

South, Central, and West Asians and Climate Change



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Sustaining All Life

Climate change has had a devastating impact on South, Central, and West Asia—from the rise in sea level, to heat waves in Iraq and India, to droughts in Central Asia, to floods in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The greatest impact has been and will be on the poorer countries and communities in these regions, those least able to protect themselves. People in these regions are already suffering from widespread disease and a decline in agricultural production.

Climate change is being felt in the context of an already prolonged environmental crisis that is largely the result of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen. These wars have already seriously degraded the natural environments of these countries. They have ruined agricultural lands, contaminated soil, increased desertification, polluted water, destroyed wildlife habitat, and, of course, caused millions of civilian deaths as well as mass migrations.

It is a cycle of destruction. War accelerates climate change by degrading the environment. Climate change causes drought and famine. Then, under these conditions, violence, war, Islamophobia, and racism targeting Arabs and Muslims are easily incited. All of this makes it more difficult to unite and end war and its impact on the environment.

Despite all the above, the situation is hopeful. It is possible to limit the effects of climate change and completely restore the environment.

Big problems require big solutions. The people of South, Central, and West Asia can play a key role in finding solutions that leave no human behind; that do not pit one group against another; that do not allow one group of people to benefit by taking advantage of another; that focus on collaboration, not division; that unify more and more people; and that focus on decisive actions to sustain all life.

People also need to become aware of where they may have "benefited" from the oppressive policies, and recover from the confusions that have led them to not challenge them.

Sustaining All Life offers tools to individuals and organizations to create these big solutions. Using these tools, people are able to heal from emotional damage, for example, by telling their personal stories about how they have been affected by the following:

- War and other violence
- Destructive movements
- Islamophobia
- Refugee crises and migration
- Poverty
- Droughts, floods, and other extreme weather
- Reliance on fossil fuel

With healing comes clearer thinking and more accurate perspectives. Then it is more possible to build a united environmental movement. As a united force, the people of South, Central, and West Asia can play a key role in sustaining all life on Earth.



The Work of Sustaining All Life

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some big changes are needed if this is to happen. These changes will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background.

In Sustaining All Life we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression) between nations and between groups of people within nations, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness among the populations of many countries, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the environmental crisis, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of capitalism. Sustaining All Life works to address these issues and others.

The source of the environmental crisis

We modern humans have lived on the Earth for about 200,000 years. For much of this time we have struggled for survival. Ancient fears for our survival have been passed down to each generation and have resulted in societies based on exploitation, oppression, and division.

These societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the Earth. And they have come to rely on dividing us, scaring us, discouraging us, and hurting us in other ways, to keep us from making meaningful change.

The role of oppression

Oppression (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) is institutionalized in our societies. This makes it much more difficult for us to address and end climate change. All of us, at some point in our lives, are targeted by oppression. We are all harmed by it. Then we are pulled to act out on others the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Oppression is neither inherent nor inevitable in human beings. It arises from and operates on the basis of emotional hurt.

The importance of healing personal damage

The emotional harm done to us in our societies interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the environmental crisis. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This

happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. Sustaining All Life uses the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling* to help people build ongoing mutual support for this personal healing.

Healing from the hurts that drive oppression and other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist it. We may feel like there isn't time. We may feel that we have been able to succeed in life only by not showing anyone how much we've been hurt. We may feel ashamed of or embarrassed by our feelings. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage we carry and by assuming that we will never be free of it. We may feel it would be unbearable to look at and to feel those feelings again. Perhaps this is because we have had no opportunity to tell our stories or have not been treated well when we have tried to tell them.

In Sustaining All Life we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts.

By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This will strengthen us in building our movements.

* Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved.

For more information, see:

www.rc.org/sustainingalllife
or write: Sustaining All Life, 719 Second Ave. North,
Seattle, WA 98109, USA.
Email: ircc@rc.org

Tel: +1-206-284-0311 | Fax: +1-206-284-8429

