Climate Action
Against Disinformation

The New Playbook

Undermining climate action:
10 emerging fossil narratives that threaten progress ahead of COP28

Introduction

At COP27, for the first time in the history of COPs, delegates engaged in official discussions about phasing out fossil fuels at the negotiations table. The development was prompted by the latest IPCC reports, which unequivocally emphasised the need to urgently and substantially reduce overall fossil fuel use in order to limit global warming. Although nations failed to agree to reduce overall fossil fuel use, there has been increasing international pressure underscoring the urgent need for a transition towards cleaner alternatives, such as renewables.

In his speech on the priorities for the UN General Assembly in 2023, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said to fossil fuel producers that "your core product is our core problem", and that what is needed is a "renewables revolution, not a self-destructive fossil fuel resurgence". The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) itself has acknowledged the role the fossil fuel industry has played in disseminating climate disinformation, including engaging in greenwashing tactics to prevent critical climate action. Since discussions on phasing out fossil fuels at COP27, vested interests in the fossil fuel industry have been polluting the public debate on transitioning away from fossil fuels. These individuals or groups, driven by their own interests, employ deceptive narratives, distort conversations, mislead the public, and hinder meaningful climate commitments.

Governments, as well as stakeholders in the media space, have a clear responsibility to safeguard climate change information and to take decisive measures against the spread of disinformation. In line with this mission, Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD), a coalition comprising over 50 organisations, actively monitors the media landscape and assesses communication attacks that undermine climate action. The coalition has compiled this document, **highlighting emerging deceptive claims and efforts to contaminate discussions on the phase out of fossil fuels**. It provides accurate

scientific information to equip the public, UNFCCC delegates, and journalists with vital insights for critical deliberations at the upcoming COP28 climate summit in November 2023, hosted by the UAE.

All of these narratives are misleading claims that could delay vital climate action according to CAAD's universal definition of climate disinformation, which examines content that:

- **Undermines the existence** or impacts of climate change, the unequivocal human influence on climate change, and the need for corresponding urgent action according to the IPCC scientific consensus and in line with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement;
- **Misrepresents scientific data**, including by omission or cherry-picking, in order to erode trust in climate science, climate-focused institutions, experts, and solutions; or
- **Falsely publicises efforts** as supportive of climate goals that in fact contribute to climate warming or contravene the scientific consensus on mitigation or adaptation.

Emerging False Pro-Fossil Fuel Claims

FACT 1: Fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – are by far the largest contributor to global climate change

MISLEADING CLAIM 1: *"The problem is emissions, not fossil fuels"*

DEBUNKED:

- It is an undeniable fact, clearly stated in the latest IPCC report, that the combustion of oil, gas, and coal overwhelmingly contributes to the climate crisis. This fact has already been acknowledged by governments, including COP28 host UAE, during the IPCC talks in March 2023. All IPCC pathways that limit warming to 2C require significant reductions in the use of all fossil fuels.

- According to The Global Carbon Project, approximately 36.6 billion tonnes of the 40.5 billion global CO2 emissions in 2022 came from fossil fuel use. Extensive research on "Carbon Majors" reveals that "nearly two-thirds of carbon dioxide emitted since the 1750s can be traced to … 90 fossil fuel [coal, oil and gas] and cement producers, most of which still operate today."

- The cause of the crisis is clear, as is the solution: we need to end the expansion of the fossil fuel sector and begin a rapid, planned shift from dirty coal, oil and gas to wind, solar and other renewables.

FACT 2: Oil and gas industry operations make up a substantial portion of human-made greenhouse gas emissions

MISLEADING CLAIM 2: "*The oil and gas industry is used as a scapegoat for wider, global inaction*"

DEBUNKED:

- The major oil producers have used the above-mentioned narrative to divert attention from the core problem and the emissions from the fossil fuel industry. It is a typical example of "whataboutism", as defined in the discourses of climate delay.

- Emissions from oil and gas operations alone account for a significant proportion of the overall global emissions. The Global Carbon Project estimates that 36.6 billion tonnes of the 40.5 billion global CO2 emissions in 2022 came from fossil fuel use.

- The extraction, processing, and transportation of oil and gas contribute to nearly 15% of global energy-related emissions. To put this into perspective, these emissions exceed the total emissions produced by the United States and are twice as high as the combined emissions of the entire European Union.

FACT 3: The oil & gas industry has to tackle Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions in order to stay below 1.5C of heating

MISLEADING CLAIM 3: *"If the oil & gas sector tackles Scope 1, 2 emissions + methane that's a major climate win"*

DEBUNKED:

- Over the years, many oil and gas companies have claimed they should not be responsible for Scope 3 emissions, arguing that customers should instead bear the responsibility, essentially saying "We only make the stuff, we're not the ones who burn it!" . This is another misleading attempt to divert attention away from the holistic role oil and gas companies play in the current climate crisis.

- According to Wood Mackenzie, Scope 3 emissions contribute to 80-95% of the total carbon emissions attributed to oil and gas companies.

- Without a rapid and immediate reduction in the burning of fossil fuels (including scope 3 emissions), the attainment of the goals outlined in the Paris Agreement will remain unattainable.

- To limit warming to 1.5C, a substantial reduction in oil and gas production is imperative. According to research, oil and gas production must decline globally by 3% each year until 2050, and 60% of oil and fossil methane gas must remain unextracted.

- Currently, major oil producers are planning a significant increase in emissions through expanded oil production, which cannot be offset merely by making incremental improvements in the production process's cleanliness.

FACT 4: Urgent action is required to halt new oil and gas production and manage a gradual decline in existing fields

MISLEADING CLAIM 4: "*We can't stop production now. It's impossible.*"

DEBUNKED:

- No-one is asking for an immediate end to all production. Scientists and energy experts at the IEA are emphasising the urgent need to put an end to new production and implement a carefully managed decline of existing fields.

- Their message is clear: in order to avert a climate catastrophe and prevent surpassing the 1.5C limit established by the Paris Agreement, decisive action must be taken to cease the expansion of oil and gas production and actively reduce operations.

- In fact, investments earmarked for new oil and gas ventures to 2030 could fully fund the expansion of wind and solar energy required to restrict global warming to 1.5C.

FACT 5: The cost-of-living crisis has been, in part, driven by an over reliance on fossil fuels

MISLEADING CLAIM 5: *"Cutting fossil fuel production will hit consumers hard and make the cost of living crisis worse"*

- The IMF is clear: Rising fossil fuel prices are impacting billions of consumers worldwide, detrimentally affecting the cost of living. This crisis is a direct consequence of our dependence on costly fossil fuels, and the most effective solution lies in swiftly reducing this reliance and transitioning towards affordable, secure and homegrown green energy.

- Fossil fuel supply disruptions have underlined the energy security benefits of domestically generated renewable electricity, leading many countries to strengthen policies supporting renewables.

- Meanwhile, the surge in global fossil prices has bolstered the competitiveness of solar PV and wind generation when compared to fossil fuels. This positive shift opens up new opportunities for widespread adoption of renewable energy as a cost-effective alternative.

FACT 6: For an equitable transition, wealthy nations should stop all new fossil fuel production and support poorer nations develop resilient and distributed renewable energy systems.

MISLEADING CLAIM 6: *"Oil & gas production is central to fair & just development in Africa, Asia + Latin America"*

- Economies in Africa heavily reliant on fossil fuel exports experience significantly slower rates of economic growth, often up to three times slower, compared to those with diversified economies.

- In Mozambique, foreign companies, led by Eni and TotalEnergies, have invested nearly $30 billion in developing offshore natural-gas reserves and LNG capacity. However, despite these investments, 70% of the population still lacks access to electricity.

- Everyone needs access to energy to enjoy lives of dignity. However, this is no reason to invest in a system that has already failed and proven unsuccessful – precisely the system from which Europe is trying to wean itself off.

- Being one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change, Asia stands to lose very little from the impending energy transition. While investments are necessary, the cost of sustainability is insignificant compared to what the continent stands to gain.

- Africa has the opportunity to invest in distributed renewable-energy systems, which can bring genuine prosperity and security to the continent.

- The green transition has the potential to be a transformative force both economically and socially, as highlighted by the OECD.

- At the same time, wealthier countries with diversified economies like the US, UK or Canada should accelerate the phase-out of oil and gas production to allow more time for poorer countries that may find the transition harder.

FACT 7: CCS is expensive, energy intensive, unproven at scale and its application does note align with the timescale or ambition necessary for limiting global warming to 1.5C

MISLEADING CLAIM 7: *"CCS + CCUS are a global solution, allowing us to continue to burn oil, gas & coal (with existing, and new infrastructure) (and solve poverty)"*

- The lack of widespread adoption of Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) indicates its ineffectiveness as a solution. Building CCS plants is a slow process, expensive to operate, and impractical to cover all emissions. With the urgent need to reduce emissions by nearly half within 7 years, we cannot afford to wait decades for CCS to make a substantial impact. (Globally there are around 35 commercial facilities applying CCUS to industrial processes, fuel transformation and power generation.)

- Even if we consider all proposed CCS projects currently in the planning stage, their combined capacity by 2030 would only be capable of capturing less than 1% of global fossil emissions.

- Given that CCS projects take 5-9 years to build, the only feasible way to achieve the 43% emissions reduction needed within this decade is by reducing the reliance on fossil fuels.

FACT 8: Direct Air Capture is not a replacement for steps to avoid releasing emissions in the first place and relying on it to meet climate targets presents a major risk.

MISLEADING CLAIM 8: *"Investment in Direct Air Capture should take priority; we need to scale this up urgently"*

- Direct air capture (DAC) is a very expensive method of capturing CO2. It is more energy intensive and therefore more expensive than capturing it from where the pollution happens. In fact, it is currently the most expensive approach. This is because the CO2 in the atmosphere is much more diluted than, for example, in the flue gas of a power station or a cement plant. This contributes to DAC's higher energy need and cost than other CO2 capture technologies and applications.

- Currently, 18 direct air capture plants are operating worldwide, capturing almost 0.01 Mt CO2/year, and a 1 Mt CO2/year capture plant is in advanced development in the United States. In the Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario, direct air capture is scaled up to capture almost 60 Mt CO2/year by 2030.

- Direct air capture has many problems to resolve before we can talk about it as a credible climate solution. Presenting it as a "magical bullet" that will solve climate change and allow burning more fossil fuels is misleading and diverting attention away from the root causes of the problem.

FACT 9: E-fuels are not cleaner than conventional petrol and has limited impact on toxic pollutant emissions

MISLEADING CLAIM 9: *"E-Fuels are a simpler, cost-effective way to drive transport fleets"*

- When considering total cost of ownership, electric vehicles (EVs) are already competitive with petrol and diesel vehicles in most cases. E-fuels, by contrast, are projected to remain three to five times as expensive in 2050.

- The era of driving to a petrol or gas station to refuel cars is approaching its end. The future envisions a world where individuals can conveniently charge their vehicles at home or on local streets.

- E-fuels emit just as much toxic NOx as gasoline or petrol. They fail to address the severe air pollution impacts on public health caused by combustion engine cars.

- E-fuels do not serve as an alternative to renewable energy; instead they represent a vastly more wasteful way to use renewable energy. As a result, they are expected to power only a minuscule portion of road transport, if any.

- Even oil companies' own projections show a lack of significant involvement of e-fuels in road transport for decades to come.

FACT 10: Evidence suggests hydrogen will have a limited role in a future net-zero energy system, complementing electrification and energy efficiency solutions.

MISLEADING CLAIM 10: *"All colours of hydrogen can help us reach net-zero, and we must act 'colour-blind".*

- Hydrogen functions as an energy carrier rather than a standalone energy source. It rarely exists on its own and is best thought of as an inefficient battery.

- The production of hydrogen requires existing energy sources, which leads to significant losses in the production process.

- Scientists agree the only clean hydrogen is green hydrogen, which is produced from renewable energy. Green hydrogen will play a critical role in decarbonising heavy industry. However, the current production of hydrogen is primarily produced from fossil fuels, making it potentially more polluting than directly burning fossil fuels.

- According to the IPCC, hydrogen is estimated to account for a maximum of 2.1% of total energy consumption by 2050.

- A 2021 peer reviewed paper shattered the climate credibility of blue hydrogen, finding that its greenhouse gas intensity can be up to 20% worse than burning fossil gas for heat.

- Hydrogen heavy weights the US, EU and Australia are already funnelling investments into green hydrogen, leaving blue hydrogen as a risky experiment within the industry.