province led to the first-ever environmental protest in the country, when thousands of residents blocked National Highway No.1A for days, clashing with police. Recently, the proposed plan of Long An Coal Power Plant close to Ho Chi Minh City has been causing concern, as its air and water pollution will affect about 13 million people. The petition to stop the Long An Coal Power Plant, which was initiated by a group of Vietnamese environmental activists, has so far been signed by 15,111 people.

Located in a tropical climate zone, Vietnam is a country with a large potential for renewable energies, particularly solar, wind and biomass. These will provide great alternatives to coal as a key source of energy production and will help mitigate climate change impacts in the country. Nevertheless, the market for renewables is still small and requires appropriate policies from the government to encourage investment. Awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy for sustainable energy policies are key to winning the climate change battle in Vietnam. Through these exciting mural projects, CHANGE/350 Vietnam hopes to raise awareness among the Vietnamese public about climate change and pollution and encourage people to speak up and demand that the government, for the benefit of the people and the environment, scrap plans to build new coal-fired power plants, ban single-use plastic and invest in community-based sustainable energy. ■■

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Vietnam_marine_life_disaster

Climate Action in Hong Kong: The World's First Climate Change Museum

Debbie P.W. Tsang and George S.K. Ma

Blessed with a fine natural harbor and a hardworking, entrepreneurial population, Hong Kong is one of Asia's most impressive success stories. However, its relentless drive for economic prosperity during the second half of the 20th century came at a high price to its environment. While, by the 1970s, environmental degradation had already become a concern in some parts of the world, Hong Kong only began to become environmentally conscious two or three decades ago.

By the beginning of the 21st century, the negative effects of its economic development – large-scale pollution, a cramped and unhealthy urban cityscape, the despoliation of the territory's magnificent natural environment – had become too noticeable to be ignored any longer.¹ Attitudes had also changed due to growing popular awareness of the threat posed by global warming. Calls for a sustainable approach were first made by NGOs and local activists, such as Greenpeace Hong Kong and WWF Hong Kong. These calls struck a chord locally, and were soon backed by the territory's government. There is now a growing consensus in Hong Kong that we need to act, and to act now, to combat global warming and to be responsible stewards of our environment. Earlier this year, in response to Fridays for Future, two student protests were organized, and around a thousand students and their parents joined in. Their slogan "Seas are rising, so are we" reverberated. Success in the battle ahead is all but certain and will, to a large extent, depend on winning public support for the changes we will have to make to our lifestyles. Here, public education has a crucial contribution to make.

The inception of the Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) has been making vigorous efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change. It is committed to building a sustainable future for Hong Kong through education, research and community outreach and services, and its promotion of environmental sustainability makes an important contribution to the realization of its vision. A little under two decades ago, CUHK was the first local university to conduct an environmental audit, and since 2010 has been implementing various policies on campus to promote the ideal of sustainability. It also boasts the world's first climate change museum. The idea of a museum was first mooted in 2010, when Dr. Rebecca Lee, a local explorer who set up the Polar Foundation in 1997, sought a location to house a collection accumulated during her many years of fieldwork in the Arctic, Antarctic and around Mount Everest. This proposal was enthusiastically adopted by CUHK. In December 2013, with the support of a generous donation from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change (MoCC) was established on CUHK's campus. The museum's mission is to educate the public about the potential impacts of the global climate crisis and to promote climate action.

In addition to delivering the message that climate change has profound environmental and social consequences for the human race, the MoCC is a vocal advocate of social and sustainable development as well as of climate action. The exhibition is therefore laid out in such a way that it first shows the alarming

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George Ma, holds a PhD in Earth Sciences and is the assistant director of the MoCC and the assistant director of the CUHK Secretariat of the Hong Kong Chapter of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN Hong Kong). He is also a Certified Professional Geologist with the American Institute of Professional Geologists. He is committed to promoting climate action and the SDGs.



Inside the Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

Photo: Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

impact climate change has on the remote polar regions, which are particularly vulnerable to global warming, and then guides visitors back to their own communities, where they learn how climate change will affect them, what scientific solutions are available, and how both communities and individuals can take action to combat climate change.

To guide visitors on this fascinating educational journey, the MoCC adopts a positive stance in its public education work. Its exhibitions showcase innovative research on the environment, energy and sustainability conducted by CUHK's researchers, and they also publicize the Jockey Club Charities Trust's initiatives, such as responsible consumption and production. Dr. Rebecca Lee's collection is on permanent display in the museum, expounding the many layers of climate change evidence.

The MoCC's strategy to tackle climate change in Hong Kong

The MoCC wants to enhance knowledge, attitudes and behavior in relation to climate change within and beyond Hong Kong. Regardless of age, religion and ethnicity, it is each global citizen's responsibility to take action to combat climate change. In order to raise public awareness of this global challenge and to encourage individuals to enlist in this common struggle, the MoCC considers the ability, background, education level and interests of

its audiences when designing its exhibitions, seminars and workshops. Because it appreciates the importance of educating the next generation, it places great emphasis on promoting the topic of climate change in schools. So far, the response has been promising. The MoCC has served more than 765,000 visitors and event participants since its establishment, and six out of every ten visitors are students.

The MoCC strives to present every exhibition professionally and to make it attractive by incorporating the latest developments in climate change and sustainability research, introducing new components and technologies that generate and maintain public interest and support, and by integrating art into its science communication. The MoCC tracks its performance and listens to the audiences through an ongoing impact survey. Audience feedback has invariably been positive.² Visitors have come away with a greater knowledge of climate change and climate action, while those who have taken part in seminars and workshops have had an enjoyable experience and also learned how they, as individuals, can help to make a difference.

Promoting sustainability

In 2017, the Jockey Club Charities Trust pledged its support for the three-year 'JC-CUHK Climate Action' program. As part of the program, the MoCC is undertaking a range of environmental education activities, including large-scale annual carnivals, as well as eco

tours, visits and workshops to disseminate climate change and sustainability messages to a broad audience. It also strives to recruit young leaders to the cause of sustainability by training museum ambassadors, building a platform for networking and information exchange, and organizing programs for university and secondary school students, so as to promote public awareness of the need for climate action and sustainable development.

Sustainability Hub and Action Monitor

MoCC's exhibitions and programs also aim to take full advantage of the resources of modern technology. Most people profess some concern for the environment, however our good intentions do not always make us change our behavior. There is therefore a niche for a well-curated resource hub with an online collection of tools and resources to dramatize the serious issues at stake and persuade people to 'go green.' The Sustainability Hub has been created to offer expert tips, and a wide range of educational materials are being constantly updated to inspire individuals to take action, change their behavior and adopt a more eco-friendly lifestyle. The Sustainability Hub is complemented by the 'Action Monitor,' an online tool that encourages individuals to set their own green targets through a checklist that covers a range

of activities from carbon reduction to resource conservation and sustainable living (e.g. eating less meat and more vegetables, saying no to shark fin soup, etc.), and to monitor their own progress towards them. Accomplishments are recognized through an e-badge scheme, which motivates commitment and guides development in terms of environmental stewardship.

Mobile Jockey Club MoCC

The 'Mobile Jockey Club MoCC' was launched in December 2017 to provide a multimedia-enhanced, interactive exhibition series designed to disseminate climate change and sustainability messages and educate the public about the impact of climate change in an enjoyable way. This mobile mini-museum uses portable modular structures that can be set up in a few hours, allowing MoCC exhibits to be taken to schools, community centers and other public spaces. This outreach approach has greatly extended the scope and reach of the museum's public engagement. To date, the mobile museum has presented two important exhibitions: 'Polar Vision' and 'Climate Change and Me.' 'Polar Vision' allows its audience to visualize climate change from a polar perspective. 'Climate Change and Me' reveals how human activities are closely related to climate change and promotes important green concepts, such as clean energy, a low-carbon lifestyle and sustainable development.



Sustainability Hub Homepage

Waste Reduction Project

The MoCC is educating Hong Kong's coming generations about the importance of waste reduction. Waste is a serious problem in Hong Kong. Around 7.5 million tons of waste are generated every year in Hong Kong, of which over 70% end up in landfills. This approach is ultimately unsustainable. Waste reduction plays a crucial part in environmental protection, and it is easy to show that all of us can make important individual contributions. The MoCC's Waste Reduction Project is aimed at students in Hong Kong's secondary schools. It seeks to increase awareness among young people about the waste issue and the need for environmentally sustainable waste management. The MoCC invites schools to join this project, and participating schools are challenged to

such as fabric and wood. The workshops also offer the opportunity to encourage participants to help combat climate change by embracing low-carbon local traveling and avoiding, where possible, high-carbon air travel. Eco tours are an extended module of the museum visit.

The Drama of Climate Change and a Low-Carbon Future

With public sector support from the local Environment Conservation Fund, the MoCC is running a two-year engagement project, 'The Drama of Climate Change and a Low-Carbon Future,' underpinned by a 'Theatre in Education' approach and experiential learning. The aim of the project is to encourage Hong Kongers, especially our young people, to embrace the impor-



Waste Reduction Project

Photo: Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change

examine their waste generation, identify ways of achieving zero waste, take action to reduce waste, and, most importantly, encourage students to spread the message of 'waste less, save more' to their families and friends.

tance of making green choices and taking green action to ensure a low-carbon future.

Public engagement

Besides offering in-house guided tours of the museum, the MoCC also organizes activities such as workshops and eco tours. All of these have the same goal – to spread the message that anyone, at any time, can help to create a more sustainable environment. Most of the workshops promote zero waste. Participants can experience upcycling of various materials

Summary

The MoCC constantly updates its exhibitions in order to provide comprehensive information about climate change, covering social, environmental, and scientific perspectives in local and global dimensions. A new exhibition presenting scientific methods used to investigate Earth's climate history, will be launched in late 2019 / early 2020.

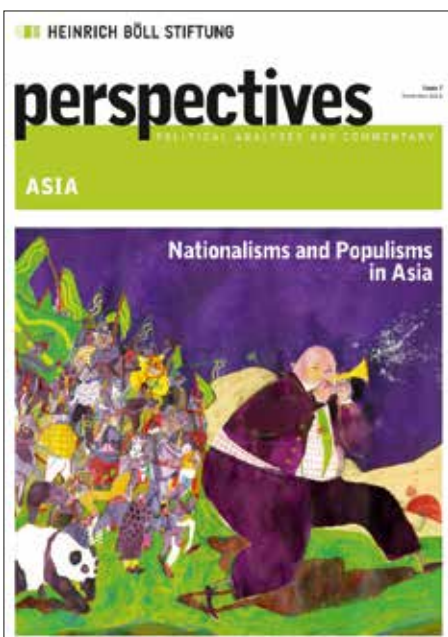
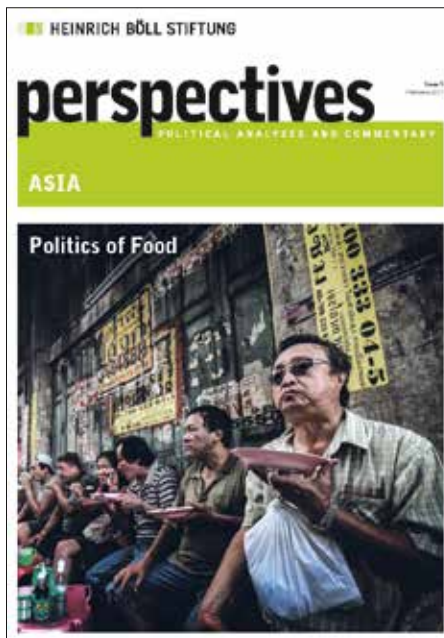
The MoCC has been actively building partnerships with local green groups, government and international institutions for exhibitions

and environmental education programs and activities. It is linked with the global community through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), which aims to make universities, research facilities, civil society organizations, businesses and other knowledge centers focus on practical problem solving for sustainable development. The MoCC currently serves as the secretariat for the Hong Kong Chapter of the SDSN and makes use of its unique status as a university museum to promote the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Finally, the MoCC believes that international cooperation, that is the Paris Agreement, is crucial in tackling climate change, yet that individual climate action is equally important. We all, regardless of our ages and walks of life, have the power to make green choices. Each and every individual action counts and will be a building block towards combating climate change. Act now for ourselves and for our children! ■■■

¹ According to the Hong Kong Observatory, between 1885 and 2018 the average temperature of Hong Kong has been rising at 0.13°C per decade. The temperature rise appears to have accelerated in the latter half of the 20th century, reaching 0.17°C per decade during 1989–2018. The average temperature rise has been accompanied by an increase in the number of hot nights (days with a minimum temperature of 28°C or above) and very hot days (days with a maximum temperature of 33°C or above), and a decrease in the number of cold days (days with a minimum temperature of 12°C or below). Extreme precipitation events have also become more frequent. Over the past few decades, several new hourly rainfall records were set at the Hong Kong Observatory, while previously a new record had only been set every few decades.

² MoCC regularly conducts impact surveys, mainly in the form of questionnaires and personal interviews. Over 90% of respondents state that they have become more aware of climate issues, and are willing to make, or actually have made changes in their behaviors.



Perspectives Asia is published annually by the Asia Department of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. With this publication, analyses and debates concerning global challenges and specific developments in the Asian region are made available in English and German.

This edition of **Perspectives Asia** is available in English and can be ordered from:

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Publication information

Publisher Heinrich Böll Foundation
Publication Date November 2019
Editor Ella Soesanto
Contributors Gitanjali More, Fabian Heppe
Copy Editor Mandy Ma
Typesetting KALUZA + SCHMID Studio GmbH, Berlin
Printed by Ruksaldruck, Berlin
Paper Climate-neutral printing on 100% recycled paper

Opinions expressed in the articles are those of their authors and not of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

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Cover illustration by Abhishek Chauhan

The image on the front and back cover of this magazine is a visualization of interacting hashtag data extracted from Twitter. The data analysis screened hashtags related to #climatecrisis, #climatechange and other climate-linked keywords. Data scanning was done for Twitter users in the geographical area of South Asia, Southeast Asia and China. Gephi, an open-source network analysis and visualization software, was used to generate the graphic, mapping the network of interactions of various other hashtags that either occurred simultaneously or are connected on the Twitter social media platform based upon the interaction between Tweets. The image garners different perspectives that exist in relation to the climate crisis in South Asia, Southeast Asia and China, where social media is becoming a greater force in the mobilization of molecular movements. This data was collected from Twitter during July 2019.

Abhishek Chauhan is an independent researcher and designer, with interests ranging in new media, technology studies and art. He explores visual language through graphics and video. Abhishek has completed his Master of Design from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati and Bachelor (Design) from National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Gandhinagar in Gujarat, India.

