

Absence of Evidence is not evidence of absence

Gary Clyne | Contributor

NATIONAL or right-wing populists have disrupted the climate change fight, recommended by science, for cultural and economic gain. They threaten democratic values and customs around the world in the name of the 'people'. If not populist, you are bad, not right of center, not a part of the 'people' and therefore, outside of national societal protection and its patronage framework. You can identify a populist by his or her language. Core populism features anti-elitism messaging and frequently uses people-centric language, with a strong use of collective pronouns of 'our' and 'we'.

An example of an extreme populist is President Bolsonaro of Brazil. He is waging war on the environment and science in the name of mining, energy production and agribusiness interests. The Amazon provides the earth with 20% of its oxygen and the entire Amazon stores nearly 100 billion metric tons of carbon—about a decade's worth of global emissions. But Bolsonaro is 'fuelling' an anti-climate agenda, such that the Amazon is being transformed into a degraded savanna-like ecosystem, threatening its ability to act as a carbon sink in the short and long term, exacerbating the climate crisis. This Amazon forest dieback or savannization, as it is sometimes called, is one of the biggest threats to the planet and humankind.

As greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere continue to escalate, annual global mortality rates will increase. Studies show that by the end of this century, tens of millions of people will die each year worldwide due to climate change. Researchers say the number could potentially match the global death rate for all infectious diseases combined. So how does a populist respond to climate change as a cause of preventable death? Absence of evidence. Below are my top six of the most counterfactual populist rhetorical themes:

- 1) If climate change is making extreme weather events worse, does it matter? Improved warning systems, evacuation plans, and resilience will reduce deaths, develop economies, and create resilient societies.
- 2) Wealthier nations are more resilient and capable of adaptation. The goal should be to reduce emissions over the next



century and keep temperatures as low as possible without undermining economic development or the status quo. Poor nations can adapt to life below sea level or adapt to rising sea level. Rising seas are not an obstacle to economic growth or prosperity. If it were, the Netherlands would be poor, not rich.

- 3) Habitat loss and climate change are not linked. The relationship between invasive and native species of plants and birds on islands are simply evidence of the failure of a species-area relationship.
- 4) Biodiversity on land masses like islands does not have anything to do with global extinction rates. High-tech industrial farming is a solution to habitat loss and carbon emissions. Highly intensive industrial meat farming will produce less carbon emissions than organic farming techniques and use less land.
- 5) Because our facts sound like 'climate denialism' to many people, it just demonstrates the power of 'climate alarmism'.
- 6) Emission reduction goals can be achieved by mid-century but only if we remove the obstacles to cheap, reliable, and clean nuclear energy.

Despite the populist nonsense unpacked above, oil majors and other multinationals have started to adopt climate best practices. Equinor, Shell, ExxonMobil, Total, Chevron and OMV are among the leaders in the sustainability theme in the oil and gas industry. The World Bank-managed Global Gas Flaring Reduction Partnership (GGFR), which is composed of governments, the aforementioned oil companies, and international institutions, are working to end routine gas flaring at oil and gas production sites around the world. GGFR, in partnership with the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the



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Colorado School of Mines, has developed global gas flaring estimates based upon observations from a satellite launched in 2012. The advanced sensors of this satellite detect the heat emitted by gas flares as infrared emissions at global upstream oil and gas facilities.

The GGFR, of which I am an observer (no self-promotion intended), is committed to working with governments and industry to end flaring and methane venting. GGFR is working in many of the highest gas flaring countries in the world, helping them develop policies, regulations, and practices to end routine flaring. It also leverages commitments from governments and companies to end routine flaring through the Zero Routine Flaring by 2030 initiative, which provides grants and bridge capital for Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) projects at scale. Now over 80 governments and companies, accounting for over half of the world's routine flaring, have pledged to end this 160-year-old practice.

Some brilliant minds at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, and a South American scientist and I (again no self-promotion intended) are developing an advanced sensor of our own, funded by a U.S. Department of Energy grant. This sensor, when placed in a geological formation or crude oil reservoir, will talk to proprietary monitor, report and verification (MRV) software and confirm

that fugitive emission captured, compressed, transported and sequestered in geological formations or oil reservoirs are there to stay. This confirmation is a key metric for support of CCUS tax and carbon credit awards in rich countries around the world. The PNM 2020 Manifesto provides for tax credits to encourage investment in CCUS and enhanced oil recovery. CCUS, therefore, is the link needed to bring capital and equity to the country's projects.

Climate change mitigation is a global collective challenge, demanding coordinated action among many different private sector stakeholders, as well as developed and developing nations. For developed nations, the benefits of climate mitigation are uncertain and unevenly distributed, and accrue primarily to future generations. For developing small island states, climate action is an opportunity for economic growth and job creation. CCUS is the key. The December 2015 Paris Agreement gives countries the green light to voluntarily buy and sell tax credits and carbon credits across borders, suggesting a cooperative approach that will deepen and expand CCUS market links.

The actual buyer and seller of tax and carbon credits will probably be private oil and gas companies operating in the two countries, making use of linking rules being developed under the Paris Agreement. An example of a link that currently exists is where two

emissions trading systems are joined, such as between Switzerland and the European Union (EU). Private entities operating within these systems can trade EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) allowances and Swiss ETS allowances, use the allowances for compliance in their respective country and know that there is some cascade upwards to the EU and Swiss accounting framework. The approach is quite simple and transparent, and effectively a non-issue for the participants in the transactions.

Transactions under any rules, whether in the U.S., Germany or Trinidad and Tobago, will be subject to the rules and require evidence of carbon emission reductions. This means MRV in some form or another is necessary. Our sensor under development and the MRV that will account for the carbon dioxide (CO₂) reductions will require output that proves emission reduction accomplishment by evidence of absence. This is the way science works. Populist dogma will not and cannot survive such tests, and falls apart under close introspection. Absence of evidence is not the same thing as evidence of absence.

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Green Fund stands at \$6.9 billion but disbursements have been limited

Staff Writer | Energy Chamber

ACCORDING to the Auditor General's Report on Public Accounts for the period October 1st 2018- September 31st 2019, the Green Fund holds TT\$6,946,131,930.

The Green Fund was established under the Finance Act of 2000 as a levy that is payable by all companies and partnerships doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. The levy is 0.3% on gross income and is payable quarterly, and is neither a deduction in computing chargeable income nor a credit against corporation tax due.

The purpose of the fund is to financially assist organisations and community groups that are engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation, environmental education and public awareness of environmental issues and conservation of the environment.

The fund has been growing significantly since inception and at the end of the 2019 fiscal year, the fund has a balance of TT\$6.9 billion. Unfortunately, the fund has been vastly underutilised and the

disbursements have been limited.

To date, according to the Green Fund via their social media page, the fund has contributed to just 27 environmental projects in the value of \$392 million over its life. In 2019, only \$13.6 million was disbursed, which is only approximately 6% of the accumulation in the fund.

The most that was disbursed in any single year was in 2015 when \$122 million was released.

In the recently concluded Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Conference hosted by the Energy Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago, there were several calls to put the fund to better use and broaden the scope of projects that can access assistance through the fund. It was highlighted that the scope of the fund was very narrow and does not overtly address climate change.

Professor John Agard, while speaking at the event, suggested that some of the money in the fund be used for climate action or to address climate change.

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Green Fund Accumulation and Disbursement

