



CLIMATE CRISIS: A TICKING TIME BOMB

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"We basically have three choices, Mitigation, Adaptation and Suffering. The question is, what the mix is going to be. The more mitigation we do, the less adaptation will be required and less suffering there will be."

-John Holdren, President/ science advisor, Harvard University

A recent project helped me gain a brief insight on the climate crisis that communities around us are facing. Until then, like most others, I was partly oblivious and in denial about this serious issue engulfing our earth. The more research I did, the more perturbed I got. I am unable to shake off this gory image of the 'metaphorical Mother Earth' in a hot spot. (Pun intended). In my imagination, our earth is literally being set ablaze and I must say that it is not a sight for the sore eyes.

With fuel emissions galore, rising temperatures, rampant extreme weather, natural disasters, leaping sea levels looming over us, seawater intrusions invading the quality of water and thawing permafrost, the situation does look grim. The sad part is that the awareness regarding the gravity of the situation has not been embedded yet in the psyche of many. Some think that the concept of it being termed a crisis is overrated. Unfortunately, from the ignorance and complacency we are seeing, the reality is far fetched.

If we google just the term crisis, it says "*a time of intense difficulty or danger*" and also "*a time when a difficult decision must be made*". So when we use "crisis" in conjunction with "climate", the magnitude intensifies and we have something very serious to ponder on. The globe is heating up as we speak with all the carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that we let out into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels, cutting down rainforests and farming livestock.

Speaking about hard facts, currently, we emit around 50 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. This is more than 40% higher than emissions in 1990, which were around [35 billion tonnes](#). In India, according to Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), the average temperatures have risen by 0.6 °C between 1901-1910 and 2009-2018. As per the [World Bank](#), if climate change continues unhindered, then the average temperature in India is estimated to reach as high as 29.1°C by the end of the century (up from 25.1° C currently). Some parts of India are more affected than others. Comparing the average temperature over the last decade, it has risen by a good [1° C](#) in parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and the North East compared to the historical average in the 1950 to 1980 period. Apart from this, India is threatened by the rising sea levels due to increase in floods and cyclones. In 2018 -2019 alone, as many as [2400](#) Indians lost their lives due to extreme weather events. There is also a fear of erosion of a considerable amount of coastal landmass because of extreme weathers that threaten the livelihood of many. An ancillary problem of seawater intrusions into the water table is also a worrying factor. The [IMD](#) says that these events are increasing both in frequency and intensity. This is a serious cause of concern and therefore calls for a comprehensive Government plan and policy to tackle the impending environmental crisis.



Zooming in on the home front, Chennai off late has evidently seen an increase in climate induced natural disasters like droughts, floods and cyclones. This is mainly because of the abuse of land use patterns and natural resources. The intensity and the frequency of these extreme events indicate that climate change is altering Chennai's weather patterns. Between 2004 and 2011, Chennai experienced eight consecutive years of excessive rainfall from the northeast monsoon, according to data from the IMD. For three years since 2011, Chennai experienced drought, with 2013 recording a 33% deficiency of rain. Tamil Nadu saw its worst drought in 140 years in 2015. It received 62% less than normal rain during the 2016 northeast monsoon. 2017 and 2018 were also drought years with water scarcity reaching a peak during the summer of 2019. Soon after a drought season in 2019, [Cyclone Gaja](#) killed at least 45 people and created havoc on the agricultural fields in southern Tamil Nadu.

All these statistics indicate that there is definitely a climate change happening right in front of our eyes and it is absolutely right to term it as a crisis. Though this is a threat to the future of our planet, there is still time for us to adapt to it and mitigate its effects, if we adopt the mitigating measures at a rapid pace like never seen before. So the question arises as to what is the best way to tackle the climate crisis? Should the focus be on adaptation or mitigation? While [mitigation](#) basically involves reducing the flow of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, adaptation on the other hand involves adjusting to the actual or expected future climate. There is no way to prioritise one over the other. Adaptation without mitigation means committing to likely greater impacts in the long term whereas mitigation without adaptation means remaining exposed to growing risks. Hence the right balance of both is needed to tackle climate change.

While the main focus should be on systematic changes, as individuals, we can contribute in our own small way towards mitigation. Powering our homes with solar panels would be one good way to start and choosing an LED bulb instead of the regular one also helps in conserving energy to a great extent. We can make a conscious change in the way we eat by eating less meat, choosing local foods and buying food with fewer packages. Recycling, buying fewer things, planting trees and saving water are also effective ways to contribute towards mitigation. Another way to mitigate the effects would be by choosing public transport, carpooling, opting for a fuel efficient vehicle, riding a bicycle or even walking when possible. Last but not the least, [creating awareness](#) and spreading the word among our friends and family about the looming climate crisis and advising them to act responsibly will be a good way to contribute towards mitigation.