

# Op-Ed: Real environmental crisis is not climate change



Garbage bags sit in a bin along a city street awaiting collection. Photo: wirestock / Freepik

**By Vijay Jayaraj**  
01.28.2026

What if the worst environmental problem wasn't the one everyone is talking about? While Western elites sip fair-trade coffee and obsess over carbon footprints, the developing world drowns in a toxic soup of its own making – a crisis entirely distinct from the phantom menace of climate change.

The real environmental emergency isn't the modest warming that has helped humans thrive. It's land degradation, poisoned water and other forms of pollution that are burying the Global South alive.

Yes, we've been fighting the wrong environmental war.

The foaming **black sludge in the rivers**, the mountains of untreated garbage festering in streets and the invisible superbugs breeding in waterways represent a true crisis that extends across continents.

In Ghana, only one-quarter of the daily trash is gathered for disposal. Uncollected waste breeds insect vectors that transmit malaria and dengue fever. In South African townships, nearly three-quarters of the residents report diseases directly attributable to improper waste disposal. Cholera dominates the list.

Southeast Asia now ranks among the largest contributors to **marine plastic pollution**. Mismanaged waste flows through rivers into coastal waters, damaging fisheries and tourism. Plastic pollution stems from governance failure, not atmospheric chemistry. The solutions are mundane but unapplied: collection trucks, engineered landfills and modern incineration with air-emission controls.

Yet here emerges the peculiar tragedy of our moment: While **our children drink poisoned water**, our governments have burned billions of dollars at the altar of net zero. They divert precious financial resources, energy and administrative bandwidth toward fighting a ghost. They chase the approval of the United Nations and the World Economic Forum, pledging allegiance to a “war on carbon.” They announce billion-dollar “renewable” targets for solar and wind installations.

In countries where capital is scarce and competing priorities numerous, this reallocation is consequential. Billions allocated to renewable energy transition in poor countries translates into delayed investment in wastewater treatment, sanitation systems and waste management technology.

Environmental ministers in developing nations have been socialized into a hierarchy of concern that places the atmospheric concentration of a botanical nutrient – carbon dioxide – above demonstrable health catastrophes unfolding in their jurisdictions.

The justification for this abysmal stance is rooted in the claim that carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is causing a climate crisis. The premise that this trace gas drives dangerous global warming is unscientific. The “settled science” is anything but.

Researchers like William Happer and W. A. van Wijngaarden have **shown** that the greenhouse effect of each CO<sub>2</sub> molecule diminishes as its atmospheric concentration increases. Adding more CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere is like painting a black window with another coat of black paint; it makes little difference to the light passing through.

Furthermore, new **data** indicate that the rate of global warming between 1899 and 1940 – before the surge in industrial emissions – may have been higher than the warming rate from 1983 to 2024. If human emissions are the primary control knob of the climate, how can the greater warming of the early 20th century be explained? It cannot.

Every time a city in India or Bangladesh floods, the media shrieks “climate change!”, blaming the rain on the burning of fossil fuels. This is a lie. The rain is real, but the cause of the disaster is fabricated. Analysis of Indian flood deaths show repeatedly that **urban planning failures** are the culprit.

Recent assessment by the U.S. Department of Energy acknowledges that excessively aggressive mitigation policies targeting CO<sub>2</sub> are likely more detrimental than beneficial to economic welfare. The scientific case for treating CO<sub>2</sub> as a planetary menace has weakened as observational data and physical modeling have matured.

And the irony is that the fossil fuels proposed for abandonment are needed to solve the real problems: High-temperature incinerators, recycling plants and water treatment facilities require massive amounts of reliable, affordable baseload power. Solar and wind cannot provide this.

Robust infrastructure that can withstand floods and storms requires steel and concrete, which is produced by using coal and natural gas. To improve the quality of indoor air, households must transition away from burning dung and wood to **clean-burning liquefied petroleum gas**.

The climate scare is a luxury adventure for the rich. For most, the fight is for clean water, breathable air and the dignity of a life free from filth. The abstract, **unscientific**, and profitable carbon targets tailor-made for multi-billion-dollar corporations is not going to save the Global South from the suffocating effect of real pollution.

The longer developing nations remain entranced by climate virtue signaling, the longer they defer the genuine environmental remediation their populations deserve.

This commentary was first published by [American Greatness](#) on January 8, 2026.

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