

Care-full climate communication

A guide to communicating about care-centred, low-carbon societies



About Caring Societies

Caring Societies is a project carried out by **Hot or Cool Institute**, in partnership with **SERI**, **Climate Outreach** and **Global Action Plan UK**.



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About the Hot or Cool Institute

The Hot or Cool Institute is a public interest think tank that explores the intersection between society and sustainability. We equip organisations, policymakers, and communities with the science to inform their decisions towards a sustainable and prosperous future, putting people and science at the centre of the sustainability transition.

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Cover: Two smiling retired pensioners are tending to the potted plants on a table. *Photo: Vladimir Vladimirov/iStock*

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Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction	5
Communicating about care and climate	7
Beyond communication: reflecting, balancing and practising	14
Reflecting on our colonial past and present.	14
Balancing urgency and care	17
Practising solidarity	19
Conclusion	24
References	25



A family with two children playing in the sea at the beach in Beadnell, North East England.
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Executive summary

The core importance of care work within societies, encompassing the care of individuals and the environment, is frequently underestimated and devalued. This undervaluation results in the neglect of vital activities that sustain well-being and development.

Activities such as caring for children, the elderly, the disabled, and the environment are consistently overlooked. This disparity exacerbates inequality patterns through social and environmental crises, ultimately impacting everyone.

The interconnectedness of care and climate crises is evident; a sustainable society necessitates an equitable and caring economy that prioritises both environmental sustainability and social well-being. This report delves into the relationship between care and climate crises, emphasising the need to dismantle oppressive systems and integrate care into various facets of society.

The concept of a "care economy" is proposed as a means to acknowledge and organise unpaid care work within a framework that fosters social well-being. The report examines the various intersections of caring societies and climate solutions, highlighting the importance of equitable low-carbon lifestyles.

The overarching objective of this report is to explore communications strategies in effectively addressing the root causes of care and climate crises, emphasising the significance of people, the environment, and care-based activities.

Through research synthesis and interviews, the report explores communication strategies for caring societies, considering not only framing but also practical implementation, such as care needing to be conceptualised as both caring for one another (humans) and the larger environment (nonhumans) and using positive framing that incorporates solidarity and compassion in messages around inequality.

The larger aim of this report is to contribute to ongoing conversations and future efforts in the realms of care and climate. For a comprehensive analysis of related topics and interconnections, the complete report 'Economies that Dare to Care' by the Hot or Cool Institute is recommended.

Introduction

Care work sits at the heart of our societies. Caring for people and environments is fundamental to the survival of all living beings, and yet is systemically undervalued and deprioritised. This means that so many activities that underpin wellbeing and flourishing are also chronically undervalued and deprioritised¹, including the care of children and the elderly; whether we receive medicine or assistance if incapacitated, disabled or trans; whether our environments are safe, clean and beautiful; and whether we will continue to live on a habitable planet. This imbalance in our societies entrenches and amplifies pre-existing patterns of inequality through social and environmental crises, which all of us suffer from in varying degrees as this violence is systemic.^{2,3}

While often treated as separate, the care and climate crises are twins: a caring economy must also be an environmentally friendly one, and a sustainable society must also be an equitable, caring one. As co-author Meera Ghani writes, care and climate change are interconnected in their origins and their solutions:

“Climate breakdown... is a manifestation of existing systems of oppression namely, colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism... This work is about dismantling the interconnected systems of oppression, hence climate justice work can't be separate from racial justice, social justice, economic justice or gender justice... It's putting care at the heart of how we build and move forward... In practical terms, it means divesting from institutions and corporations that are destructive and re-investing into services and institutions that centre and provide care such as health care infrastructure, mental health services, child care, elderly care, affordable housing, public transport and a living wage.”⁴

To resolve these crises, feminist economists have conceptualised the 'care economy' as one that situates unpaid care work in a system that organises and ensures social reproduction and wellbeing through the cooperation of a mix of different actors, relationships and spaces.^{5,6,7} In the climate sector, there is also work being done to connect solutions to the climate crisis with care-centred approaches. A key message in the chapter on lifestyle change in the United Nations Environment Programme's 2020 Emissions Gap Report was the need for equitable low-carbon lifestyles, and the need to reduce global emissions while maintaining wellbeing and/or increasing this where needed.^{8,148}

This report is part of a larger project seeking to learn from, and build on, existing practice and thinking on how to address root causes of the climate and care crises, and put the wellbeing of people and the environment, and care-based activities, at the heart of our societies. For a fuller overview of the background and solutions relating to a caring, low-carbon future, and how care and climate are interlinked, see the [wider report led by the Hot or Cool Institute](#).

In this report, we explore opportunities and risks of *communicating* about caring societies, synthesising research and practice regarding how the topic is framed, as well as considerations for practice that extend beyond communication. This report stems from a review of knowledge on climate and care narratives, and 10 semi-structured interviews with researchers, artists, activists, practitioners, Indigenous experts and policy specialists. We hope that this is a resource that will contribute to conversations between those who work in care and climate across many domains, and facilitate needed future work.



Mother and son visiting a melon garden in a glass house in Bogor, Indonesia. Photo: Pramod Kanakath / Climate Visuals Countdown

Communicating about care and climate

Narratives around caring for the environment, flora and fauna have long been in existence, used by cultural and Indigenous groups around the world and by environmental communicators. Similarly, narratives around care, such as health care, social care, aged care and more, have also been in usage – again, by cultural and Indigenous groups and by care communication practitioners.

While in Western contexts these topics – of caring for the environment, and caring for people – tend to be partitioned, for many communities around the world they are one and the same, inextricably linked.^{9, 10, 11} Several of the experts interviewed in this report talked about this lack of distinction between the environment and people/themselves:

““ When we talk about climate change and climate crisis, we don't see the environment as an 'other'. We'll talk about environments in places like Nigeria and Africa, it's about us. It's about identities, about our livelihoods.” – Jennifer Uchendu

““ I've always been connected and concerned for the environment through my Māori identity, because I feel like it's almost intertwined in a way, because a lot of the cultural practices are around relationships and connection to the environment. The word 'whenua' is for land but also means 'whenua' as in placenta, and hapū, which means pregnant, also is the name for the sub-tribe groups. A lot of the relationships are connected to each other and to the land through our language and through the practices that we do.” – Interviewee 10

““ Once we understand our obligation to the land, land becomes our family member and our meanings, our understanding of land is very relational and responsible. That's why how I understand myself, who I am, is very, very interconnected with hybridity, because I understand land as my God, as my family, as my parents.” – Dr Ranjan Datta

In many cultures, especially those of Indigenous groups around the world, there is no distinction between self and other humans, or the self and the land, the water and other living beings. And while the cultures, languages and practices of Indigenous peoples around the world differ in many ways, with nuances and differences between and within cultures, there are consistent examples of Indigenous phrases and guiding concepts that describe a sustainable and care-centred society. Examples include the related concepts of *buen vivir* in Indigenous areas of Latin America, such as Ecuador, Bolivia and Colombia,¹² *lekil kuxleja* from Chiapas, Mexico and Tselal communities,^{13, 14, 15, 16} and *sumak kawsay* in the Kichwa language in the Andes.^{17, 18}

Herrera-Salazar¹⁹ describes how in the heart of Mayan philosophy the name of the continent, *Abya Yala*, is synonymous with questions of how people ought to live with the earth, and the philosophy of people relates closely to the sun, earth, water and agricultural cycle.

In the Pacific, phrases such as *mālama āina* from Hawai'i, and *kaitiakitanga* in te reo Māori, describe guardianship and protection of the natural environment, and go beyond the idea of 'caring', recognising that humans are a part of the natural world.^{20, 21, 22}

These terms in various ways relate to loving, recognising and respecting the earth and humans, and living in harmony with all living beings and with nature,^{23, 24} and have been at the forefront of Indigenous-led movements for autonomy, post-development and decolonisation.^{25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32}

These examples illustrate that concepts of a caring society have long been connected, and that there are many ways in which these concepts have been, and can be, used to communicate care-sensitive climate action. Common among these narratives are the ideas of relationality, responsibility to one another and interconnectedness.

These ideas about interconnectedness also emerge in the research about communicating care.³³ For instance, language that has been used to communicate about unpaid care has strong crossovers with these ideas of **interconnectedness** and **interdependence**. What this means is that care encompasses the wellbeing of all non-human and human life.³⁴ Care, then, is anchored conceptually in the following ways:

- Care as a collective and shared good
- Care holds society together
- Care as a universal: we all need care, and we all give care
- Care as infrastructure within the economy

From the environmental and climate framing literature, there are also similar narratives of responsibility, and care for living beings. Certain forms of care-centred climate change framing, such as talking about the impact climate change has on "plants and animals" or the impact it has on "other humans and future generations", may work well in emphasising the necessity to address climate change,³⁵ and in the US context, when people share messages on social media "nature" and "health" messages tend to survive (i.e., are passed on multiple times) longer than other messages.³⁶ Examples of frames that link climate concern with care include:

- Climate action is caring for nature, the plants and animals
- Climate action is protecting health and wellbeing
- Climate action is protecting future generations
- Climate action is justice, rectifying inequalities

A little girl is watering plants with her grandfather in his allotment.
Photo: SolStock / Getty Images



One typology of media frames about social issues, developed in the US context, describes recurring themes that may apply to the care and climate change discourse, including: **economic** frames, referring to investment, growth and markets; **social progress** frames, which focus on quality of life or solving problems in harmony with nature, and describe climate change in terms of its relationship to development and welfare; **morality** frames, which can refer to ethical concerns – for instance around the historic responsibility for climate change – but also limits, boundaries, religious principles and more.^{37, 38}

In the dominant media discourse around climate change, for instance coverage of Conference of the Parties (COP) events, the ‘economy’ frame tends to be used by the global north* whereas ‘social progress’ and ‘morality’ frames focusing on social justice and equity tend to be most consistent with the Southern discourse³⁹. Yet there are hints of a shift away from economic frames towards social progress and morality frames, even within certain sections of the population in the global north.^{40, 41}

* We recognise and acknowledge that the terms global north/global south can be problematic and their usefulness is being debated in academic circles. However, they generally remain the accepted terms to talk about global and regional inequalities in the international affairs and policy sector, and are widely used within the United Nations (UN).

Table 1. Examples of framing ‘care’ and ‘climate change’

Frame	Countries	Details	Sources	Impact (if known)
CARE FOR NATURE	Australia UK	Protecting intrinsic value of nature (e.g., plants and animals). Environmental motivations being the driver of climate actions.	Myers et al., 2012 ⁴² Connor et al., 2016 ⁴³ Sapiains, Beeton and Walker, 2016 ⁴⁴ Li and Su, 2018 ⁴⁵	Small to medium effect of environmental protection messages on climate change engagement.
	<p><i>“Our health and wellbeing depend, directly and indirectly, on the quality of living systems.... Both global and local efforts are needed to safeguard the integrity of ecosystems...”⁴⁶</i></p> <p><i>“Nature is out of balance...”⁴⁷</i></p>			
CARE FOR HUMANS	US	The benefits and risks to humans if action is taken or not taken on climate change. The benefits include improvements to health and society; the risks include increased morbidity and mortality for the most vulnerable and at-risk groups.	Maibach et al., 2010 ⁴⁸ Myers et al., 2012 ⁴⁹ Dickinson et al., 2013 ⁵⁰ Connor et al., 2016 ⁵¹	Negative frames had a non-significant effect on climate change engagement. Positive frames about taking action for future generations increased engagement, and yielded positive reactions and hope.
	<p><i>“Taking actions to limit global warming – by making our energy sources cleaner and our cars and appliances more efficient, by making our cities and towns friendlier to trains, buses, and bikers and walkers, and by improving the quality and safety of our food – will improve the health of almost every American.”⁵²</i></p> <p><i>“If we (don’t) act on climate change, we will be less community-minded when thinking about how our behavior impacts others.”⁵³</i></p>			
CLIMATE JUSTICE	US	Emphasises how climate change affects people differently, and some are more adversely affected than others.	Severson and Coleman, 2015 ⁵⁴ PIRC, 350.org and NEON, 2020 ⁵⁵ Gellatly et al., 2022 ⁵⁶	Inequality frames resonate, but accusatory and blame frames are off-putting.
	<p><i>“We need to rethink what a “good life” looks like, and it shouldn’t be about getting money or possessions, but about making sure everyone, locally and globally, has a decent quality of life, without destroying the planet.... Together, we can create a better, more equal and caring world.”⁵⁷</i></p> <p><i>“Putting equality and justice at the heart of any attempt to tackle climate change.”⁵⁸</i></p>			
WORLD IN CRISIS/ CARE WILL IMPROVE ECONOMY AND SOCIETY	US Germany UK	Amid multiple crises, we can reorganise society and the economy in terms of care, in service to the people, and fix a multitude of social problems.	<u>Wirtschaft ist Care</u> ⁵⁹ <u>Creating a Caring Economy: a call to action</u> ⁶⁰ <u>Message from the Future II: The Years of Repair</u> ⁶¹	Impact not published, but videos well circulated.
	<p><i>“We the people, make and sustain the economy and human life. We are the economy and we can do things differently... we can build an economy that puts care at its heart... based on wellbeing, gender equality, and sustainability.”⁶²</i></p> <p><i>“We are all entangled. Making each other sick. Keeping each other alive.”⁶³</i></p>			

While there are many overlaps, the academic research on framing and communication often misses the overlapping space between care and climate change: care as a holistic issue encompassing communities, the environment and all beings. A recent report from Oxfam describes the need to communicate an “umbrella” narrative around care that encompasses all elements and forms of care work.⁶⁴ Such a cohesive umbrella narrative of care and climate could, following the lead of examples such as *kaitiakitanga* and *mālama āina*, include all domains of care including health and disability care, family care, environmental stewardship, social welfare, justice and more.

There are also many examples of practice and communication that meld care for climate and for people – whether from centuries of Indigenous knowledge, or local and activist communities of practice⁶⁵ – and opportunities to work together and learn from these examples of practice. Recent multimedia examples illustrate the potential of integrated approaches to communicating about care for people and the environment. Videos such as ‘[Wirtschaft ist Care](#),’⁶⁶ ‘[Creating a Caring Economy](#)’⁶⁷ and ‘[Message from the Future II](#)’⁶⁸ draw together narratives about crisis (such as Covid-19) to surface the importance of care for communities and nature, and the necessity of reorganising society to focus on our mutual dependence. These multimedia examples also connect with ideas about ‘a better way of living’ that align with the sentiments of *buen vivir*.

We can also draw learnings from wider arts-based and storytelling examples of communicating the linkages between caring for people and the climate. One example of local, place-based storytelling comes from the town of Rigolet, Nunatsiavut, which released a series of digital [stories](#) showing local Inuit accounts of changes to climate, wellbeing and health in the community.⁶⁹ Another key example is ‘Sins Invalid’, a disability justice arts and performance project led by disabled artists of colour. A Sins Invalid show,⁷⁰ ‘We love like Barnacles: Crip Lives in Climate Chaos’, centres disabled queer and trans communities of colour facing social, political and economic disparities as a result of ecological disaster, and exacerbated by the pandemic.

In this review, we have connected different sources of knowledge about how to communicate about care for people and the environment. We want to acknowledge that the ways in which cultural knowledge, particularly Indigenous knowledge, has been used and introduced into Western contexts has been harmful – for instance, through oversimplification, stereotyping or romanticising of Indigenous people and practices, or through appropriation and use without acknowledgement of, or space given to, the autonomy and necessary role of Indigenous people in decision-making. We acknowledge that the authors are non-Indigenous and these are not our stories to tell, and we endeavour to advocate for and amplify Indigenous communities.

“Many Indigenous stories are not written down—they are not google-able. These are stories held as life-knowledge and ceremonies, stories shared and circulated internally to specific Indigenous kinship webs with care and in accordance to legal histories and protocol. These Indigenous stories are born of lands and waterways; they are stories that create definitions and subjectivities embedded in place, lands, water, spirituality, and being in relation. When settler-scholars and storytellers seek to re-tell stories of Indigenous places, especially from faraway places lacking relational connectivity, stories of Indigenous origin can be viewed as somehow possessable by those to whom they do not belong. Or the stories can be erased altogether.”⁷¹

Shaban Mwinji, a community scout ranger in Ukunda, Kenya, standing in a restored Mangrove Forest by Mikoko Pamoja. Photo: Anthony Ochieng / Climate Visuals Countdown



We echo calls to avoid damaging framings such as those that portray Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) and historically excluded communities as helpless victims of crises, or framings that do not acknowledge wider systemic oppression and power relations, yet position such groups as the stewards and champions of resilience. By not vocalising (i) BIPOC and historically excluded and marginalised communities' underrepresentation in decision-making, (ii) their exclusion from access to financial, social and material resources, and (iii) the neglect of local needs, knowledge and struggles, such an approach can be reductionist and disempowering while adding yet another care responsibility to these groups.⁷²

Other communication-related risks to avoid include stereotyping of care work – for example, by not equating care work with women's work, and acknowledging differences, ambiguities and power relations in the way care work is defined.⁷³ For instance, "an employer deciding a job is a caring job is not the same as a worker seeing it that way."⁷⁴

There is also a need to add a caveat regarding the limitations of the reviewed literature. The majority of studies designed using the Western scientific method on the framing of care and climate have been carried out in the global north, in Western, anglophone nations,⁷⁵ where sampling is often unrepresentative, particularly of minority groups.^{76,77} Our search itself has also been largely limited to the English language. Consequently, the results described are examples of what may be effective in Western, anglophone nations, and we encourage further work on frames and narratives for the settings in which they are to be used.

In this section we have reviewed different ways of talking about care and climate, covering various forms of knowledge, practices and evidence. This is only a beginning: there is a strong need to expand the knowledge base on the communication of care and climate change in a geographically, culturally and linguistically representative way. Based on the reviewed knowledge, some suggested directions for future research include:

We need to talk about caring for each other and caring for our environment as one and the same. Communication needs to actively recognise the leading knowledge of Indigenous people.⁷⁸ As Farhana Sultana⁷⁹ writes, "living and thriving are possible when caring for self includes caring for others, ecosystems, the earth." Central to this is the idea of '**a good life' and wellbeing for all.** We can draw on learnings from the way in which language has played a role in Indigenous-led movements

towards environmental stewardship and social care. Studies suggest that this could work in different cultural contexts as well – for instance, messages about “a good life” that de-emphasise the pursuit of affluence in favour of finding time and space for loved ones, improving quality of life and enjoying one’s physical environment resonate with wide sections of the UK public.^{80, 81, 82}

Messages about inequality may ring truer through solidarity and compassion than blame.

Considering its centrality to action on care and climate change, inequality is likely to be a central theme in communication. Research from Europe and the US points relatively consistently towards the idea that people may be concerned about inequality, yet find overly accusatory and blame-focused messages off-putting.^{83, 84, 85, 86} A participatory, peer research project in Ayrshire, Scotland, took a similar approach in operationalising “kindness” to create shared conversation about reshaping the community into one that is more caring.⁸⁷ Proponents of this approach also argue that “the very act of thinking and talking about kindness encourages us to be kinder.”⁸⁸ In the next part of this report, experts in our interviews corroborate this point by emphasising empathy, solidarity and compassion as key elements of a ‘care-filled’ future.

Relatedly, positive framing may work better than negative framing. The examples of Indigenous terms and language tend to be positively framed, in contrast to a lot of environmental framing which tends to be negative and crisis-oriented, such as disasters, risks and security.⁸⁹ Some research in the US suggests that ‘gain’ frames tend to be more effective than ‘loss’ frames in the environmental context,^{90, 91, 92} and in the UK context, positive framing seems more well received than negative framing when it comes to human health outcomes.⁹³ The potential for positive framings of care and climate – as an opportunity for a new way of living and being, rather than as a problem we must solve – may be an avenue for exploration.

An open question is **whether the ‘feminisation’ of care affects how narratives and frames around care will be received** by various audiences. In English, for instance, care language tends to be more linked to traditionally feminine stereotypes, such as ‘emotion’, ‘nurture’, ‘support’ and even the word ‘care’ itself. The association between these characteristics and feminine qualities is foundational to the devaluation of care at a societal level and the valuation of culturally masculine traits in Western countries.^{94, 95} Research in the US also shows that audiences are sensitive to mismatches between the gender of a speaker and whether the language they use to communicate climate change is typically “gender-conforming.”⁹⁶ However, whether this is the case for care-centred societies and also the case in non-Western countries where English is not the primary language are questions for future examination.

Beyond communication: reflecting, balancing and practising

Beyond the communication of care and climate change, we wish to highlight risks and opportunities that are likely to impact the success of working together towards caring societies. The following sections address these recommendations:

- Reflecting on our colonial past and present
- Balancing urgency and care
- Practising solidarity

Reflecting on our colonial past and present

What emerges clearly from the review and interviews is a need for recognition of the role that colonialism has played and still plays in shaping the status quo and maintaining barriers to caring societies. The systems that led to climate change and the care crisis are entangled with colonialism.^{97, 98, 99} As physician Rupa Marya writes, “to be colonized means to be disconnected and disintegrated – from our ancestry, from the earth, from our indigeneity, our Earth-connected selves.”¹⁰⁰

“How can you not talk about how colonisation has impacted the way that we interact with the world and the way that everything – our food systems, our transport systems, the work that we do, the decisions that we make, even the way that we work – that has been like globalised, the way that we work, the hours that we work, the kind of work that is important and isn't important and the value that are put on those jobs.” – Interviewee 10

There is a strong parallel between the harms done by colonial practices on the land and harms done to the people.^{101, 102, 103} Many of our interviewees also emphasised that colonialism is not a thing of the past, and the need to acknowledge hierarchies of power and privilege that maintain the status quo and set barriers for different groups, communities and individuals. Without examining our own practices and their relationship to colonialism, we risk perpetuating the very problems we're trying to solve.

Decolonisation and knowledge

Many interviewees spoke about the perpetuation of inequality and power imbalances, as well as colonial practices by organisations that aimed to do good. The notion of hypocrisy appears frequently – for instance, Aldred et al.¹⁰⁴ write that “many of us do work and study at a university that celebrates research chairs in climate change and water security, sponsored by industries responsible for the forceful dispossession of First Nations from northern lands/waters.”

“ We see the hypocrisy in narratives of land grabbing, in the name of trying to protect the environment where we see another form of... almost a new form of colonisation... but what you're actually doing is exploiting people and denying them of opportunities to grow in the same way that you've grown and being very oppressive around knowledge; who knows what, whose knowledge should be listened to?” – Jennifer Uchendu

As communications, narratives and framing all rely on various research methodologies and approaches, there is a need to decolonise what is accepted as and seen as ‘knowledge’ and ‘research’, reflecting on whether the methods that we use are always appropriate to the context. Harmful research practices have often treated Indigenous people as “objects” of research, rather than the practitioners and researchers themselves, and can place Indigenous communities at risk of displacement, disconnect from cultures, conflict and oppression.^{105, 106}

As practitioners, there is a need for honest and open reflection about what is considered knowledge, who we work with, whose work we are reading and what we regard as expertise. Many Indigenous scholars have written about the gatekeeping of knowledge by Western science, where Indigenous perspectives are invalidated for being subjective and personal, while science’s own subjectivity is ignored.^{107, 108, 109, 110} Yet the rich oral traditions, place-based narratives and



Scout volunteers of the Community Forest Association (CFA) inspect a fallen tree deep in the Kirisia forest during a joint patrol with a team of Kenyan Forest Service rangers on August 16, 2021, in Maralal, Samburu, Kenya. Photo: Siegfried Modola/Getty Images

first-hand observations practised by many Indigenous communities are extremely important, legitimate and powerful sources of information that can greatly enhance our understanding of environmental change and human wellbeing.^{111, 112, 113} As Latulippe and Klenk¹¹⁴ argue, it is not simply 'integration' of Indigenous knowledge that is needed, but making room for Indigenous research leadership.

“ There's always this debate in New Zealand about mātauranga Māori – which is Māori knowledge – and science, if they are compatible ... isn't science just a way of trying to find something out? Why can't that also be a way of knowing and be just as valuable, in helping us to have a deeper understanding?” – Interviewee 10

“ Buen vivir is already taken by mestizos from Indigenous. It's a re-engineering of the concept... Cultural appropriation is a problem, but for some things cultures are happy to be taken from, like Indigenous people are happy that their way of their cosmovision is taken into account in how we are going to build the world. The only problem is when they are not included in the talks, when they are not consulted.” – Soledad Granada-Castañeda

Self-reflection

Interviewees spoke about the role of self-reflection in understanding their own position, power, privilege and assumptions as crucial to their work on caring for people and for the environment. Decolonising is seen as a lifelong, continual process of (un)learning and self-reflection. Practical ways forward include considering the ways in which our own positions of power and privilege can be used to redress equity, which may include giving up that power – for instance, in collaborations, funding, speaking opportunities and consultations – when it can be better represented by someone else.

“ They think, “Oh, decolonisation – we have done the decolonisation,” but they don't understand. Decolonisation is a lifelong process, lifelong, maybe few generation process. If we are not uncomfortable, all on the Western ways of knowing, we are not doing enough. So, decolonisation first for me starts from me, to unlearn who I am, challenge the way I got the colonial education, and at the same time to take the responsibility to relearn.” – Dr Ranjan Datta

“ Spaces, especially when they're very open, inclusive and there is an understanding of what power and positionality means – when that is done, it's really helpful... It's a way of reducing the burden that comes with even thinking about the climate crisis as it relates to power and position. For me, when I experienced peak impacts of eco-anxiety it was because I was very much aware that I was black, as a young woman, and then I had these levels of vulnerability and marginalisation that make it very difficult to see myself as an agent of change. And so when you create spaces that remove all of those exclusion, they are extremely powerful.” – Jennifer Uchendu

Balancing urgency and care

Our interviews and review highlighted a need to ensure the priorities and mutual goals of caring for people and caring for the environment are balanced, and to take a holistic approach to care and climate as one and the same. Any climate action needs to be care-centred, and any care action needs to be climate-friendly. These acts need to urgently bring about low-carbon societies and do so in care-sensitive and gender-responsive ways.

As MacGregor and colleagues¹¹⁵ note, when communicating about the compounding issues of the care crisis and climate change there is a need to situate our thinking and our communications within, and with acknowledgment of, the decades of feminist research on gender and care to date. Communicators need to be mindful of presenting care as a 'new' issue. Feminist scholars have long drawn connections between care, justice and the environment,^{116, 117} and highlighted the crisis of unpaid care work, including environmental care activities such as food production and caring for animals and shared spaces.^{118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123}

“Feminists knew for a very, very long time about inequity in unpaid care, which is one of the biggest structural barriers to gender equality, whether to climate justice or other gender equality areas... We started by doing some desk research and listened to feminist voices in the sector and beyond to hear what they think the issues are... This narrative came through very, very strongly. So when I put in that “green work should be care work” into our position paper, it was in the full confidence that this is one of the major feminist asks.” – Interviewee 2

Climate change is increasingly becoming a platform upon which to be seen and heard to advance agendas and raise funds, reducing barriers between scientific, political, economic and social science communities.¹²⁴ The merging of intersecting issues around climate change places it as a focal point for global issues, from equity to global capitalism and more. Here, differences in power and influence are central. Although the care crisis has gained international attention, featuring in one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG5: gender equality and women's empowerment), in comparison climate change still dominates global platforms, and is the centre of multiple regular global conferences between nation-states.

Consequently, there is a need to avoid harmful “climate change bandwagoning”, which refers to actors purposefully linking or expanding the definition of an issue to climate change for strategic reasons.^{125, 126} When communicating the interactions of care and climate change, there is a need to centre the goals and outcomes of addressing the care crisis. The risks for communicators are that climate change marginalises or overshadows the crucial need for gender-responsive and care-sensitive actions, and that the solutions to the care crisis are co-opted to address the climate crisis.

There is a need to act with both urgency *and* care. This means communicating both the need to act quickly to limit climate change, and the need to ensure that the measures taken to do so are equitable, just and take care into account.

“They've got a wagon. And they've got all the tools that they need to fix the problem, but the wheels on the wagon are square, and Indigenous knowledge could give them round wheels. And maybe it will take a little while to build the wheels. But then once you have them, it'd be moving so much faster, you know, but they just can't. It's like they can't trust enough to believe that those round wheels are going to move that wagon, you know, or that what they have already isn't a sound enough solution.” – Interviewee 10

“A lot of this climate crisis/urgency narrative means action without thinking or caring about what could be the negatives... that rests on a lot of ignorance or lack of knowledge on understanding what colonialism is. Because the starting point when the urgency set in is not as long in duration as the starting point of colonialism, when the urgency or apocalypse narrative set in for others.” – Dr Karin Louise Hermes^{127, 128}

The experts we interviewed emphasised the need for those working on care and climate to resist old silos, and to find solutions that will solve these crises together, rather than work against one another.

“Sometimes if you work with decision-makers they emphasise it's either/or, because there's always this connotation of limited funding for limited issues... This is such a restricted context that you very often get a dynamic where one issue is played out against the other... That [risk] for me would be to work in silos. So in the current context of crises, especially, you would need to coordinate, because the only way you're going to achieve increased political ambition is by advocating for it together. If you look at all the challenges we have, with climate change, the lack of caring economies, and all the other conflicts and disasters, pandemic, whatever is going on, there are so many urgent crises that require attention that if everyone just advocated for their issue you will be played out against each other.” – Interviewee 2

“I think people want to keep this structure, that big business is the centre of all and care is on the margins... The care sector, the nurses, for example, who are striking, or complaints of parents who got into burnout in the pandemic, and so on, all these different topics of care, they are listened to as long as these people agree to stay at the margins. But when we try to get into the centre – it's not possible up to now – but I'm really trying to change this together with other people. I think one of the most important things we have to do is to really create a coherent care movement.” – Dr Ina Praetorius¹²⁹

A Samburu woman works removing some plants of the invasive species *Opuntia* (brought by the British during the colonial period) to control their spread in Naibunga Upper Conservancy, Laikipia County, Kenya on May 12, 2022. Photo: LUIS TATO/AFP via Getty Images



Practising solidarity

Solidarity emerged from interviews as a key starting point for working together on care and climate: solidarity in the sense that even if we are not personally affected by something, we act in solidarity with those who are, acknowledging the need for place-based and local solutions, power- and resource-sharing, and allyship, as well as continually asking ourselves, “Who is not in the conversation, but should be?”

Place-based and local solutions

Communication of (and solutions to) care and climate issues need to be contextualised in recognition of cultures, histories, politics, religions and traditions.^{130,131} What care looks like and how it is understood is different depending on many cultural factors.¹³² Our expert interviewees agreed that communication around care and its solutions need to start from the bottom up and be place-based, respecting local traditions and nuances.

“*They wanted to solve climate change with the colonial governance system they have created for colonisation... It is actually creating more pressure or another tokenisation... So for local people, or ethnic people, or Indigenous people, in many parts of the world, including the place I came from, climate change solutions by this colonial structure became another burden... It has to be connected with Indigenous or traditional ways of knowing and be land-based.*” – Dr Ranjan Datta

Practising solidarity by advocating place-based leadership means that communications practitioners can avoid championing measures and messages that are regressive, and remain mindful about how policy implications will affect different social, cultural and political contexts. For instance, advocating for a more equal distribution of care work between people of different genders may be safely done in certain countries, but require enormous social and cultural change in others.

Intersectionality

Achieving low-carbon, care-sensitive futures requires reaching the furthest branches of the tree. The idea of inclusivity, empathy and taking an intersectional approach to care came up in nearly all the interviews.

“*My vision for care is empathy.... Care means to understand the situation of the people who are in difficult times and then they stand by them without questioning their credibility.*”
– Jalila Haider

“*We will not be in the buen vivir as far as we are not all in the buen vivir.*” – Soledad Granada-Castañeda

“*I feel like progress can be made, when all parties can acknowledge the difficulties for all parties... What needs to happen is approaching it with empathy, because you might not experience it yourself, but someone does. And that means that it matters.*” – Interviewee 10

Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw¹³³ to describe how systems of oppression can overlap, creating situations affecting people who have multiple identity categories that cannot be seen by only looking at elements such as gender or race or income independently. In the context of caring societies, an intersectional approach is crucial because it centres the idea that everyone must be cared for, and highlights that those experiencing overlapping oppressions are often overlooked by policies.¹³⁴ Interviewees spoke about the core relevance of intersectionality to their work:

“*Tackling intersecting inequality should be at the heart of designing this new world. This is essential to ensure that it is a feminist future. It would put the values of compassion and equality and caring and sustainability at the heart of economies, societies and politics, all of which need to be designed together, with feminist principles at the centre.*” – Interviewee 2

There is an abundance of work in the disability justice movement in this area. In their podcast ‘Into the Crip Universe’, Ruffino Darrow¹³⁵ describes overlapping ways in which environmental degradation, air and water pollution, racism, classism and ableism relate to their experience of environmental illness. As environmental harms tend to affect first and most severely the communities that historically have been the most marginalised, without centring these communities, environmental measures risk causing additional harm. For instance, Piepzna-Samarasinha writes about “not shaming someone for precut vegetables or wet wipes or going to the drive through or using a car. Including an SUV because it’s big enough to fit a chair.”¹³⁶ Our expert interviewees also spoke about how climate action without a focus on care needs, or the effects of exclusion and colonisation, risks creating greater harm.

“From a climate perspective, the focus is on reducing cars... Actually, from our perspective, disabled people do need access to cars... Maybe there's an unintentional, unconscious missing of issues from disabled people, people with long-term conditions and unpaid carers around issues like...car usage in delivery of care, how do they deliver care? How can your rights still be respected, but actually things are sustainable?” – Jane Miller

“One could say that care is similarly built on interdependence, and I'm a person with disability, and in the disability context, caring and being cared for is a hotly debated and ambivalent topic, insofar as care provision frequently goes hand-in-hand with the limitation of autonomy of people who need care. But we just need to redefine what it means to be interdependent: to what degree there is value in attending to other people, attending to our environments, and investing effort and labour into maintaining them lest they get degraded, they degenerate, they die off. The fundamental existential aspect of human being is maintaining oneself and others in the world.” – Dr Tomislav Medak

“The goal is a positive thing. But the way to get there – you can do it a number of different ways – if we're just doing it the fastest way, it benefits you, but does it benefit me? I explain it as somebody helping you get a bee off your face by punching you in the face... Thank you very much, now the bee's off my face, but also, I'm hurt.” – Interviewee 10

These insights point towards a strong need to act in solidarity, ensuring that as a movement our work towards a care-filled, low-carbon future is inclusive and intersectional, not only in our communication but in all areas of practice.

“For years awaiting this apocalypse, I have worried that as sick and disabled people, we will be the ones abandoned when our cities flood. But I am dreaming the biggest disabled dream of my life – dreaming not just of a revolutionary movement in which we are not abandoned but of a movement in which we lead the way. With all of our crazy, adaptive-devices, loving kinship and commitment to each other, we will leave no one behind as we roll, limp, stim, sign, and move in a million ways towards concreting the decolonial living future. I'm dreaming like my life depends on it. Because it does.”¹³⁷

Care for carers

Globally, there is increasing demand for care under exploitative circumstances and poor conditions, without adequate compensation for care workers – including low or no pay. This is often carried out by women, girls and gender non-conforming people from historically marginalised groups in terms of (but not limited to) class, caste, race, age, sexuality and disability.^{138, 139, 140} Similarly, the governance and actions of Indigenous people determine the care and conservation of a considerable share of the planet's intact natural ecosystems,¹⁴¹ yet Indigenous communities receive little support or consultation in national and international spaces, while being at the frontlines of climate change impacts and persecution.

Interviewees brought up the need to care for carers – of people, of communities and also of the natural environment. The types of care needed may vary widely, from networks of care that support the physical health of environmental defenders in protecting themselves in confrontations, to community gardens providing fresh food and connection for new immigrants; or from mental health care services for care practitioners at risk of government and community backlash, to resources on care and mutual aid projects.^{142, 143, 144}

“*My mental health and my privacy is always being compromised. I'm under surveillance of my state and you know, non-state actors as well, as a feminist within the community I faced so much backlash... The religious groups and ethno-nationalist groups who are conservatives, they think that she is promoting—helping our women and she is breaking the homes, taking men to the jail, giving power to women... Sometimes I feel so lonely, even though I know so many friends... my friends say, “Oh, we sorry, I can't walk with you this way,” like when we are going to a restaurant. I say, “Why?” They say, “You are at risk or vulnerable, if someone kills you,” (laughs) they will be the target. I take these things lightly, but it's getting worse on my brain and peace of mind.”* – Jalila Haider

“*We've been working together with various organisers of what we call pirate care. Pirate – insofar as they are contesting regimes of exclusion and are embracing disobedience to contest them... We decided to create a syllabus that will document situated knowledge of those practices... [In the pandemic,] we started documenting not necessarily disobedient forms of practices of care organising, but also immediate responses to organise care for those who are isolating at home, or those who are facing family violence and yet have to stay at home in the lockdown, and those who are left without a job due to the lockdown. We've created a small body of texts, practical texts, how-to's [aimed at those groups of people], that was widely received and shared at that moment, because that was what the moment required.”* – Dr Tomislav Medak

The lack of adequate care for carers also affects participation, for instance where carers have too little time or energy to contribute meaningfully to care and climate initiatives:

“What we noticed was there was a real gap in terms of people on the frontline of social care coming to speak about climate issues and climate-related issues. And I think that really goes back to the point of burnout. There's definitely a lot of people within that sector who want to do climate-related action, climate-related work, but really, they didn't have the space or capacity to come and have a conversation about it.” – Jane Miller

In ‘Care Work’, Piepzna-Samarasinha¹⁴⁵ writes about Kindred, a collective of queer Black and brown Southern organisers working in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, as one of the first to talk about caring and healing within their movement as a core practice of the movement itself. Their strategy statement included the “need to be able to respond to the increased state of burnout and depression in our movements; systematic loss of our communities’ healing traditions; the isolation and stigmatization of healers; and the increased privatization of our land, medicine and natural resources that has caused us to rely on state or private models we do not trust and that do not serve us... Our movements themselves need to be healing, or there is no point to them.”

Our movement towards a low-carbon, caring world needs to begin with the provision of care for those who provide care, from knowledge and support networks, to working towards changing cultures and systems.

“How will we become the home and future we've been waiting for, and what specific steps are we willing to take to ensure that home, this sense of love and safety, this indelible mark of humanity, belongs equally to us all?”¹⁴⁶



Conclusion

The climate crisis and the care economy are interconnected. For sustainable change to happen in a society and its individual members, a radical shift in conceptualising well-being and care work needs to happen. Well-being of both people and nonhumans need to be at the core of the solutions offered for the climate crisis. This also follows on from the wider report 'Economies that Dare to Care' by the Hot or Cool Institute.¹⁴⁷

Communication through certain strategic conceptualisations of care-work and climate offers an entry-point on how this work can move forward:

- Care needs to be conceptualised as both caring for each other (humans) and caring for the environment (nonhumans);
- Solidarity and compassion works better in framing messages about inequality;
- Positive framing may work better than negative framing.

However, it is important to be mindful that care and care-work is not oversimplified and romanticised to fall into gender-stereotypes and framings that gloss over wider systemic oppression and power relations.

There is also a need to actively decolonise accepted models of research and what constitutes knowledge. This is particularly highlighted in concepts such as Buen Vivir in indigenous areas of Latin America and other examples of indigenous framings of interconnectedness and interdependence.

Communicating about climate change needs to be balanced with urgency and care. This means that equitable ways to do so are taken into account to reflect gender-responsive and care-sensitive actions. In so doing, intersectionality has to be foregrounded to ensure that the measures taken to limit climate change are just.

Attention also needs to be paid to care for carers as this affects participation in climate initiatives in the long run. Care and healing needs to be centred for those who provide care themselves.

Following on from the report 'Economies that Dare to Care', short to medium term approaches for inducing change in policies is crucial (see Table 2 in the report). These changes should take into account the concepts and issues highlighted in this report.

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