

# Climate Change Focus Groups

Conversations among Vermonters who speak  
Arabic, French & Lingala, Spanish, Nepali, and Maay Maay

Climate Action Office  
April 2024



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## Foreword

In the following pages you will find focus group summaries and detailed notes. Focus groups were composed of members of a community whose native language is not English. The focus groups were co-facilitated by a leader of each community, the Climate Action Office, and the Consensus Building Institute.

These focus groups emphasize the importance of gathering and sharing information about climate action among Vermont communities and State Government agencies.

# Arabic Speakers Focus Group

Zoom virtual meeting

February 17, 2024

## Summary

### Perceptions of climate change:

- Participants are most concerned about changes in weather patterns, floods, disasters, hotter summers, mosquitoes, air quality, and a sense of worry and fear.
- Participants are personally affected by financial burdens associated with climate change: higher electricity bills, food prices, and flight costs.

### Causes of climate change:

- Participants attribute climate change to various human activities, including the use of cars and transportation, industry and manufacturing, and agriculture's reliance on chemicals and fertilizers.
- They emphasize the need for a shift towards clean energy sources like solar power and advocate for government subsidies to make clean energy more accessible, especially to those who cannot afford them.

### Personal experiences with climate change:

- Participants' firsthand experiences with climate change impacts include poor air quality, flooding, hotter and more humid summers, and more mosquitoes. These have financial and/or health impacts

### Potential solutions:

- Participants suggest various individual and collective actions, including reducing reliance on cars through carpooling, better biking/walking paths, and safe and accessible public transportation.
- Participants stress the need for accountability measures to deter environmentally harmful behaviors and climate pollution.

### Preparations for climate change impacts:

- Participants want more proactive, early measures to address climate-related emergencies, emphasizing the need for accessible information and resources in multiple languages.

### Effective community engagement:

- Participants value direct, meaningful engagement with government and community stakeholders.
  - They emphasize the importance of follow-up actions, ongoing communication, collaboration, transparency, and tangible outcomes resulting from community discussions.
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## Detailed Notes

### First thing that comes to mind when hearing “climate change”:

- Change in weather.
- Floods, disasters.
- Sense of worry: something bad is going to happen.
- Difficult weather followed by unexpected consequences.
- Increase in temperature.
- Seasons are not the same anymore.
- Electric bills are becoming higher, more expensive to heat or cool homes.
- Food prices are getting expensive because the cost to grow crops in bad climates is higher.
- Flight costs are getting higher
- It is all happening because of the gas we release into our surroundings.

### Causes of climate change:

- Using cars, transportation
- Factories that burn fuels: we keep burning more fossil fuels.
- Manufacturing and industrialization. USA is an industrial country–this country is one of the biggest causes of climate pollution.
- We have forgotten about people and have focused more on manufacturing goods.
- Use of chemicals and fertilizers in our soil: the agricultural sector today is also a problem.
- We need to focus more on clean energy, such as solar panels.
- Government needs to subsidize the clean energy system and make it cheaper for those who cannot afford it.

### Personal experiences with the impacts of climate change:

- Bad air: air quality is getting worse and not all homes are insulated.
- Because of bad air quality last summer, I suffered. Some people in our community even ended up in the ER rooms.

- Even though the wildfire was in Canada, our air quality was impacted, and we suffered. This shows how climate change is not only a local issue.
- Summers in Vermont are getting hotter and hotter. It is also more humid. Vermont summers are not the same anymore. Houses here do not have air conditioning.
- Flooding is another way I have experienced the impact. My house is next to the Winooski River, and I was extremely terrified when I saw the recent flood. The water level was so high.
- Extreme rain and increased water level are making life more difficult. Everything stays damp and moist. I have asthma, and I suffer because of bad air quality after the flood.
- When it rained heavily, my basement was flooded. My ceiling/roof could not hold all the water and was compromised. This makes life challenging.
- Climate change is affecting everyone around the world. It is an international problem. And we must come together to solve this problem.
- We have borders between us, but the sky is the same everywhere, so the impact of climate change is the same. We need to think as a collective to find solutions to climate change.
- Due to climate change, we are seeing the unseen. Places that never had snow now have snow. For example, it snowed in the United Arab Emirates, and it's never happened before. Places that were cool are getting hotter and unbearable. This is hard to witness.
- Climate change is affecting all aspects of our lives, such as finance – with food and electric costs getting higher, economy, personal and public health.
- I am an elderly person and I always look forward to the summer to get out because going out helps me feel healthy. However, I no longer enjoy summer because of bug bites, mosquitoes, and ticks.
- Mosquito bites are a common experience in our communities.

**Potential solutions:**

- We need to start in our own way, small baby steps. We can teach our kids how to ride bikes, walk, or to carpool, instead of using the car for everything. We can teach our kids to recycle. People shouldn't burn garbage.
- Change can begin among us, just the way we can start good changes in the state of Vermont.
- We must put rules that will have more filters to control pollution from the exhaust system in our cars.
- Electric cars might be a solution, but they are expensive to buy, and they are not for everyone.

- More bikes are needed. And we need more bike paths, as they have in Europe, where they can bike in the winter and in the summer. The bike path in Burlington is just for fun and enjoyment—it is not functional for commuting.
- Our streets must be safe for bikes. Right now, they are not safe. There are not good bike lanes or shoulders on the roads.
- More bus stops would make the bus stops closer to people.
- We need alternative options. Right now, people are forced to drive because we have to go places for day-to-day activities. If other options are available, it becomes easier.
- One big challenge is the landscape of Vermont. As our geography exists, we cannot ride a bike too far because we have mountains, hills, and lakes. And it's dangerous to ride bikes on the highways.
- The state needs written laws to reduce the sources of climate change. We need accountability. We need some punitive measures to maintain accountability because then people will fear the law and correct their behavior. Similar to when you are speeding, you get a ticket. This could be the case for releasing pollution that is hurting others.
- We need to begin valuing human lives.

#### **How do we prepare for the impacts:**

- We need to acknowledge that disasters are real, and the state should be prepared to handle those disasters while also helping people be prepared.
- We cannot continue to live in flood zones because it's getting more dangerous.
- We need to learn about emergency kits and emergency preparedness. Whether or not we accept it, emergencies will come. We need to be prepared, and people need to know how to be safe. Information about what to do when we have floods, heat strokes, etc., will save lives. Just like First Aid and CPR, we need training opportunities for how to respond in emergencies like floods and wildfires.
- The state should prioritize helping people who are the most vulnerable, such as the elderly and disabled, to stay prepared for emergency situations. We need training for first aid and emergency preparedness.
- When we had floods, the state shared videos in our language detailing what to do when there is a flood. That was very helpful. We need more resources like that. Information in accessible formats in languages we understand is very helpful. The Vermont Language Justice Project is a great resource I have used and appreciated.
- We would appreciate having access to information *before* a disaster occurs, not after it's already happened. It's challenging to access any resources when a disaster has just happened, and we are struggling to stay safe. We need preparation in advance.

- The Vermont Alert system could include resources and education.

**Effective ways to engage community members:**

- Conversations like this where we get to learn and share are helpful. We need more of these in person and on Zoom. This is better than reading.
- Discussions like this are very helpful because we can ask questions directly. That way we get reliable information.
- If you share information with some community members, you can be sure that they will pass that information to others in the communities. Even if a few people attend a meeting, the information gets passed in the community.
- If you are going to host meetings like this, take our opinions and feedback seriously. Show us that you value what we shared. Don't just meet once and disappear; come back and have follow-ups.
- After these meetings, tell us what is going to happen after we have shared our feedback. We like knowing how our voice is impacting things happening with the government.
- When we share our stories, we anticipate that things will change. We feel comfortable, respected, and valued knowing that our voice is making some difference. If anything, we shared today helps make any positive change, please come back, and tell us even if it's years later.

**Topics you are interested in learning more about:**

- Before any laws and regulations are created, please meet with us and get our feedback. There's no point in meeting with us after the fact.
- Vermont is an agricultural state, and we want to eat organic and locally sourced food. However, they are far too expensive. Imported food is cheaper than locally produced food, and that baffles my mind. It is quite ironic because back in our country of origin, foreign-grown crops used to be more expensive. We need to look into how we can best support one another. How can we, the consumers, support our local farmers?
- I'm interested in learning more about mosquito bites making people sick and how to address this. What is the state doing about it?
- We want to learn more about electricity. Why is electricity so expensive? Before the price changes significantly, we would like to have a conversation. Are there any ways we can have conversations with electric companies?
- Please take action after these meetings. Show us how our voices made a difference. Come back and tell us what you did based on what we shared. Don't just have meetings occasionally.
- Having this meeting alone shows that you care. Let's continue.



# Spanish Speakers Focus Group

Kellogg-Hubbard Library, Montpelier

February 22, 2024



## Summary

### What comes to your mind when you first think of climate change?

- No snow or less snow. More winter rain and mixed precipitation.
- Unpredictable weather patterns
- Harsh wind storms
- Very hot summers
- Changes in the weather and environment that differ from the climate in the past
- More diseases and sickness (respiratory issues, etc.)
- More flooding here than there ever was
- Poor air quality due to distant fires and the wind
- It's only getting worse, and more unpredictable from year to year
- Planning for weather is difficult
- Makes people afraid of what's coming

### Ways to prepare for the impacts:

- Need to get used to the unpredictability and adapt
- Responsibility is on everyone
- Personal actions matter even on a small scale
- Education and teaching the children how to be prepared
- Use of technology to help communities and individuals prepare better
- Weatherizing homes for today's standards
- Government needs to help
- Recycling; consuming less; electricity usage

- Being conscious as to how we live
- Corporations have a much greater responsibility than individuals
- More public transportation needed
- It should not be cost prohibitive to prepare
- Use more solar; but it's too expensive in this country

### **Causes of Climate Change:**

- Corporations
- CO2 emissions
- Consumer driven economy
- American culture and how we live and consume
- Transportation & travel
- Farming & agriculture
- Population growth

### **Personal Experiences with Climate Change:**

- In Nicaragua, the summers are so hot and last so long that it has changed the soil
- When the soil changes because of climate change, it affects farming/food production
- El Nino/El Nina effects are stronger
- It feels as if the sun has gotten much hotter
- Seeing climate change effects, like major flooding in Vermont is scary, because they remember that from their own country
- Vermont climate has drastically changed in the last decade. Less snow.
- Wind storms are scary
- In Argentina, solar panels have been around for decades; household solar is widespread and accessible

### **Potential solutions:**

- Better public transportation—invest in that instead of pushing electric vehicles
- More Car share programs
- Weatherizing homes; make it less expensive and easy to do
- Insulate homes and businesses
- Electric cars are too complicated and too expensive. Programs are complicated also
- Go after the corporations
- Make solar less expensive—why is it so expensive in the United States of America?
- Government needs to figure out how to make it easier and less expensive

- Corporations have a greater responsibility than individuals
- Education; teach children especially
- Our culture needs to change and the way that we live now needs to change

**Effective community engagement:**

- Use appropriate technology to reach the community; use Facebook and WhatsApp
- Utilize the leaders to reach out to community members
- Use alerts on phones to reach Vermonters, like it's done now for emergency alerts
- Announce next meeting date at the existing meeting - stay consistent and do it more frequently

# French & Lingala Speakers Focus Group

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission office, Winooski  
Saturday February 24, 2024



## Summary

### Perceptions of climate change:

- Some general confusion about climate change. Folks were aware of changes in weather patterns, but some uncertainty around causes.
- Comments on the difficulty in moving to Vermont from Democratic Republic of the Congo and adjusting to the cold weather. "Why is Vermont so cold?" "We are not used to the cold." "To live in this weather is very difficult."
- Unpredictable weather patterns.
- Too much rain over the summer destroyed crops.
- There is pollution everywhere.
- It is not as cold this winter as it usually is.

### Causes of climate change:

- Industry. Individuals also contribute, but it is mostly industry. But, people also need jobs. So how do we reconcile these two needs?
- Confusion around how agriculture is both a contributor to climate change and a solution.

### Potential solutions:

- Switching from gas to electricity is better.
- Growing your own food. But, *organic* materials (compost and potting soil) are more expensive.
- Trees.

- Put solar panels on all of the buildings.
- Develop a machine to remove the pollution (greenhouse gasses) from the air
- “People with intelligence need to focus on how to move away from gas because we use gas all the time.”
- Focus on multiple solutions/backup solutions because not just one thing will work.

**Preparations for climate change impacts:**

- “We need to know the information to protect ourselves. What will the State of Vermont provide for us to know what to do for the future?”

**Effective community engagement:**

- Lean on community networks like you did to set up this focus group.
- Give us time to think about everything from this focus group, and we can come back next time with more to contribute to the discussion.



**Detailed Notes**

**What comes to your mind when you first think of climate change? How do you relate to climate change?**

- It's affecting everyone; he has experienced this winter as way warmer than others. He has been here for four years, and the winters fluctuate greatly. The weather is sporadic. He cannot find a good reason for that and wonders the reason behind it.
- Arrived here two months ago. Getting used to Vermont. Adjusting to the rhythms and systems and the cold, and the comparison between the heat in West Africa

and the cold here. Looking at the temperature here, and in California there is a heat wave. Noticing drastic differences between temperatures in the US.

- I always wonder, why here in Vermont is so much colder than other states? Why only in Vermont is it very cold?
- Where we come from, we don't have this kind of weather. We don't have a choice. We just have to get used to the climate. Sometimes when it is the summer, it is hot, but we are used to the heat. We are not used to the cold.
- It is not easy to get used to the cold weather. You have to get up early, get the snow and ice off your car. We have people in the family who have asthma, or are sick. To get used to living in this weather is very difficult. The conditions of living are not great, so their homes also are too hot or too cold.
- When she came here to the United States to Atlanta, she had to put so many blankets on at night in the winter because she gets very cold. Now, in Vermont, it is getting worse. But she doesn't have a choice, so has to get used to it.
- This year is different from other years. I don't know what is causing the change.
- The floods destroyed all of our local crops so we did not have any local food.
- There is pollution everywhere: In our work, in our homes.

**Slide: Climate change is affecting Vermont... How familiar are folks with climate change? Have you experienced any big changes?**

- Climate Action Office explained that the effects of climate change can be very different around the world. Here in Vermont, we are seeing more rainfall, droughts, flooding, wildfire smoke, warmer winters, hotter summers, tick borne illnesses.
- I am also very new (since last April). For us, who have been here for a couple of years, people are saying this year is different. It's not as cold. I know why God wanted me to come this year.
- Flooding caused a large amount of damage to local farms and local food. We will start farming there again around March, so we will see how it goes.
- We have a little garden. Last year, we did not get anything because there was a lot of rain.
- I have a garden behind my house. The vegetables were okay, but the corn was not okay because of the rain.
- We need to know the information to protect ourselves. What will the State of Vermont provide for us to know what to do for the future?

**What contributes to climate change in Vermont?**

- Industry is causing pollution. After everything I've heard now, gas is a part of it. But I am concerned because we all use gas at home. Maybe the government can find a way for us to not use gas if it is going to be affecting us. Is there any way the government can fix this? We use gas everyday.
- The big companies/industry are causing climate change. We also contribute, as individuals, but it is mostly bigger industries and companies contributing.
- Agriculture: How is agriculture affecting the climate? Climate Action Office explained how agriculture both contributes to climate change and also helps fight climate change.

### **Solutions to prepare ourselves for the future: What to focus on?:**

- Is there any way they can create something to cook food without using gas? Car as well— there are electric cars. The government can try to create solutions and programs to reduce gas use.
- Switching from gas to electricity is better.
- It's important to grow our own food here.
- Even the materials to grow our own food are expensive. We have to get the soil. And the organic soil is more expensive.
- The way I understand it, industry is creating these climate problems. If today, the government were to decide to stop industry, that would also be a problem because people will not have jobs. So, what is the solution? Climate Action Office explained we need to move away from gas powered industry to renewably-powered industry. We need workforce training and new jobs.
- Is gas or electricity the problem? I think it is both, right? Climate Action Office responded: The main focus is to reduce the gas because it is much more polluting. And, we can transition to clean forms of electricity.
- In Vermont, we have lots of trees, which are good for the environment.
- How are we going to solve the problem of gas? People with intelligence need to focus on how to move away from gas. We need people who are smart and can create an alternative. They need to push their minds a little further, and think about how to push our solutions further.
- Put solar on all of the buildings to start with. This would help.
- Build a big machine to pull pollution out from the air.
- Put solar panels on all of the houses.
- We need to have backup solutions. Because if something stops working that we rely on, we are going to be in trouble.

### **How to engage you into the future?**

- Same way you set this focus group up. Use the community network.

- Give us time to think about it. Next time we meet, we can bring up what we are thinking.
- When we come back, we will continue this discussion!



# Nepali Speakers Focus Group

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Office, Winooski  
Saturday February 24, 2024



## Summary

### Perceptions of climate change:

- Less snow. More winter rain instead of snow.
- Melting icebergs.
- Know that there is a connection with gas emissions.
- More diseases and sickness (tick borne, cancer, etc.)
- More flooding.
- Worsening air quality.
- Dirtier drinking water.
- Difficulty farming.
- Inconsistencies in weather patterns.
- "We need to take this very seriously."
- Lack of trees and forests worldwide.

### Causes of climate change:

- Lack of trees.
- Military industrial complex (F35s)
- Our lavish lifestyles. Frequent air travel by celebrities and wealthy people.
- Money and the drive for profit.
- Government is promoting climate pollution through business and money.
- Transportation & travel

- Farming & agriculture.
- Population growth.

### **Personal experiences with climate change:**

- Climate migration is happening in my home country.
- In our community there is a lack of knowledge between composting, trash and recycling.
- Many people in our community already reuse as much as possible.
- In Bhutan, there are fewer regulations, so people can get creative about reusing materials for building.
- In Bhutan, we had space to grow our own garden, but here we do not have the space.

### **Potential solutions:**

- Use more paper products.
- More farming.
- Government support for installing solar panels and heat pumps on rental buildings.
- Hand out free composting bins & offer free composting services (or support use of compost in personal gardens).
- Reduce individual car use.
- Regulate car pollution: Is there a point when a car should not be allowed to be on the road?
- Electric vehicles are only serving people with a lot of money. Lower the cost of electric vehicles. Some confusion around electric vehicles being a solution, but energy use being a cause.
- We need to focus on white people too! They are the ones who live in large homes and over-consume.
- “It is difficult for us to have an opinion, because we look to people like you to have the answers and expertise.”
- Regulations to disincentivize wasting materials.
- Better public transportation: “The public transportation is terrible. No one uses it. And people do not walk and bike when it is so cold outside. And electric vehicles won’t work because they are too expensive.”
- Highlight the importance of biking so people know it is important.
- Encourage the use of sustainable materials: “At home, everything is made out of bamboo, which is a sustainable material.”
- Make healthier, local food more affordable.
- Regulate agricultural fertilizers.

### Effective community engagement:

- When you are implementing policies, you need to inform marginalized communities and involve them in the process.
- Use AALV.



### Detailed Notes

#### When you hear the word climate change, what's the first thing that comes to mind? How is it impacting you?

- Looking at the environment in the past, the trees, nature, he sees some changes. He is fairly new in Vermont, but comparing the amount of snow we used to have, we are seeing a decreased amount of snow.
- Icebergs melting. Less snow this year than previous years.
- Connection with gas emissions.
- Decreased amount of snow. More illnesses, viruses, emerging diseases & sicknesses.
- Flooding. A lot of clients lost gardens they put a lot of effort into. It was their sense of community.
- I don't understand climate change well.
- We are getting more rain than snow.
- More rain. Less snow.
- Huge impact on our health. The air quality is worse. The water we are drinking is dirtier. Climate change has negatively impacted our health, so we have to think about how to make our lives sustainable by using our resources thoughtfully.
- Lack of trees.

- Impacted our lifestyles. If we don't look closely it can be easy to miss. But if you look into the past compared to now, you can see it clearly. More flooding. Here and in Nepal. Farmers are leaving their farmlands to do something else, which has created this climate migration in a lot of countries. So we need to ask ourselves how we are treating our earth.
- Lack of snow here in Vermont. The military is a huge contributor to climate change, using chemicals and resources which has a huge impact on the climate and environment. Our lavish lifestyle is also contributing: people who have 4 cars for one person. We need to think about our children. Our health is getting worse, even though we are living longer. Cancer is everywhere, and this is a symptom of what we are doing to the earth. We need to take this very seriously.
- I agree. Also, the gasses are impacting the environment, our drinking water, bringing us diseases. I have been in Vermont since 2012, and a lot has changed since then. I see more people getting sicker now than they were. I don't know much about climate change, but this must be contributing to our health.
- Change in weather. Nice and sunny one day, and the next day it is different. There is rain and snow– inconsistencies in the weather.
- Population growth is affecting the environment– the pollution worsens.
- Flooding, air pollution. We all need to take these matters seriously. As individuals we need to also take responsibility in ways that we can, by planting trees around your house, etc. We can all work as individuals to make our environment healthier.
- First year in Vermont. Hears that there used to be more snow. We need to have more trees, green plantations. Having more trees would be better.
- Money and the drive for profit is causing climate change. We are not doing as much as we should be doing to address this issue. We talk about small changes (using paper products), but when you look into it, there are big contributors- like airplanes flying. The government is promoting climate pollution through business and money. They need to really help regular people understand this and provide support to actually make changes.

**Question: Of these contributors to climate change, which of these feel most relevant to your life? Based on your lived experience: are these causes covering what's impacting you?**

- Airplanes, transportation
- Factories
- In our communities there is a lack of knowledge between composting, trash and recycling. People cannot afford to buy a composting bin. Many people reuse plastic bags in our community.
- Farming. Vermont is a farming state.

- F35s - military spending
- I have big problems with the fighter jets. It makes it very difficult for anyone to sleep during the day time. The sound pollution is really challenging. All these vehicles and these big fighter jets are not good for our environment. For me as an individual, I do not need those here. I don't think farming contributes to climate change a lot. And it is very important that we have farming all around us. The factories are also big contributors. I am in favor of cows! We need agricultural farmers around.
- Can we get more information on how all of these things are contributing to climate change?
- Even for people who are renting, the government could focus on installing more solar panels, renewable energy on rental buildings, environmentally friendly forms of heating and cooling the house.
- It would be nice to hand out compostable baskets to have at home. We waste a lot of food, so they could use their compost for their own gardens.

**Questions: Where do we need to focus our resources/solutions?**

- We need to try to use Car Share and reduce individual car usage. We need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.
- Is there a point at which someone cannot drive their own vehicle because it's too old/emitting too much?
- In Bhutan, there is a limit to when you cannot drive a vehicle anymore.
- Climate Action Office explained renewable forms of energy and electricity after a question about how confusing renewable heat and cooling systems are. Electricity is a problem when we use gas (fossil fuels) to produce electricity. If we move to electric cars, we use less fossil fuels. Some of our electricity comes from within the state and some comes from beyond.

**What should the government be doing? Where should we be focusing?**

- Electric Vehicles are only serving people who have a lot of money. Our communities cannot afford Electric Vehicles. They care! When you are implementing policies, you need to inform marginalized communities and involve them in the process.
- We need to focus on the white people too! Because they are the ones who live in large homes and over-consume and over-pollute. Consensus Building Institute clarified that we are not engaging this community because you are the problem. We are engaging with the most impacted communities.
- Government needs to lower the costs of electric vehicles so more people have access.

- “It’s difficult for us to have an opinion, because we look to people like you to have the answers and the expertise.”
- In Bhutan, we can use resources much more efficiently and reduce waste because there are fewer regulations around building, etc. Here there are lots of rules which incentivize waste.
- Back in Bhutan, we had plants around our homes. We used to use our own waste. We had plenty of water. Here we don’t have the space and we don’t have the same resources to live this way. So the context is totally different.
- None of these solutions make sense. Public transportation is terrible. No one uses it. People will not walk or bike because it’s cold. Maybe in the summer it would work. Electric Vehicles won’t work because they are too expensive.
- It requires a real mental shift. Americans like to live in comfort. In other places around the world, people bike in the winter, but here you aren’t going to get people to do it.
- Riding a bicycle is a cheap way to get around. You save money on gas.
- We need to highlight the importance of biking so that people know that it’s important.
- When I went home, everything is made out of bamboo. The western world needs to learn how to use sustainable materials. I didn’t see many plastic water bottles back in Nepal. Here, healthier food is way more expensive. Back at home, healthy food is not expensive. We need to provide fruits and vegetables and reduce the cost of healthy and sustainable food.
- In farming culture, the access to organic compost is limiting. It’s cheaper to buy the products that are bad for the soil and the environment. So, we don’t have this choice. The government needs to regulate farming fertilizer, but needs to make it accessible to everyone and not the more expensive option. We rally behind politicians, and then they win and they don’t do anything. So, we need actual action.
- Need to be able to grow our own food.

**What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the words “climate change”?**

- Seeing decreases in snowpack
- Thinks of icebergs melting, seeing less snow than in previous years
- Has connections with greenhouse gas emissions
- Flooding impacts, flooding gardens, impacts sense of community
- Increases in viruses seems connected to climate change
- Don’t understand climate change well
- Getting more rain than snow

- Impacting our air and water, think we need to live more sustainably and reduce our emissions of greenhouse gasses
- Lack of trees worldwide is noticeable
- Impacts in Nepal – snowmelt from Everest, causing more flooding and landslides, farmers leaving their traditional lands – climate migration
- There are large polluters (like military); our lifestyle is becoming too lavish, we need to be thinking about impacts on our children and future generations
- Been here since 2012, seeing a lot more people sick in the hospital
- Seeing increased changes in the weather, inconsistency
- Population growth is a big driver of climate change
- New to Vermont, not sure about big changes, need more trees
- How much impacts can we have doing small acts versus big actions like celebrities flying in airplanes? Government should provide additional support

### **Climate change impacts:**

- A lot of confusion about trash/recycling/compost – don't have the knowledge and resources to understand or afford composting
- Think transportation is a big contributor – and farming
- F35 sound pollution – makes it hard for anyone to sleep during the daytime
- I like cows and farmers, don't think they are big contributors (one attendee is a farmer)
- Government should focus on installing more solar power, heat pumps, both for renters and homeowners
- Should be handing out compost containers and working harder to educate people about recycling, trash, etc.

### **Solutions:**

- Have concerns about cars on the road that are polluting – questions raised about regulations to take older, polluting cars off the road. In Bhutan, after a car reaches a certain age it is no longer legally able to be on the road.
- Question about how electricity is considered a polluting source, and yet electric vehicles are considered a climate solution
- When the government is thinking about implementing policies – people cannot afford to purchase electric vehicles, information is not distributed into our communities
- Government should collaborate with companies to produce affordable electric vehicles – could have electric vehicles that are priced based on what people afford.
- For those without a lot of education and context, we rely on others for opinions about solutions.

- Use of renewable resources and natural materials can help increase resilience – if we do use natural resources to build the same way we do in Bhutan, we would not pass building and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) inspection in the US.
- There are sustainable resources that are used in Nepal that are not being used in the US. Providing low-cost access to healthy food is a key solution.
- It is difficult and expensive to access organic compost and soil – government should be providing incentives for that; it helps people get outside and be active and do something good for the community.



## Somali-Bantu Focus Group

Somali Bantu Community Association of Vermont Office, Burlington  
March 16, 2024



### Summary

#### First thing that comes to mind when hearing “climate change”:

- Use of water bottles; water bottles being thrown all around.
- Global warming – that’s how people in our community think of it.
- Drought that we experienced back in Somalia that caused a lot of suffering. When I hear about climate change, it reminds me of that suffering back from Somalia.
- More rainfall, less snow in Vermont.
- Hot temperature, dry weather.
- Very cold winter and very hot summer. Constant change in temperature.
- I don’t know much about climate change. I want to learn more.
- Difficulty raising livestock in the winter. I have chickens and it’s hard in winter.
- Not a lot of snow in winter. I can see the difference during winter months.
- I garden and it’s easier to garden if we had a good winter with lots of snow. Less snow in the winter means I have to worry about watering my garden.
- Hot temperature. We pray for more snow because I don’t like the heat.
- Not as much playing with snow outside. Kids used to get excited when it snowed.
- I have heard that there is a solar eclipse coming up and I am worried about what that means and what will happen.

- My family struggled with snow when we first moved to Vermont because we did not have a shovel and we did not know what to do with snow in our driveway. Our neighbors helped us. Then we got used to it. Now we don't get snow anymore. Something is changing.
- Constant change in weather. Weather becoming unpredictable.
- Increase in sickness in the community, such as flu, allergies, etc.
- I don't know much about it. But I am here to learn.
- Some of us feel like our water bill is getting higher.

**Potential impacts and considerations when thinking about solutions:**

- Keep rental properties in mind. The majority of people from our communities rent and do not own houses. So when considering solutions, such as heating and cooling or solar panels, keep renters in mind. It's challenging to use services aimed at homeowners when renting.
- We have big families, and we need cars larger than 5-seaters for our families. There aren't many electric car options that meet our needs. When considering electric cars, are there any solutions that meet our needs?
- Additionally, purchasing expensive cars, like electric cars, requires good credit records. As new immigrants, some of us don't have that credit. Having programs to help in that situation would be helpful.
- Many solutions are geared towards homeowners, which can help reduce emissions. However, the majority of people from our communities are renters, and we don't have much control over what we can do in our apartments. Are there programs that can help first-time homebuyers?
- When there was a flood, our community garden was flooded, and small gardeners like us did not receive any significant benefits.
- During floods, all of our vegetables went to waste. We received gift cards to stores where they sold food we don't even like. They could be used for fruits and vegetables, but a lot of what we grow are staples like corn and beans. Plus, the dollar value on the card (\$100) was less than what we pay to reserve the spot in the community garden. So it also did not cover the cost of seeds, compost, plus all our time and effort. I can fill my freezer(s) with what I grow in my garden plot; the gift card amount does not cover that. It felt like our needs did not matter. Before giving anything out, ask people what they need rather than simply giving something out that they may not even use.
- Gardening is an important activity among resettled refugee communities. Consider small garden owners when thinking about agriculture.
- The state should help people prepare for natural disasters before they happen. Rather than addressing them after they occur, it helps to learn beforehand.