

# Climate change concerns amongst South Africans remain high

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77% of South Africans state that they are concerned about Climate Change compared to a global average of 69%.

Climate change. Global warming. Greenhouse effect. Whatever the terms used, over the past few years the world has become used to hearing about it on a regular basis. Environmentally conscious consumers - no longer the small niche market it once was - are using their spending power to support earth-friendly products, whilst companies and governments around the globe have received the message loud and clear.

To understand more about this hot issue, global market research firm Synovate examined people's attitudes towards climate change and the issues surrounding it in a recent global research study. The study, conducted with over 13,000 people in 18 countries, also addressed the responsibilities and roles of media in combating this global concern. This is the third global climate change research study that Synovate has conducted since 2007.

## Climate concerns?

The study reveals that **the world's population remains as concerned as ever** about the effects of climate change. Across all countries surveyed in the three rounds of research conducted by Synovate, 30% of people in 2010 and 2008 said they were 'very concerned' about climate change, versus 29% in 2007. 48% of South Africans stated that they were "very concerned" and 29% stated they were "somewhat concerned."

Interestingly, **there was an increase in the percentage of people who aren't concerned about climate change at all because they believe it's just part of a natural cycle of events**. Nine percent of those surveyed this year compared to 4% in 2008 are not worried, no doubt at least partially influenced by the several groups who have questioned the validity of the concerns around climate change over the past year. This figure is at 9% in South Africa.

Steve Garton, global head of media research at Synovate, said: "The issue of climate change has continued its rough ride since our last climate change survey in 2008. Global conferences that have been organised to tackle the challenges have struggled to reach a meaningful consensus whilst the underlying science has been questioned by some. At the very least, the most important beliefs of the impacts relating to climate change have not been made simple and clear enough to people around the world."

In the latest survey, countries with the highest number of people reporting they are 'very concerned' about climate change include Colombia (69%), Ecuador (59%), and China (58%, which is more than double the 26% of Chinese who were very concerned in 2007).

## Corporate social responsibility

The vast **majority of those surveyed (88%) feel that companies have a responsibility to help reduce climate change**. This was highest in China (98%) and France (94%).

In response to how they should do this, the top answer was 'save energy and reduce waste' (70%) followed by 'ensure materials are green and ethically sourced' (58%).

Garton said: "Companies around the world have been told by consumers (and their wallets) over the past few years to examine how they can become more efficient whilst also ensuring the goods they produce are healthy for the individual and

the planet."

Eighty-three percent of South Africans believe that companies have a responsibility to ensure they help to reduce climate change effects and 74% believe that the way to do this is by investing in green technology.

Richard Rice, Group Sales and Marketing Director, states that "In South Africa, we are now seeing some action from government and businesses in South Africa to address the issue of climate change. There have been recent reports of green legislation entering the business economy and experts are expecting government to implement a carbon tax which is feared to have a detrimental effect on South African business. However, South African businesses are aware of the urgent need to address the climate change policies and argue for new thinking to fundamentally transform the economy into a green one."

## Where's the blame?

Twenty-eight percent of people globally believe that the main factors causing climate change are those caused by human (waste, population increases, electricity, etc). This figure is fairly consistent with the 27% who said the same in 2008. In South Africa, the majority believe the main factor in climate change is industrialisation (25%), while 18% maintain that the blame lies in human causes and 21% place the blame on pollution.

The belief that **deforestation** is the main factor causing climate change has tripled from 5% in Synovate's first climate change survey in 2007, to 15% in 2010. This rose as high as 41% in Kenya. George Waititu, head of Synovate Kenya, said: "Between 2007 and 2009 Kenya went through the worst drought in a decade. At the same time, the country experienced the worst political crisis in half a century, notwithstanding the global economic downturn. The livelihoods of many Kenyans are still based on agriculture, which relies on climate conditions, global economic stability and political solidity. The increase is due to the fact that the adverse effects of the drought were realised in 2010, while 2008 was fairly manageable. In the search for solutions, various stakeholders across the country and beyond have pointed to deforestation as the main cause of climate change, especially around Mau forest, the largest water catchment in the country. The government has embarked on a campaign to relocate those who live around the area, effectively re-foresting the Mau."

## Blame it on the cars?

In 2010, as with all the previous studies, only 1% of people blame airplanes for climate ills and just 3% blame automobiles. While **the blame on cars** was as high as 8% among Russians in the latest survey, the overall average dropped - from 7% of people in 2007 and 6% in 2008 that believed cars were mostly at fault.

The environmental mantra on **driving smaller and more fuel efficient cars** has clearly spread throughout the world. More than one in five (22%) people globally say they have bought or plan to buy a smaller car, rising as high as 52% in China while 14% globally say they bought or plan to buy an electric or hybrid car (highest in China at 52%, followed by Brazil at 24%).

In South Africa, 5% of those interviewed believe that cars are responsible for the detrimental effects on the climate and to combat the effects of the carbon emissions from cars, 47% of South Africans have bought or plan to buy a smaller car. Sixteen percent of those interviewed would go a step further and plan to buy an electric car.

"While the efforts being made by automotive manufacturers to produce better fuel saving and alternative fuel power trains is being received very positively by consumers across the world, there is also a feeling that more can still be done," said Tim Englehart, senior vice president of Motoresearch, Synovate's automotive research division.

## Climate change dangers

Almost one third of respondents (31%) globally cited the **biggest danger of climate change to be erratic/extreme weather conditions**. This was highest in China at 62%, followed by France, Germany and Japan (48% each) with 30% of

South Africans agreeing with this sentiment. Fifteen percent of South Africans believe that poor health and disease is the biggest threat posed by the effects of climate change.

The next most important dangers were **desertification**, at 12%, and **drought** at 6%, with 28% of Kenyans selecting desertification, and 34% of Colombians selecting drought.

## Personal responsibility

Most of the people surveyed indicated that they've personally done something to help reduce the impact of climate change. The most popular activity? **Saving electricity**, with 76% of people globally saying they did this. This was highest in South Africa (95%) and China (93%).

The next most common activity was reducing water consumption, with 68% of people globally doing this. This was highest in China at 96%, followed by Colombia (90%), Australia (88%) and Brazil (87%).

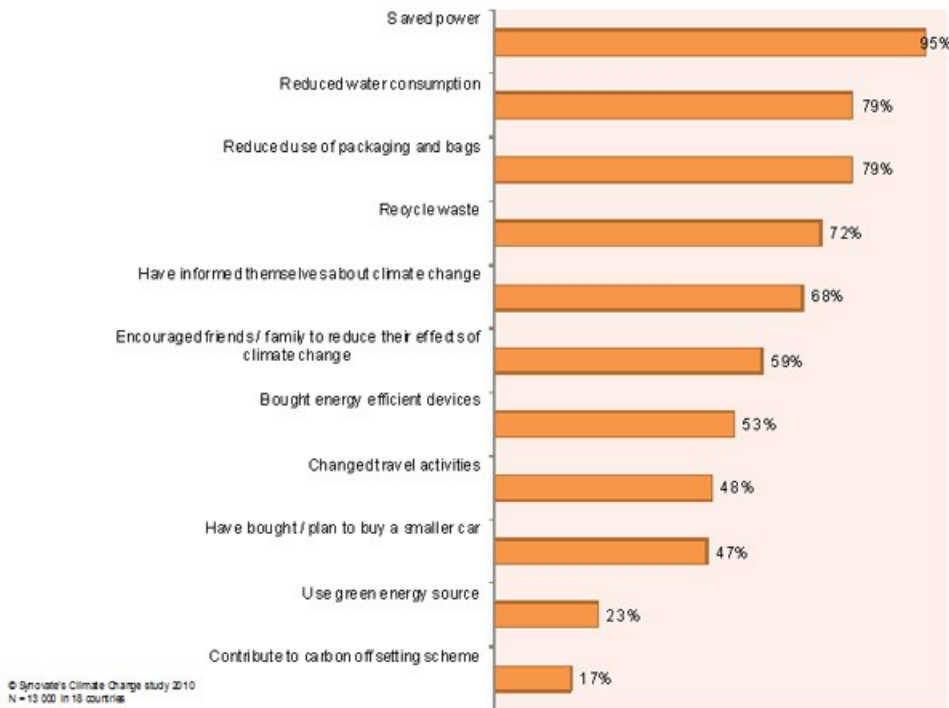
Recycling waste and reducing the use of packaging and bags both came in third at 67%. Reducing packaging / bags was highest in Hong Kong at 94%, followed by China at 93%, where government measures to reduce use have had immediate effects.

Other ways people have sought to reduce the impact of climate change:

- 57% of people globally bought energy efficient devices whilst Australia stood at 79% - driven by government measures to eliminate wasteful incandescent light bulbs.
- About one third globally (33%) changed their travel activities; this was highest in China (54%), Hong Kong (53%) and France (52%).
- Almost half (47%) took public transport more frequently, again highest in China (89%) and Hong Kong (86%).
- One in five (21%) used an alternative energy source (solar, wind, etc.), with Colombia (36%) rating amongst the highest on alternative energy.
- Only 15% of people globally contributed to a carbon offsetting scheme, indicating how much progress still needs to be made in this area.

When asked about the best way to tackle the effects of climate change, 46% of people globally said the '**changed behaviour of ordinary citizens**' is the way to go.

## What South Africans are doing to reduce the effects of climate change



## Shopping green

People across the globe seem more than willing to "put their money where their mouth is" when it comes to doing their part to reduce the effects of climate change. When asked if they'd spend more for environmentally friendly products, **almost half the people surveyed said they'd be willing to pay more**. Twenty-seven percent say they're willing to spend up to 9% more whilst 22% are willing to spend from 10-19% more for products that are eco-conscious.

Those willing to pay up to 9% more is as high as 34% in South Africa while 19% say they will spend between 10 - 19% more.

## Media matters

The media, whose job it is to report what's happening in the world, has been very much a part of shaping public perceptions of global issues such as climate change. When respondents were asked **what role media should play in the issue of climate change**, 84% said it should be 'educating and informing the public'. People rated TV as the best media source for climate change information, followed closely by websites.

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