Our climate news recap and update

One of this year's most trending topics has been climate change. Understandably: climate change is speeding up rather than slowing down. The problem is so serious that even the terms used to describe it needs to be updated. Several scientists and organizations, state that it's more appropriate to talk about 'climate emergency', 'climate crisis' or 'climate breakdown' rather than climate change. Also 'global heating' is more accurate than 'global warming'. Scientists say that we have 12 years left to reverse the situation before it goes out of control. We wrote about the Paris Agreement, an international treaty aimed at keeping rising temperatures in check[1], but, unfortunately, it has been largely ineffective. Few countries are doing what they promised to do and this past November the United States requested to withdraw from the Agreement. If governments are moving slowly though, many private enterprises and movements are not. Let's recap and update some of these inspiring stories.

The Ocean Cleanup Project

Last year we wrote about the Ocean Cleanup Project, founded by the young inventor Boyan Slat[2], that launched a device for capturing the plastic floating in the Pacific Ocean's Great Garbage Patch. The testing phase ended this November. After some initial difficulties, the device proved capable of capturing and collecting floating plastic debris. The project is successfully moving ahead. In parallel, the Ocean Cleanup just launched a new device called the River Interceptor. This invention is a solar powered floating machine that stops plastic from flowing downriver into the seas. This is Boyan Slat's next ambitious aim: to tackle the 1,000 most polluting rivers (responsible for about 80% of ocean plastic pollution) before the end of 2025. Boyan Slat will not be alone: recently two Italian friends (one based in London and one in New York) developed a similar system called Blue Barriers. It seems like they will be competing with Slat in cleaning the world's dirtiest rivers.

Strike for climate

This year no climate action has been more in the news than the Fridays for Future strikes inspired by Greta Thunberg. We spoke about them in February[3], and since then the movement has increased in size. In September, Greta spoke at the UN Climate Action Summit where she scolded world leaders for their inaction. "How dare you!" she said. "You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words!" Her courage energized many people to demand change from their own governments. This year also saw the rise of a similar movement, Extinction Rebellion, founded in the UK in 2018. Extinction Rebellion promotes peaceful acts of civil disobedience to demand political solutions against climate breakdown. Many governments are now taking steps because of the pressure of these popular movements. Italy, for example, is the first country to introduce climate change studies in schools. Also, Greta Thunberg was one of this year's Nobel Peace Prize candidates, an acknowledgment that fighting for the environment contributes to world peace. Finally, the Nobel went to Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed for his effort to achieve peace between his country and Eritrea.

Earth Day

Curiously, though, Prime Minister Ahmed is also famous for his Green Legacy Initiative, a reforestation campaign. As part of the Initiative, this July Ethiopians planted more than 350 million tree seedlings in a single day, a world record. Many scientists believe that reforestation is one of the most effective ways to fight climate breakdown. Planting trees is also one of the Earth Day initiatives that we wrote about two years ago[4]. Next year Earth Day will celebrate its 50th anniversary. By then it aims to have completed its Canopy Project: the planting of 7.8 billion trees – one tree for every person on Earth. News like these

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prove that 2019 saw a significant growth in climate activism. Hopefully, this is a sign that we are at the beginning of a worldwide shift, where people are taking charge of their environment and their future.

COMPREHENSION

1) Read the article and complete the sentences with the right alternative.

1. In 2019 climate change

a. slowed down.
b. was a minor trending topic.
c. caused some fifty climate disasters.

2. The Paris Agreement is ineffective because

a. not all countries are respecting it.
b. people and private enterprises are not doing their part.
c. climate change cannot be stopped.

3. The United States wants to

a. join the Paris Agreement.
b. leave the Paris Agreement.
c. rewrite to Paris Agreement.

4. The Ocean Cleanup Project collects plastic found

a. on the surface of the Ocean.
b. at the bottom of the Ocean.
c. below the surface of the Ocean.

5. Boyan Slat launched the River Interceptor

a. last year.
b. as a substitute to his Ocean Cleanup Project.
c. to stop more plastic from flowing into the Oceans.

6. Greta Thunberg spoke at the UN Climate Action Summit

a. complimenting the good work done so far.
b. criticizing the participants.
c. thanking the participants for their impact on her life

7. Extinction Rebellion

a. was created by Greta Thunberg.
b. has similar aims to those of Fridays for Future.
c. is contributing to world peace.

8. The Nobel Peace Prize

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a. considered climate activism as an activity that favours peace.
b. was won by Greta Thunberg.
c. was won by Prime Minister Ahmed for his Green Legacy Initiative.

9. The Green Legacy Initiative and the Canopy Project

a. are promoted by Prime Minister Ahmed.
b. want to plant one tree for every person on Earth.
c. have similar objectives.

10. 2019 has been

a. a good year for climate activism.
b. a bad year for climate activism.
c. the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.

VOCABULARY

2) Complete the sentences with the following words. Put the verbs and nouns in the right form, if necessary.

recap * bushfire * acknowledgement * canopy * to withdraw * capable * to tackle * legacy * seedling * shift

1. A _____ is an uncontrolled fire in a forest.

2. The leafy branches of trees form a natural _____.

3. A young plant is called a _____.

4. I like _____ difficult problems because I like a good challenge.

5. The _____ of people like Gandhi and Martin Luther King is the peaceful methods behind their social activism.

6. _____ is short for 'recapitulation'.

7. The opposite of to advance is _____.

8. He is a _____ instructor: he is very good at teaching what he knows.

9. Until recent years, there was little public _____ of the seriousness of climate change.

10. New 'green' laws are a sign of a positive political _____ in the direction of protecting the environment.

GRAMMAR – Past Simple and Present Perfect

3) Complete the sentences using the verbs provided. In one instance use the past simple, in the other the present perfect.

1. The UN _____ (to produce) the Paris Agreement in 2015. So far, 195 countries _____ (to sign) it.

2. In 2015, the United States _____ (to support) the Paris Agreement. Since then, the US _____ (to change) its position.

3. Boyan Slat _____ (to launch) The Ocean Cleanup Project at the end of 2018. The Project _____ (to face) many difficulties.

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4. Greta _____ (to hold) her first strikes in front of the Swedish parliament. Since then she _____ (to join) strikes in many places around the world.

5. Jennifer _____ (to meet) Greta Thunberg at a public event last year, whereas Hellen, _____ never _____ (to meet) her.

6. _____ you ever _____ (to participated) in a Fridays for Future strike? I _____ (to participate) in one last February.

7. Abiy Ahmed Ali _____ (to become) Prime Minister in April 2018. He _____ (to be) in office for almost two years.

8. The Nobel Committee _____ (to award) the Peace Prize to Abiy Ahmed Ali. The Committee _____ (to award) the Prize annually since 1901.

9. Earth Day _____ (to found, passive form) in 1970. Over the past 49 years, it _____ (to promoted) many interesting initiatives.

10. Human activity _____ (to destroy) much of Ethiopia's forests. Yet, last year Ethiopians _____ (to plant) millions of trees in a great reforestation effort.

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