Public Hearing

Stakeholder Perspectives on Climate Justice

Online event • 25 May 2023, Berlin

Please join the discussion: #Klimagerechtigkeit
In its second hearing on climate justice issues, the German Ethics Council would like to learn more about the perspectives of certain stakeholders who are particularly affected by the consequences of climate change. Furthermore, the Council wants to take a closer look at peculiarities of the public debate on the topic.

It is often regarded as particularly unjust that those people who will foreseeably suffer the most from the consequences of global climate change often contribute only a comparatively small share to its emergence. This applies, for example, to many people in the Global South. Their perspective will be presented by Md Shamsuddoha, who himself lives in Bangladesh, one of the countries which are already severely affected by climate change. Thanks to his many years of involvement in international academic and climate policy projects, the director of the Center for Participatory Research and Development in Dhaka is also able to voice general interests and fears of the Global South.

Younger people, too, will be disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change, even though their contribution to it is likely to be comparatively small. In this context, the Federal Constitutional Court in 2021 referred to a duty of the German state not to overly restrict the future freedom of young people through insufficient legislative action in the present. This was a partial success for the constitutional complaint against the Federal Climate Change Act of 12 December 2019, in which the then 22-year-old Sophie Backsen was involved. The Ethics Council invites her to contribute the perspective of young people to the hearing. Living on the North Frisian island of Pellworm, which already now lies one metre below sea level, Backsen is personally affected by climate change in a particular way.

Another perspective addresses the health consequences of climate change. These include direct health hazards due to more frequent extreme weather events such as heat waves or storms, but also indirect risks such as the spread of pathogens that are adapted to a warmer climate. At the World Health Organization, a dedicated department is working on the correlations between climate change and health. The German Ethics Council welcomes Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, Head of the Climate Change and Health Unit at the World Health Organization.
All invited stakeholders have in common that they and many others are struggling to be heard in the public debate on climate change. The German Ethics Council is therefore also interested in the specific dynamics of this debate, as it influences both the decisions taken on the topic as well as their implementation and acceptance. Is this debate sufficiently open? How does public portrayal of more extreme forms of climate protest affect attitudes towards climate change? Does the use of dramatic terms such as “climate emergency” or “climate catastrophe” in the media have an influence on public opinion on climate change? And what is good communication when it comes to the powerlessness experienced by many in the face of these crisis metaphors? To get answers to these questions, the Ethics Council invites the communication scientist Michael Brüggemann. He heads a research group at the University of Hamburg dedicated to analysing climate communication in different media and countries.
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Md Shamsuddoha
Center for Participatory Research and Development, Bangladesh

Professional Curriculum

Since 2009 Chief Executive, Center for Participatory Research and Development, Dhaka, Bangladesh
2003–2008 General Secretary, Equity and Justice Working Group, Dhaka, Bangladesh
1999–2003 Senior Coordinator, Research and Advocacy, COAST Foundation, Dhaka, Bangladesh
1999–1998 Regional Sector Specialist, BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), Dhaka, Bangladesh
1997–1999 Program Officer, Plan International

Selected Memberships

Since 20213 Adviser to the Director, Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSA)
Since 2018 Member and Treasurer of the Executive Committee, Bangladesh Network on Climate Change
Since 2009 LDC Watch
2020–2022 Director, International Board, Climate Action Network (CAN)

Selected Publications


Bangladesh, ranked 7th in disaster losses from 2000 to 2020, faces worsening climate change impacts. It experiences increased cyclones, floods, erosion, salinity intrusion, desertification, and associated water, food production, health and displacement crises, causing substantial losses to the economy, infrastructure, and most tragically, human life.

Without adaptation efforts, millions will face river floods and coastal inundation over the next decades. The agricultural sector, employing 38 percent of the labour force, will suffer from reduced yields due to temperature rise, saline intrusion, droughts, flooding, and waterlogging. Climate change threatens to undo the significant development progress that Bangladesh has achieved in recent decades, with GDP losses estimated at 2 percent annually by 2050 and over 9 percent by 2100.

Climate-related disasters often place disproportionate burdens on already marginalised vulnerable people while widening inequality and instigating social exclusion such as gender discrimination, ethnicity, and socio-economic deprivation. Women in particular are more vulnerable than men to all kinds of climate related impacts and disasters, especially if they are poor. Alarmingly, the human dimension of climate change impacts is grossly ignored in global policy discourses as well as in national planning processes.

Socially just climate action should follow comprehensive, site-specific, bottom-up vulnerability analyses and prioritise procedural and distributive justice. This means empowering communities and providing preferential access to resources and services to marginalised people. Climate justice needs to address not only the historical injustice caused by developed countries but also the failure of countries in the global south to protect vulnerable and socio-politically excluded communities. While challenging in a neoliberal world, we should mobilise public opinion to strive for a fairer world with climate justice to the extent we can.

Md Shamsuddoha
Center for Participatory Research and Development, Bangladesh
Sophie Backsen
Appellant before the Federal Constitutional Court

Curriculum Vitae

Since 2019  Student at Kiel University
2020–2021  Constitutional complaint against the German Federal Climate Change Act
2018–2019  Complaint at the Administrative Court of Berlin demanding further action of the government in regard to the climate crisis
2018       High-school diploma

Publication

In a sensational ruling of April 2021, the German Federal Constitutional Court held that the Federal Climate Change Act of 2019 violated the fundamental and freedom rights of future generations. Although the German government amended climate protection law immediately, two years later and after a change in government not much has changed in practical terms.

This means, even after a ruling of the highest German court young people in Germany and everywhere else still must fight for their future freedom rights concerning climate change.

One generation has consumed a huge amount of the CO₂ budget thereby leaving the need to reduce emissions radically to following generations whose lives and freedom will be severely restricted as a consequence. This must change and politicians in charge now have to take drastic steps to reduce emissions in order to secure the fundamental rights of young people and people who are not even born now, but will be affected considerably by climate change.
Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum
WHO, Climate Change and Health Unit, Switzerland

Professional Curriculum
Since 2003 Scientist/Senior Scientist, World Health Organization, Switzerland
Since 2010 Team Leader/Unit Head, Climate Change and Health, World Health Organization, Switzerland
1995–2003 Research Fellow/Lecturer, Disease Control and Vector Biology, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom

Selected Memberships
Since 2022 Member of the US National Academy of Medicine
Since 2011 Lead author, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 5th and 6th Assessment Reports

Selected Publications
Climate change is the greatest health challenge of the 21st century. It is driving health emergencies, placing additional strain on healthcare, and undermining the environmental determinants of health, from clean air, to water, to food and shelter. The impacts are felt hardest in poor and vulnerable communities that have contributed least to the carbon emissions which drive climate change, but rich nations are not immune. Solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change already exist, and the health gains that would result from a clean energy transition, for example from reduced air pollution, would exceed the associated financial costs. This is therefore a political rather than technological or economic challenge, to harness the strong public support that already exists for climate action, counter those that have a vested interest in continuing business as usual, and managing a “just transition” for those groups most affected by climate and health policy.

Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum
WHO, Climate Change and Health Unit, Switzerland
Michael Brüggemann
University of Hamburg

Professional Curriculum

Since 2023  Program Chair, The New Institute, Hamburg
Since 2019  Project Director, Cluster of Excellence “Climate, Climatic Change, and Society” (CLICCS), University of Hamburg
Since 2015  Chair of Communication Research, Climate and Science Communication, University of Hamburg
Principal Investigator, Cluster of Excellence “Integrated Climate System Analysis and Prediction” (CliSAP)
2014  Habilitation, University of Zurich
2010–2015  Senior Teaching and Research Associate, University of Zurich
2007–2009  Post-doctoral Fellow, Project Coordinator SFB 597, Jacobs University Bremen
2007  Dissertation, Dr. Phil. (summa cum laude), University of Hamburg
2003–2006  Research Associate, SFB 597, University of Bremen
2002–2003  Research Associate and Lecturer, University of Munich
2002  Graduation, Deutsche Journalistenschule (German School of Journalism), Munich
2001  University degree, Diploma in Journalism (with distinction), University of Munich

Selected Memberships

2018  Editorial Board Member, International Journal of Communication
2018  Founding Editor of the series “Global Communications”, Open Book Publishers, Cambridge
2017  Member, Department Council Social Sciences, University of Hamburg
2015  Member, Board of Directors, Research Center Media and Communication, University of Hamburg
2015–2019  Editorial Board Member, journal “Environmental Communication”

Selected Publications


The Four Apocalyptic Riders Haunting the Media Debate on Climate Change: Disregard, Denial, Doom, Delay

Leaving aside the wide differences of how different media in different contexts cover climate change, there are four problematic patterns shaping the climate debate.

(1) Disregard: the potential climate angle in news stories is being routinely overlooked by non-specialist journalists. Intense coverage is limited to UN summits, IPCC reports, protests, extreme weather events. Routine coverage remains on a low level, but has increased since 2019, as a result of a combination of climate protests and extreme weather events.

(2) Denial: denying the severe risks associated with climate change persists on social media and fringe outlets, but is no longer an important pattern in leading mainstream news. Professional journalism has moved beyond false balance.

(3) Doom: climate change as apocalypse was salient already in the 1980s. Today, climate coverage still is problem- rather than solution-centred. The focus on bad news may lead to news avoidance.

(4) Delay: a whole set of strategic attempts to delay climate actions draws attention to the costs of climate action, to easy future technical fixes or to green-washed pseudo-solutions.
Go to the livestream

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