

## PSYCHOLOGY AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS – A POPULATION CLIMATE ACTION FRAMEWORK - ‘People and Planet - we’re all in this together’

### Preamble

Members of the Global Psychology Alliance (GPA), comprising over 70 national and international psychology organizations and associations, signed written commitments to take action on Climate Change through the signing of a joint ‘Proclamation’ and ‘Declaration’ in Lisbon in 2019 (GPA, 2021).

These undertakings were reinforced through a follow-up meeting in Bogota in 2022, where it was agreed that the focus until 2025 should be on raising awareness (GPA, 2022). The GPA Climate Co-ordinating Group has been broadly following the GPA RoadMap 2025 Template developed in Bogota and progress up to Quarter 3 of 2023 is summarized in the Appendix.

This paper provides a framework for helping all GPA members to put these commitments into practice. The goal of the framework is to support all associations to develop transparent, actionable plans by 2025 to focus on education, advocacy, and communication to address climate change mitigation, adaptation, and justice. The emphasis in the framework is on how psychology can support individuals, communities, organizations, and nations to address the climate crisis through a ‘Population Climate Action Framework’.

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to frame climate change from a wellbeing perspective and propose action steps for psychology and psychologists across the globe to make meaningful collaborative contributions to the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and to develop strategies and processes to ensure the inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable peoples, Indigenous knowledge systems, and cultural perspectives (IPCC, 2023; APA, 2022):

- *Mitigation* refers to efforts to limit, prevent, and counteract greenhouse gas emissions so that human-driven climate change can be slowed and eventually halted. Mitigation approaches can aim to reduce overall consumption of energy as well as alter how energy is produced and used. Mitigation efforts can aim to promote individual and organizational action to promote climate-friendly energy production and use, food production and use, modes of transport and other actions to reduce greenhouse gas production.
- *Adaptation* refers to efforts to reduce the current and future negative impacts of climate change, help people to adjust to the impacts, build resilience to deal with its most damaging impacts and effects, and promote long-range planning and change. These efforts are necessary because, even under the most optimistic projections, the climate will continue to change through much of this century due to the greenhouse gasses that have already been and are currently being emitted.
- A wellbeing perspective notes that changes in the climate due to emissions of gasses resulting from human practices including energy generation and use, manufacturing, transportation, and agriculture are having widespread and harmful impacts on life on our planet, including on human health and wellbeing. Many of these impacts lead to human

rights violations. The climate crisis disproportionately affects children's wellbeing and threatens their enjoyment of the right to the highest standard of health (PSI, 2023). They also increase disparities between and among population groups, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities as well as Indigenous Peoples who have the least resources to address those effects on their social, economic, and cultural wellbeing. To acknowledge and address these disparities, the Population Action Climate Framework also promotes psychology's involvement in climate justice awareness and action not only to give voice and representation to those peoples and groups that are most vulnerable to climate change, including marginalized and vulnerable populations and the world's Indigenous Peoples, but to learn from sustainable practices of Indigenous Peoples and cultures.

Transformation is fundamental to achieve the long-term goal of sustainable development. 'In order to prevent further damage to our ecosystems and living conditions, we need ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable development and the corresponding implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The psychological objective here is to support people in participating in such change processes in a healthy, self-effective and successful manner.' (BDP, 2021).

## **2. Mitigation**

Action to save our planet needs to be put on an urgent footing. Psychology's contribution needs to lead with efforts to slow and ultimately halt the progress of climate change. How can this goal be reflected in a GPA Association action plan?

The key objectives are to increase awareness of individuals, communities, organizations, and broader systems about the necessity of acting in a way that supports a climate sustainable ecosystem; and to help individuals, communities, organizations, and systems to find ways of acting that are appropriate and effective in their own social, political and cultural contexts.

The key outcomes are to ensure that environmental and climate matters are given high priority by our profession, and to promote common, collaborative solutions based on the recognition that we are 'all in this together'.

### **Population Climate Action Framework**

The scale of the challenge is huge. To meet ambitious climate change targets, we have to transform our global energy, manufacturing, transportation, and agricultural systems from their existing carbon-intensive state to sustainable, carbon-neutral solutions. This will involve a combination of technical innovation, changes in mindset and behaviors, and new public policy frameworks and legislation (Mann, 2021).

Effective mitigation therefore requires a broad community perspective, a 'Population Climate Framework' and a 'total systems' approach to change, with psychologists increasingly working with others across disciplinary boundaries. The following areas are likely to be important:

- Psychology can contribute to the design and implementation of new technologies and systems that result in reduced energy consumption, as well as supporting individuals, communities, and governments in transitions between the old and the new. The aim is to ensure that 'people matters' are taken into account in both design and implementation and that social, political, and cultural contexts are properly considered (APA, 2022).
- Psychology can identify and support ways of bringing about changes in people's environments and lifestyles that will contribute to reduced energy use and lower emissions

(Carmichael, R., 2019). This requires a broad perspective that moves beyond individual behavior (and beyond calls for “personal sacrifice”) to examine the contexts in which people are living and working and look for ways to make change easier, enjoyable, and in their interests (Uzzell, 2022) and more normative. Fostering change at a community level is a particularly important area for psychological support as people learn and gain awareness through doing things for and with their community, and develop a sense of agency in the context of community group norms and expectations (Chapman et al., 2022).

- Psychology can support the use of effective practices by leaders and policy makers both in organizations and governments to look at existing models, frameworks, and policies and to develop alternatives that align, shape, and sometimes drive the changes required to lower emissions and improve sustainability in the broadest sense. Encouraging people to work collaboratively across systems, to understand multiple perspectives and to acquire strategies to develop pragmatic, consensual, and culturally appropriate solutions that 'go with the grain' of what is appropriate culturally can be a particularly useful role for psychologists (Oxford Peoples' Climate Survey, 2021; Uzzell, 2021)

### **Individual Mindset Attitudes and Behaviors**

Developing individual awareness and motivation and encouraging changes in everyday behavior are not only important for their contribution to climate change targets and environmental sustainability. They are also critical for role modeling and developing support for broader societal change. Individual changes can set an example for others to follow. Yet progress in this area has been relatively slow.

Psychological issues underlie much of what has been termed climate inaction and skepticism. Addressing climate change can be perceived as:

- psychologically distant, uncertain, and complicated
- profoundly threatening and requiring extensive change to our way of doing things.

Taking action on climate change requires taking personal and collective responsibility and sometimes prioritizing long-term well-being over short term gains or costs (Morrisey, & Plenty, 2022). Motivation to make change can be difficult. Too often communications on change emphasize the sacrifices required rather than benefits to be gained (e.g., there are few perceived incentives, and rewards are distal rather than immediate). Although technological innovation and adjustments to policy can make change easier, the scale of the climate crisis is such that effective action may still carry a personal cost.

Some have proposed that effective climate change action will only arise when states enact legislation that forces people and systems to change. This can be a lengthy and complicated process, and depends on shifting governmental, and voter priorities.

Developing personal commitment rather than compliance can be a more sustainable and effective strategy. Motivation to change behaviors to promote climate-friendly solutions can be increased when people are informed and educated about the need for action in personally relevant ways, and when they understand the benefits of a climate-sustainable ecosystem for themselves and future generations. Increasing motivation in this way is likely to lead to choices to take action. The psychological literature, experience, and evidence relevant to this area includes work on behavioral change in the health arena (including Prochaska, 1985), studies of motivation and intention (including the self-determination framework of Deci, 1983, 2000) and surveys which show that those who are better informed and educated about the issue tend to be more supportive of climate action (Oxford Peoples' Climate Survey, 2021).

As people become more educated and aware about climate matters and realize how their personal behavior can make a difference, their sense of belonging to the broader environmental community and identification with its aims and values is likely to grow and provide an important source of social support for continuing on this track (Udall et al., 2021).

### **3. Adaptation**

Psychologists have long been involved in supporting people affected by natural disasters, including extreme weather events and their consequences. There are many international examples provided in a recent global review (Clinton, Dixon & Morrissey, 2022).

As the warming of the planet increases, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events has increased. The consequences such as wildfires, typhoons, flooding, extreme heat, agricultural failures, and subsequent displacement and forced migration of peoples will be felt around the world.

#### **Building Resilience and Coping**

The challenge for psychology and psychologists is how best to support individuals, communities, nations, and regions, especially those who are more climate vulnerable, as they have to adapt to these challenges.

- There will be a need to plan ahead and help people prepare for climate change impacts by building social and psychological resilience at all levels from individual to community to country. This includes not only attitudinal and behavioral elements such as self-regulation and coping skills, but also more practical matters such as planning for climate disasters, coping with rebuilding, or with dislocation and migration, and ensuring that psychological support and services will be available as part of first response to any and all environmental crises (APA, 2022). More emphasis on adaptation programs is needed among individuals and communities particularly for example in the Global South and other vulnerable and resource-limited groups as they often face the most severe brunt of climate change, the impacts of which are amplified due to limited economic capacity necessary to strengthen disaster preparedness and healthcare systems.
- It is essential to provide broad individual- and population-based services to help people understand and adjust to climate change including coping with eco-anxiety, other mental health conditions and the social problems associated with climate change. Emotional reactions to climate change cover a broad spectrum (Pikhala, 2023; Agoston et al, 2022). Importantly, climate change adaptation must involve opportunities for community building not only to help people feel less alone in their distress about the warming planet but also to translate their climate emotions into collective action to help create contextualized and appropriate community adaptation strategies. It is also necessary to provide support for people and communities transitioning to more environmentally friendly ways of living. Such support is especially necessary for children and young people, as it is they who generally express the greatest eco- anxiety given their greater sense of investment in a future in which they are confident to thrive. There is also a need for the further enhancement of health and social care systems for an adequate approach towards existing and future threatening effects on physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Psychologists should use the frameworks provided by global agencies such as the WHO MHPSS Mental Health and Psychosocial Support framework, (WHO, 2023) in supporting communities affected by climate emergencies.

## **Adaptation and Learning**

Developing strategies and materials for adaptation provides a useful route for psychologists to develop awareness on climate change and its importance for wellbeing, as well as gaining acceptance for making a professional contribution in this area.

We note that the increasing frequency of adverse extreme weather events all over the globe will eventually increase public awareness that climate change is a serious, existential challenge that impacts us all. This will lead to a realization that adaptation on its own is not a sustainable strategy as it requires open-ended investment as the situation continually deteriorates.

The pressure will grow for mitigation to address the root causes of the problems but the later this is left, the more burdensome the behavioral changes and financial costs will need to be effective. Our view is that given ‘we are all in this together’, all climate change strategies should reference both mitigation and adaptation from the start.

## **4. Climate Justice**

Climate justice refers to the recognition that climate change effects are disproportionately borne by nations and population groups who have the least resources for mitigation or adaptation, including small island nations who contribute little to greenhouse gasses, yet are most affected by rising sea levels, vulnerable populations within wealthier nations who have fewer resources to adapt to climate change effects or to engage in mitigation actions (Pearson, Tsai & Clayton, 2021), populations whose livelihoods are threatened by extreme weather events, and Indigenous Peoples. Work in climate justice highlights that climate change carries moral and justice issues, not just policy decisions.

Climate justice is a framework for understanding, addressing, and remedying the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized and vulnerable communities. It generally includes the following principles:

- **Equity:** Climate action should be fair and just, and not disproportionately burden the most vulnerable peoples and communities.
- **Participation:** All people have the right to participate in decision-making about climate change. This includes ensuring that vulnerable and marginalized communities are included when decisions are being made about climate action.
- **Sustainability:** Climate action sustainable solutions that will protect the environment for future generations.

### **Psychology’s Role in Advocacy for Climate Justice**

Using a climate justice framework, psychologists and psychology organizations can emphasize two important areas:

- (1) Increasing awareness of the growing psychological literature on the interaction between vulnerability and climate change.
- (2) Promoting models and frameworks that increase participation and inclusiveness in decision making. This includes applying participatory action frameworks to information gathering and action plans for climate action.

(3) Giving voice to people and communities and supporting people-centered policies.

## 5. Supporting the Transition - A Look to the Future

Beyond immediate needs for mitigation and adaptation, informed by a climate justice lens, there is general agreement (Morrissey & Plenty, 2022) that the world must make a just transition from present carbon-intensive to future carbon-neutral systems. Managing this transition will be a challenge to governments and organizations, with implications for our current political, social and - economic models, frameworks, and mindsets (see for example, Lorenz et al., 2021).

The immediate interests of individuals, communities and nations do not always align with either each other or the global good. Geopolitical differences, the search for climate justice and funding, the different interests of developing and developed nations, the economic impact on those individuals and entities associated with the current system, and the blaming and shaming of individuals and institutions for their current and past activities are among the factors that make building trust and collaboration on climate action challenging (Morrissey & Plenty, 2022) .

Navigating the many challenges of building trust, a sense of community shared goals, and collaboration across sectors will require multifaceted processes for bringing together stakeholders in ways that allow inclusive and broad representation, and leaders and leadership skills to promote broad cross-sector collaboration. From developing processes to ensure the engagement of indigenous communities, vulnerable and marginalized communities, and small nations in decision making discussion and action, to crafting statements to encourage public trust will all require skills in decision making, argumentation, and communication.

Each of these are areas in which psychology and psychologists can contribute, using psychological science expertise in human decision making, risk assessment, leadership development and organizational skills.

Psychology and psychologists need to be prepared to contribute to the transition process. This preparation can be fostered by:

- Strengthening the professional fields of environmental, climate, and sustainability psychology
- Ensuring that the psychological effects of the climate crisis, important models in climate psychology, are incorporated into psychological education, training, and professional practice
- Strengthening training in the application of psychological science for policy makers and program developers who are not experts in human behavior.

At a more global level, GPA and associations who are part of GPA can begin now to foster the relations with national political leaders, senior players in the COP process, and components of the United Nations.

## 6. Implementing the GPA Population Climate Action Framework

The Population Climate Action Framework in this paper provides the overall model for coordinating GPA Climate Action from now to 2025. The key action steps are as follows:

## 6.1 Drawing on relevant expertise in psychology and related disciplines to develop Support Materials for all GPA associations to use in:

- Raising awareness (communication strategies to various audiences) about climate change: about ways to mitigate, about adaptation, about the transition process
- Motivating to action: advocacy (advocacy messages to various audiences)
- Acknowledging the experience of and addressing the specific needs of vulnerable communities and indigenous peoples
- Organizing and training within psychology to tackle climate change

## 6.2 Dissemination of Climate Action Plans by GPA Associations

- GPA associations are at different levels of development of their strategies, initiatives, and actions with respect to climate change. A database of association action plans can serve as a resource for development, collaboration, and cross-fertilization.
- The GPA can develop an overall action plan that includes periodic global campaigns across all associations. This would help make more transparent our shared priorities, implementation programme, timelines and responsibilities as well as our approach to learning and evaluation.

## Summary

Implementation of the Population Climate Action framework in this paper will enable the GPA to speak with 'one voice', recognizing and respecting the very different circumstances in different member associations whilst at the same time ensuring that what we have to say is relevant, helpful, and connected to the issues that decision makers face. It will also ensure there are processes in place which enable all to keep up to date and share best practice.



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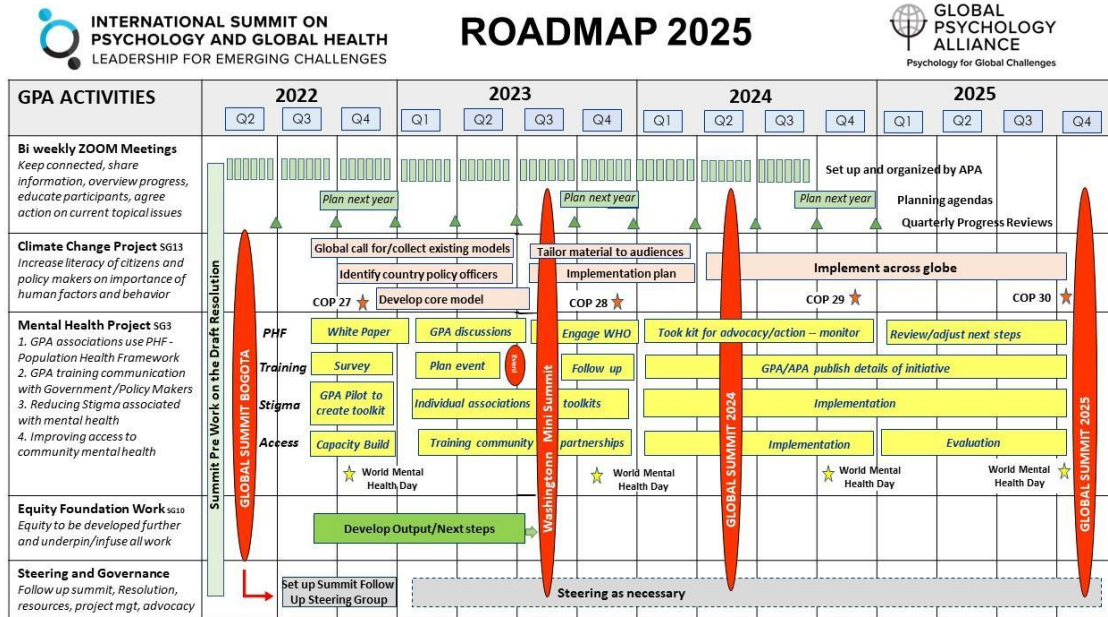
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## Appendix

### Progress on GPA Road Map



The 'RoadMap 2025' developed at Bogota provides the overall context for GPA activity. Progress against the RoadMap template the climate arena (as of Q3 2023) is as follows:

- **Attendance at COP27 (Q4 2022).** Completed. The GPA was represented at this meeting.
- **Global call for/collect existing models (Q3 2022 - Q2 2023).** Completed. The book 'Climate Action and Global Psychology' (Clinton, A., Dixon, B. and Morrissey, T., 2022) provides examples from countries and areas including EFPA (Europe) UK, Ukraine, Portugal, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Region on climate change experience. A survey was also carried out across the GPA and showed a continuing commitment to working on climate change. However, while case studies are available, it has proved difficult to collect different national models of climate change in an area which is still maturing.
- **Identify Country Policy Officers (Q4 2022 - Q2 2023).** Progress here has been slow. Most associations do not yet have a specific individual who can act as a focal point on climate change matters, although we have noted a strengthening of the organizational and institutional commitment to climate action in a number of psychological associations, linked to the broader environmental/ecological context and sustainability agenda.
- **Develop core model (Q4 2022- Q3 2023).** Progress here is on target. This paper on 'Population Climate Action Framework' provides a core model for GPA activities which can form the foundation for further work
- **Tailor Material to Audiences/Implementation Plan (start Q3 2023).** Two areas of action have been identified :
  - Development of Support Materials
  - Development of GPA Association Plans

GPA Climate Coordinating Group September 2023