

KEEP CALM: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON SOLAR RADIATION MANAGEMENT

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

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India [had its rain-wise driest August in a century](#) this year. While scientists are yet to link this anomaly with the chaotic effects of climate change, it underscores the constant threat of disrupted weather, the resulting consequences for the economy, and the importance of climate mitigation. One of the more desperate, and dangerous, ideas to have emerged from this impetus is solar radiation management (SRM): to block some of the incoming solar radiation to cool the earth's surface. SRM's dangers emerge from the fact that it interferes with natural mechanisms with unavoidable planet-wide effects. For example, if an SRM experiment by one country leads to more rain over the Horn of Africa than expected, it could trigger a locust swarm that eventually destroys crops in Pakistan and India. There is currently no mechanism that holds a geoengineering government accountable to consequences beyond its borders nor through which affected countries can appeal for restitution. There has also been little research on understanding how the world's myriad weather systems affect each other and their relative sensitivities to interventions such as SRM.

This is why the report of the Climate Overshoot Commission, released last week, calls for more research to close crucial scientific and governance gaps before any deliberations on the implementation of SRM-like technologies. The commission was constituted by geoengineering researchers to assess ways to accelerate emission cuts. But while the report is careful to acknowledge that the scientific community does not understand SRM enough to attempt a deployment, even in experimental fashion, it also argues for retaining SRM in the mix of potential climate mitigation solutions. This is buttressed by appeals to lack of time as the earth's surface is poised to warm past the 1.5°C threshold enshrined in the Paris Agreement in the next decade. This is a precarious suggestion because even less controversial, but nonetheless problematic, mitigation technologies such as carbon capture take resources, focus, and political will away from the most effective strategy — cutting emissions — and increase emissions limits. SRM will only amplify this dilution. The commission also errs by claiming to act for the interests of developing countries at a time when corporate and political actors have hijacked their 'room to develop' to pursue economic growth at the expense of climate justice. The enormity of climate change requires quick and decisive action, but when better solutions have not been implemented as well as they can be, and while there is still time to do so, it is disingenuous to contend that more high-risk solutions should remain on the table.

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