

Understanding climate change and what we can all do

A New Barefoot Guide Concept

Introduction:

The common climate crisis narratives are too narrowly focused on cutting fossil fuels, which is only one driver of climate change. There are a complex set of causes for climate change, many of which are excluded from the discussion and from the creation of solutions. A new, more holistic climate science is emerging which explains the causes of climate change more fully and offers practical ways to address it beyond only cutting CO₂. In this approach, land use practices and restoring the soil carbon sponge play a significant role. The fuller perspective that this narrative creates shows that agroecological/regenerative land use practices *and* a reduction in fossil fuels need to be combined to be effective.

We propose writing a popular Barefoot Guide that opens up an understanding of climate change in a way that most people can easily understand. The Guide will also focus strongly on what people can do, based on this shift in perspective.

The effects of climate change are increasingly becoming obvious. Everyone is being hit by them. People all over the world are talking about climate change, both rural and urban people. The main problem it's causing is increasingly unpredictable weather and temperature change. This manifests as, for example, far heavier than normal storms, or as longer spells of rain, or as longer dry spells during the rainy seasons, as well as ongoing subtle shifts in temperature and the implications these have.

High levels of land degradation are making the problems caused by climate change much worse. Apart from anything else, this often increases dependency on the use of herbicides and chemical fertilizers, further damaging the health of the soil, and reducing levels of soil organic matter.

The hopeful side is that there's much more that can be done when one understands that climate change is intimately tied up with hydrological cycles and changes in land-use. It's not just about excess CO₂ in the atmosphere.

Why a Barefoot Guide on Climate Change?

Climate change is a complex issue. Ordinary people need to understand the fuller picture. Barefoot Guides (BFGs) help people understand complex issues in an elegant, creative and simplified (not simplistic) way. They draw heavily on people's lived experiences and tell many stories. They are engaging and interactive for the reader.

There seems to be widespread confusion amongst non-experts around the primary forces that direct and affect climate change. A BFG has the potential to shift the most basic lens through which readers discuss and respond to climate change in their daily lives.

We believe this is a key focus because at the moment the issue of climate change is disempowering people. The current narrative makes many people feel helpless. All they can do is to think about their part in reducing CO2 and complain about big corporates being the only players who can make a significant difference. While keeping up pressure on the oil industry is critical, what about smallholder farmers in rural areas everywhere who only cause limited CO2 emissions anyway? And how realistic is it to expect big reductions from corporates in CO2 in the short term regardless?

Climate change can become an effective rallying call with the right perspective. It can empower people to action, *if* they understand it from a more holistic perspective. What they *can* do is much more than reducing their CO2 emissions or rely on companies and governments to change. A decent understanding will help people play their part more effectively to change the global discourse, repair hydrological cycles, and reduce CO2. The further beauty of this approach is that it will help farmers become more productive because, with a greatly improved soil carbon sponge, they will increasingly have more water available for crops and livestock.

To be clear, we aren't talking here about climate change denial, not at all. We're talking about a deeper understanding of what determines and affects climate change beyond the current mainstream models, which seem to dominate most people's mindset.

Aim of the Guide

Overall, we envision that the group will identify *distinctions* that *eliminate unnecessary conflict* between the range of non-denier climate change narratives. This will help us to shed light on a simple, easily understood and balanced story about climate change and what we can do about it in our own lives.

To do this, we propose collecting, synthesising and simplifying a useful, functional view of climate change aimed at the average person. The guide will do the following:

- a) Equip readers to understand in context and in a balanced way:
 - i. Climate change theory in general,
 - ii. The common narratives, especially those prevalent in the media
 - iii. The climate change models used to arrive at these narratives.

- b) Inspire readers to see positive lines of action they can pursue in their lives.

The first step will be to get all the main climate change camps and theories laid out on one table, so to speak. Once this is done a coherent, comprehensive and integrated understanding can be translated into easy-to-digest language.

Once we collect as many of the primary narratives as possible, we propose looking at all the broader distinctions and combining them into a single narrative wherever possible. We can then examine areas where understanding is still missing, identifying any differences we cannot reasonably combine for strengths and weaknesses.

To do this in a fruitful way, we propose listing the main differences of opinion. This will help us to come up with frameworks that put them into perspective. Where combinations or clear distinctions still do not emerge, we propose the group explores the benefits and limitations of each remaining argument. This will mean the story we produce enables the reader to consider and discuss them in a balanced and insightful way.

Some consideration of the likely impact of each perspective on society, industry and agriculture would also be helpful, since dominant viewpoints tend to decide the actions stakeholders are taking. Key misunderstandings also lead to ineffective action and wasted resources. People take an opinion based on what they talk about and the theory and models in their minds, but the way that opinion is shared and used then determines the impact in the real world. We propose the group explicitly reviews this relationship as we explore and make decisions.

Some Starter Objectives for the Guide

1. Address the primary and most common misunderstandings about climate change.
2. Link society, agriculture, industry and broader natural processes into an integrated view of climate change and put them into historical and contextual perspective.
3. Speak to the average person in a way that equips them with greater understanding by sharing clear and accurate analogies about climate change. Make sure these are easy to talk about, particularly when addressing partisan narratives.
4. Enable the reader of the Guide to engage with climate change in all these dimensions in:
 - Their day to day lives
 - How they see themselves
 - Their orientation towards the outside world
 - Their family and social ties
 - Their interaction with their bodies and external objects such as: products, food, homes etc.
 - Their viewpoint on the interaction of their environment, industry and global physical effects, both visible and invisible.
 - Their place in the overall timeline of climate change.

- The processes which are shown to address climate change positively in all these dimensions and in a holistic and practical fashion.

Who would use the Barefoot Guide?

- Ordinary citizens everywhere
- Individuals involved professionally or personally in agriculture and various industries.
- Educators, teachers, facilitators and organisations, particularly those working with rural and small-holder farmers.
- Government departments or programs.
- Policy and decision makers at all levels.

Who could be involved in producing the Barefoot Guide?

- Anyone with interest and motivation to get involved.
- Farmer representatives and those working with farmers.
- Representatives from indigenous communities
- Experts in the most prevalent heat radiation and reflection models of climate change with a focus on the physics involved.
- Experts in the biological and cyclic processes which impact climate change.
- One or more people with a good understanding of the overall history of climate change and how the present fits into that perspective.
- People with some familiarity with carbon trading schemes.
- People involved in industry and corporate schemes directed at climate change.
- People involved in climate change initiatives, techniques and interest groups.
- Others?

What other benefits?

The process of producing such a guide would link enthusiasts involved in the relevant approaches, perspectives and industries. This will build solidarity in this critical area of work in itself, with a potential for ongoing collaborative work in the future. Those frustrated with misunderstandings around climate change will have an opportunity to educate, share, reflect and impact many people on multiple levels.

Overview of process (flexible):

1. Gathering of a core group to drive and manage the process to produce the Barefoot Guide. These would need to be people who have the time and commitment to do this.
2. Establishing a wider community of interested people and creating an email group focused on producing the Barefoot Guide. Some of this group will write pieces for the Barefoot Guide.
3. Develop and agree on the broad content framework and the process of producing the Barefoot Guide. The process will draw on past experience in producing BFGs, but there's no 'set' method, each BFG has its own process.

4. Fund-raise for certain aspects.
5. Convene Barefoot Guide Write-shops
6. Gather stories in various other ways.
7. Convene an editorial team which then pulls all the writing together into a cohesive whole.
8. Hire artists to do drawings and diagrams, DTP/design work, review drafts, final editing, proof-reading.
9. Launch of the Barefoot Guide and dissemination according to a plan which will have been discussed earlier.

NB: A note on language: the guide will be produced in English but we envisage a number of translations being done. Furthermore, there will be room for people to write stories in languages other than English, which can then be translated into English.