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Headline: Public is more worried about climate change than a year ago

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The findings of a new and broad scope opinion study titled “The International Climate and Public Opinion Observatory” showed that the public is more worried about climate change than a year ago but believes that the fight must involve the joint efforts of the citizens and their governments.

The observatory was conducted for the second consecutive year and covered two-thirds of the world’s population featuring some of the biggest carbon dioxide (CO2) emitters.

According to Brice Teinturier of Ipsos, the third largest global market research company, the observatory is an effective tool in understanding and taking action for stakeholders involved in the fight against climate change. Brice said that it enables us to draw up a brand new world map of the way climate change is viewed. Above all, it enables us to go beyond mere observation, highlighting the gaps between the level of concern – which is high – and its translation into action – still difficult, whether these are actions on a day-to-day basis or the level of acceptability of collective measures, he continued.

Covid-19 did not eclipse environment concerns

The coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) crisis has not eclipsed concerns about the environment and has even strengthened it in the global south.

At present, more than half of the public places the coronavirus at the top of their list of concerns at 59 percent, followed by the cost of living (47 percent), unemployment (45 percent), poverty and inequality (45 percent), and the healthcare system (43 percent). The environment ranks sixth among the concerns at 39 percent. The countries most concerned about the environment are a large number of European states and large countries like Canada, Australia, India and China.

Sixty-two percent believe the Covid-19 pandemic is linked to the negative impact of human activity on nature and the environment.

Seventy-three percent of Asians – compared to the average 60 percent globally – believe the Covid-19 pandemic epidemic has accelerated environmental awareness.

With the present-day health crisis coupled with a worsening economic situation, half of the public (51 percent) believe that priority should be the environment even if it will slow down economic growth and causes job losses.

Among the problems linked to the environment, climate change and its most visible consequence, extreme climate events, feature among the most worrying topics at 45 percent and 41 percent, respectively. These are just behind waste accumulation, packaging, plastic (48 percent) and air pollution (42 percent).

Eighty-four percent of Asians – higher than the global average of 78 percent – have already noticed the effects of climate change, particularly in the global south. The most feared risk by far is an

increase in extreme climate events (61 percent), followed by air pollution (44 percent) and desertification (43 percent).

Seventy percent of the public claim to be more worried about climate change than they were a year ago.

Confusion among minority

There is confusion about the causes of climate change and climate skepticism among a minority.

Greenhouse gases (GHG) are recognized by 6 out of 10 people (62 percent) as a cause of climate change – a score that expresses an incomplete understanding of the warming mechanism. The remaining four people unable to attribute climate change to GHG show that climate change is still a phenomenon that people are struggling to understand.

Thirty-two percent believe that climate change exists but is not caused by human activities. Climate skepticism remains high in the United States, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Australia and United Arab Emirates.

With only half of the public (50 percent) think that climate change has only negative consequences, it is another phenomenon that can decrease global mobilization in favor of the climate.

Joint efforts needed

The fight against climate change must involve joint efforts of citizens and their government.

Half of the public (54 percent) believe that fighting climate change will involve a lifestyle change, while 29 percent think that solution will also come from technological advancement and innovations.

- Seventy-two percent of the public have been mobilized and have taken action to fight climate change despite the health crisis. These actions include signing a petition, boycotted a product or brand due to its impact on climate change, voted for a political party because it is particularly committed to fighting climate change, or taken part in a protest.

- Sixty-five percent have changed their behavior to help fight climate change. These top five behaviors include sorting waste, prioritizing seasonal fruits and vegetables, limiting heating or air conditioning, purchase products with the least possible packaging and taking public transportation.

- Sixty-nine percent think that their government should take action to fight climate change. However, only half (50 percent) believe that their government is acting to fight climate change. The data shows the big gap between the expectation of their governments and their perceived involvement.

- Most acceptable measures that governments can do to reduce GHG include developing renewable energies, replacing coal/fuel-oil-fired plants with gas-fired plants, replacing coal/fuel-oil-fired plants with nuclear plants, introducing a tax on the purchase of a polluting car, obliging owners to insulate their homes, making products manufactured abroad more expensive, making CO2 producing energies more expensive, increasing the tax on household waste, and limiting access to city centers to electric or hybrid cars only.

- Seven out of 10 (70 percent) believe that information plays a crucial role in choosing the right action to fight climate change.

An official from Environment Defense Fund (EDF) said that citizen mobilization, an offshoot to political action, is a real driver in the fight against climate change making it natural and useful to measure its scope and potential, especially within the context of the Covid-19 crisis. We want to push forward the debate and action on one of the most crucial international stakes of the 21st century.

The study is a joint project of Ipsos, and the EDF Group, an integrated electricity company active in the generation, transmission, distribution, energy supply, and trading. You can access the full report at <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2020-12/climate-and-public-opinions-international-observatory-report-edf-ipsos.pdf>

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