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1 “So many things have changed”: Situated understandings of climate change
2 impacts among the Bassari, south-eastern Senegal

3

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26

27 **Abstract**

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29

30 Mainstream discourses frame anthropogenic climate change as a biophysical apolitical
31 problem, thus privileging Western science and silencing other worldviews. Through a
32 case study among the Bassari, an ethnic group in South-Eastern Senegal, we assess the
33 local, embodied, and situated understandings of climate change and the tensions that
34 arise when the apolitical global climate change discourse interacts with situated
35 understandings. Drawing on data from 47 semi-structured interviews and 176 surveys,
36 we find that while the global climate change discourse has not permeated into the
37 Bassari, they experience climate change through its many impacts on the biophysical
38 and socio-economic systems. Results also highlight that climate is not considered the
39 main or only driver of change, but that changes in elements of the climate system are
40 inextricably linked with political and economic dynamics and environmental
41 degradation. Finally, our results point toward the importance of values and supernatural
42 forces in defining situated ways of conceptualizing, interpreting, and responding to
43 change. By including situated worldviews in theoretical understandings of climate and
44 environmental change, we contribute to the claims about the need to reframe how
45 climate change is conceptualized. Our research emphasizes the importance of a
46 relational view of climate change, which requires moving beyond understanding
47 isolated climate change impacts towards defining climate change as a systemic problem.
48 Building on feminist and decolonial literature, we argue for the need for more plural and
49 democratic ways of thinking about climate change, crossing epistemological and
50 ontological boundaries and including local communities and their knowledge and
51 understandings.

52 **Key words:** climate science, climate justice, environmental change, epistemic justice,
53 Indigenous and local knowledge, network analysis, plural ontologies

54 **1. Introduction**

55

56 “So many things have changed! (...) If I am correct, it’s because of what we do with our
57 own hands. Before, there would be sacrifices in each house to ask for the rain, or for
58 the trees to give many flowers. (...). The world is changing, and mostly here. We cannot
59 go against climate change, us Bassari.”

60 - Bassari female elder, May 2021

61

62 Anthropogenic climate change is, perhaps, the most urgent global environmental
63 problem, as it threatens life on Earth as we know it. Atmospheric changes have
64 cascading effects on physical, biological, socio-economic, and cultural systems (Adger
65 et al., 2013; Reyes-García et al., 2019; Scheffers et al., 2016).

66 Scientific explanations present anthropogenic climate change as a biophysical
67 problem, relating it with greenhouse-gas emissions produced by fossil fuels (IPCC,
68 2021), with growing consensus about the diverse ways of experiencing climate change
69 (Hohenthal et al., 2018; Rosengren, 2018; Tschakert, 2012). The opening quotation
70 from our field research among the Bassari in South-Eastern Senegal illustrates the
71 complexity of local conceptualizations of climate change. It also reflects the tensions,
72 discontinuities, and contradictions that emerge when contrasting local perspectives
73 based on distinct cosmological, ontological, and epistemological grounds with the
74 scientific discourse that dominates climate change debates.

75 Feminist, post and decolonial studies¹ and critical social scientists have a long
76 tradition of uncovering the uneven power dynamics that shape what knowledge is
77 considered legitimate, showing how power privileges Western science while dismissing
78 other knowledge systems (e.g., Blaser, 2013; Harding, 2009; Jasanoff, 2004; Lizcano,
79 2006; McLeod, 2000; Todd, 2015). Accordingly, an increasing body of literature
80 critically engages with climate change knowledge politics, analysing how knowledge is

1 Feminist and post and decolonial studies come from very different traditions but are strongly complementary. They both include analysis of power, justice, and knowledge production, decentring the dominant ways of thinking. The feminist lens is crucial considering the historical marginalization of women from Western science and the importance of gender for knowledge production processes. The post and decolonial lens is key to understand how Western scientific knowledge production is deeply imbricated in imperial and colonial relations and their contemporary remnants. Both co-constitute each other by showing how the intersecting and multiple power hierarchies in which we live are crucial to understand how and why the voices of the most affected and marginalized by the colonial, patriarchal and capitalist system (i.e., non-Western local knowledge systems) are also the ones most silenced (Harding, 2009; Hunt, 2014; Todd, 2016).

81 produced and whose knowledge and voices are heard (Goldman et al., 2018; Hulme,
82 2010; Mahony & Hulme, 2018). Overall, the global framing of climate change has
83 favoured ‘technical-biophysical’ Western science views, which, despite being presented
84 as objective and value-free, cannot be separated from colonialism, imperialism,
85 patriarchy, and capitalist resource extraction (Bee et al., 2015; Demeritt, 2001; Hulme,
86 2008; Nightingale et al., 2020). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
87 (IPCC), a key institution in making and validating scientific climate change knowledge,
88 is a good example of how certain voices are marginalized and suppressed from global
89 climate change discourses – e.g., through participation imbalances between Global
90 North and Global South countries (Hulme & Mahony, 2010), male-dominance
91 (Liverman et al., 2022), underrepresenting humanities scholars (Corbera et al., 2016)
92 and Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) holders (Ford et al., 2016), or through the
93 ‘strategic unknowing’, including denial, dismissal, diversion, and displacement of other
94 ways of knowing (Arora-Jonsson & Wahlström, 2023).

95 Feminist post and decolonial studies advocate for collaboration across diverse ways
96 of knowing in climate change research and policy, based on the principles of consent,
97 cultural autonomy, and justice (Orlove et al., 2023), which ensures that gendered and
98 power hierarchies are made visible, questioned, and addressed (Bee et al., 2015;
99 Cameron, 2012; Carey et al., 2016; MacGregor, 2009; Todd, 2016). This entails
100 learning from grounded and localised understandings of climate change and drawing
101 attention to how climate change is differently lived and experienced by different
102 subjects that, through their everyday practices, are located and bound to different power
103 structures and inequalities² (Bee et al., 2015; Brace & Geoghegan, 2011; Hulme, 2010).
104 Such an approach implies interpreting climate change’s physical dimensions through
105 cultural meanings³, e.g., understanding ‘weather’, ‘climate’ and ‘climate change’ as
106 ideas constructed through cultural practices (Hulme, 2008; Jasanoff, 2010). Thus, it is
107 crucial to study how climate change is lived and interpreted by people within particular

2 As opposed to universal, global knowledge, feminist approaches emphasize the importance of looking at climate change knowledge production from the notions of “embodiment” and the “everyday”. By paying attention to the spaces of everyday practice and to the experiences and intersecting subjectivities (gender, class, race, indigeneity, and other dimension of power) of the situated bodies that live and produce climate change knowledge, a focus on “everyday” and “embodiment” make visible how broader uneven power relations shape mundane spaces and experiences around climate change (Bee et al., 2015).

3 Previous research asserts that existing vernacular conceptions of climate and the environment (also referred as local cosmologies or ontological regimes) affect the way people perceive, experience, and react to environmental changes (Pyhälä et al., 2016).

108 social and historical contexts and how climate change experiences and understandings
109 fit into wider understandings of the world (Bee et al., 2015; Buechler & Hanson, 2015;
110 MacGregor, 2009).

111 Berkes (2009) suggests that local understandings of environmental (and climate)
112 change must be interpreted within the context of broader knowledge systems developed
113 locally. Literature on ILK highlights the unique, complex, holistic, empirical knowledge
114 that Indigenous peoples and local communities hold about climate and environmental
115 variability, in which human-nature relations and values, knowledge, and behaviour are
116 inextricably linked (Berkes & Berkes, 2009; Pyhälä et al., 2016; Reyes-García et al.,
117 2016). In a similar vein, feminist studies refer to “situated knowledge”⁴, emphasizing
118 that knowledge production is embedded in a particular language, culture, and contingent
119 to the history and power relations of the knowledge-holder group (Haraway, 1988).

120 Recognizing voices and knowledge systems marginalized by mainstream
121 approaches allows to explore different ways of understanding climate change impacts,
122 as well as a deeper understanding of the complex web of relations between climate (and
123 environmental) change and cultural, political, and socio-economic changes at the local,
124 regional, and global scales (Boillat & Berkes, 2013; Li et al., 2021). Moreover, using
125 multiple perspectives helps to think about the current gaps in climate science, question
126 assumptions, and pose new questions – e.g., Goldman et al., 2018; Mahony & Hulme,
127 2018; Nightingale, 2016. While scholarly interest in introducing local worldviews into
128 theoretical understandings of climate change is growing, the approach continues to be
129 marginalized in global debates (Barnes et al., 2013; Castree et al., 2014; Reyes-García
130 et al., 2019).

131 Building on previous work calling for epistemological and ontological plurality in
132 understanding climate change (Orlove et al., 2023), our work aims at empirically
133 exploring the local, embodied and situated understandings of climate change through a
134 case-study among the Bassari, an ethno-linguistic minority inhabiting South-Eastern
135 Senegal. To do so, we first investigate whether the global scientific concept of ‘climate
136 change’ has made its way to the Bassari, and if so, who has access to this knowledge

4 We use the concept “situated knowledge” (Haraway, 1988) to emphasize the extensive body of critical research that challenges the historical Western categorization of non-Western cultures as “local”, “traditional”, or “Indigenous” while considering (Western) science as universal (e.g., Cameron, 2012; Todd, 2015). The notion of situated knowledge recognizes the knowledge-practice-belief based on the multigenerational cultural transmission and evolving adaptive processes that characterizes ILK (Berkes, 1999) and brings attention to colonial legacies and contemporary power dynamics.

137 and how it merges with local notions of change, resulting in local meanings of 'climate
138 change'. Then, we explore local reports of environmental changes and the perceived
139 importance of climate change amongst other drivers of change. Finally, building on
140 feminist and decolonial literature we discuss the frictions that arise when the apolitical,
141 global, science-based framings of climate change interact with the local, embodied, and
142 situated understandings of local communities with nature-dependent livelihoods,
143 considering the implications of these frictions for adaptation and climate change
144 governance, and arguing for more diverse representations and conceptualizations of
145 climate change.

146

147 **2. Case study and methods**

148

149 **2.1. The Bassari of South-Eastern Senegal**

150

151 The Bassari country, Southeast Senegal, is a region characterized by tropical
152 savannah with dry-winter characteristics (Peel et al., 2007) and mean annual rainfall ca.
153 1172 mm (2005-2015) distributed along one rainy season (June-July to October-
154 November) (ANACIM, 2020). The landscape and livelihood activities are determined
155 by the yearly rhythm of dry and rainy seasons, which, as in the rest of the Sahel area,
156 shows high inter-annual variability. During the 1970s and 1980s, the region was
157 affected by intense droughts, and thereafter, there has been an increase in annual
158 rainfall, widespread warming, and an increase in climate extremes (IPCC 2007, p. 299).
159 These trends, however, are not clear, and climate change projections for the area remain
160 uncertain and subject to large local variability (Sultan & Gaetani, 2016).

161 Situated in one of the most remote regions of Senegal, the Bassari country has
162 historically been socially, politically, and economically isolated from the rest of
163 Senegal. Historical accounts depict the Bassari as hunter-gatherers and small-scale
164 subsistence farmers, with dispersed settlement patterns and a self-sufficient lifestyle
165 until the beginning of the 20th century. Most social changes in the area accelerated in the
166 20th century, with French colonialism and increasing integration into the mainstream
167 market economy (Porcuna-Ferrer et al., under review).

168 French colonial rule (1900-1960) placed the Bassari territory in a particular
169 development trajectory, characterized by the imposition of a tax-system, forced labour
170 recruitments, the establishment of French schools and Catholic and Protestant missions,

171 the creation of transport infrastructure and weekly markets, and the establishment of the
172 Niokolo Koba National Park in an area traditionally used for hunting and gathering by
173 local populations. After Senegal's independence (1960), the Bassari territory integration
174 into the Senegalese economy continued through development projects and NGOs,
175 which enhanced access to health and education and promoted agricultural
176 mechanization, the use of chemical inputs, and new improved seed varieties. Small-
177 scale tourism developed in the area in the 2000s, bolstered by UNESCO's designation of
178 the Bassari Country as a World Heritage site.

179 The study area is located at the foothills of the Fouta-Djallon mountain range, below
180 the Gambia river and is bounded to the West and North by the Niokolo Koba. A paved
181 road connects the departmental capital, Kedougou, with the market town of Salemata,
182 which is about 11 kilometres away (Figure 1). Nowadays, the main livelihood activity
183 in the area is slash-and-burn agriculture, mostly for subsistence and cereal crops, with
184 some legume and vegetable cultivation and cotton as the only cash-crop. Most Bassari
185 families own some cattle as a cash-saving strategy. Bassari are increasingly involved in
186 market-based economic activities such as construction, tourism, and gold mining
187 (Porcuna-Ferrer et al., under review).

188 [FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

189 **2.2. Methods**

190

191 Data collection took place over 16 months between 2019 and 2021. We worked on
192 three Bassari villages, with populations of approximately 200, 433, and 986 inhabitants,
193 representing the area's diverse environmental and socioeconomic conditions (see
194 below). Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Reyes-García et
195 al., 2023a), we collected and interpreted data on Bassari familiarity with the Western
196 concept of climate change as well as situated reports of environmental change. We
197 collected data in French, with translations into Bassari by two experienced local
198 research assistants, one man and one woman, who assisted us in ensuring that the
199 questions were culturally-appropriate and correctly translated and understood. Research
200 assistants belonged to the biggest village. When conducting research in the other two
201 villages, a local interpreter belonging to each community also accompanied us. All
202 members of the communities that participated in the research agreed research assistants
203 and interpreters to be financed during the research period.

204 Before starting data collection, we obtained permission to conduct research from the
205 official and customary authorities at village level (i.e., the *préfet*, the *chefs de village*
206 and the *chefs coutumiers*) and each household and individual participating in the
207 research. The research protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the Universitat
208 Autònoma de Barcelona (CEEAH 4781). All authors of this paper are European, as
209 such, we acknowledge that not being Bassari scholars might limit our understanding of
210 Bassari knowledge and cosmologies, affecting our interpretations of Bassari reports of
211 climate and environmental change and their drivers.

212

213 **2.3. Bassari's familiarity with Western scientific notions of climate change**

214

215 To explore whether the scientific concept of 'climate change' had permeated in the
216 local communities, we conducted a survey (n = 176). Participant selection followed
217 stratified random sampling, balancing the number of selected individuals per case-study
218 village, and gender and age quotas (Table 1). We asked survey participants: (i) Have
219 you heard the term 'climate change'? (yes/no); If yes: (ii) where did you learn about it?
220 (i.e., TV, radio, other people, health post, school) and (iii) what does 'climate change'
221 mean to you? (open text, documented verbatim). We also documented basic individual
222 socio-demographic characteristics (i.e., biological sex, age, level of schooling, and
223 village of residence).

224

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

225 We coded the answers into a variable called "matching", which took the value of
226 "yes" if the interviewee referred to changes in the atmospheric system and (but not
227 necessarily) CO₂ emissions or pollution; "partially" if the interviewee referred to
228 environmental changes potentially driven by changes in climate (e.g., crops produce
229 lower yields, wild trees decrease production, etc.) but did not specify the driver; and
230 "no" if the interviewee mentioned changes that were not related to climate or
231 environmental change (e.g., arrival of phones, radio, new crops, etc.).

232

233 We used percentages to quantify people's level of familiarity with scientific
234 understandings of climate change and assessed whether responses to the variable
235 "matching" were associated to informants' sex, age and level of schooling. To test
236 independence between response and explanatory variables, we used the Exact Fisher's
237 test for categorical variables (i.e., sex and level of schooling) instead of a Chi-squared
test for which we had too few observations. A Kruskall-Wallis test was used for the

238 numerical variable (i.e., age). The association between source of information and the
239 variable “matching” was assessed with a Chi-squared test. In the text, we mention the
240 test name when referring to the Kruskal-Wallis test or to Chi-squared test; otherwise, p-
241 values were obtained through the Exact Fisher’s test.

242 All data analyses were run in R (R Core Team, 2021). We used the ggplot2 package
243 (Wickham, 2016) and Inkscape v.1.2 for other visualizations.

244

245 **2.4. Situated reports of environmental change and its drivers**

246

247 We used a two-step process to assess situated reports of environmental change and
248 the relative importance of climate change as a driver. We first conducted 47 semi-
249 structured interviews (SSIs) with people locally recognized as knowledgeable, selecting
250 individuals who could hold different knowledge on local environmental changes (Table
251 1). We tried to balance our sample across age, sex, and main livelihood activity,
252 selecting the most common activities performed in the area (i.e., farming, hunter-
253 gathering, fishing). Women participation was lower than desired (28%), which we
254 primarily attribute to the fact that, for logistical reasons, we had no option but to
255 conduct SSIs during the main harvest time. Since women, besides being farmers also
256 shoulder most responsibilities of household caregiving, they were less available than
257 men for interviews.

258 Following Reyes-García et al., 2023a, SSIs started with the question “compared to
259 your youth, what changes in the environment have you noticed?”; followed by questions
260 about changes in a) the weather, seasons, temperature, rain; b) soils, river, and streams;
261 c) wild plants, animals, and fish; and d) farming, livestock-keeping, or any other
262 livelihood activities. For each change mentioned, we asked *why* the informant thought it
263 happened and *what* was causing it. We then organized three focus group discussions,
264 one in each village, to assess the community consensus regarding environmental
265 changes and their drivers and to clarify unclear or contradictory observations.

266 Verbatim environmental change observations were coded into summary indicators
267 following the hierarchical classification system proposed by Reyes-García et al., 2019 ,
268 where environmental changes are classified according to the ‘system’ (i.e., atmospheric,
269 physical, biological, socio-economic), ‘sub-system’ (e.g., temperature, terrestrial

270 physical system, cultivated plant species) and ‘impacted element’⁵ where they are
271 observed (e.g., seasonal temperature, wild flora productivity, cultivated spp.
272 productivity). For example, we coded similar expressions (e.g., “now it rains less”, “it
273 does not rain like before”) into an indicator (i.e., “changes in mean rainfall”) which,
274 following the classification used, was assigned to an impacted element (“mean
275 precipitation”), a subsystem (“precipitation”), and a system (“atmospheric system”).

276 When a change was reportedly driven by another environmental change, we used
277 the same process to classify the driver. However, when drivers of change were not
278 environmental, we drew on the IPBES classification of drivers, which distinguishes
279 between ‘direct’ drivers of change (i.e., land-use change, resource extraction, pollution,
280 invasive alien species) and ‘indirect’ drivers of change (i.e., values, demographic,
281 technological, economic, governance) (Balvanera et al., 2019). We extended the IPBES
282 classification by adding ‘supernatural forces’ as driver of environmental change (e.g.,
283 “trees have stopped producing fruits as a punishment because now we sell their fruits”,
284 “because of God”). To integrate both classification systems (IPBES and LICCI), we
285 chose to work at the level with the highest correspondence between them, although we
286 are aware that this correspondence is not exact.

287 We used network analysis to assess interactions between reported environmental
288 change impacts and their drivers (Brandes, 2005), focusing on the relationships between
289 changes rather than on the changes themselves. For this, we created an edge-list, with
290 one column indicating the list of environmental change impacts and another indicating
291 the reported drivers (adding one line per additionally reported drivers for the same
292 impact). We only used impacts and drivers for which there was consensus in the focus
293 group discussions. When visualizing the edge-list as a network, nodes represented either
294 drivers or impacts of environmental change, and ties represented directed relations
295 between nodes. So, an oriented tie from change (i) to change (j) indicated that change (i)
296 drives change (j).

297 To analyse the network, we calculated two measures at the node and network levels:
298 (i) *Indegree*. At node level, indegree, i.e., the number of incoming ties, represents the
299 number of drivers reported for a particular change. At network level, a high indegree
300 centralization indicates that a limited number of impacts are linked to many drivers

5 In the text we also refer to ‘impacted elements’ as ‘environmental change impacts’

301 while the rest are linked to a few. (ii) *Outdegree*. At node level, outdegree, i.e., the num-
302 ber of outgoing ties, represents the number of times a change is mentioned as driver. At
303 the network level, high outdegree centralization indicates that a small group of drivers
304 causes most impacts. We calculated all directed networks using the R package “net-
305 work” (Butts, 2015).

306

307 **3. Results**

308

309 **3.1. Bassari’s familiarity with Western scientific notions of climate change**

310

311 Fifty-three percent of the sample (n=176) reported hearing about climate change;
312 but only 55% of those provided a definition. 59% of respondents who had never heard
313 the term climate change were women, 68% were over 40, and 58% had never attended
314 school (Figure 2).

315 Younger people (Kruskal-Wallis test, $p = 0.003$) and people with higher level of
316 schooling were significantly more likely to have heard the term ‘climate change’ than
317 their peers ($p < 0.05$). Everyone who had reached high school had heard about ‘climate
318 change’. We found no statistically significant relationship between gender and having
319 heard the term climate change ($p > 0.05$). Men ($p = 0.02$), young people (Kruskal-
320 Wallis test, $p = 0.02$), and people with schooling ($p < 0.05$) provided explanations that
321 most closely matched scientific notions of ‘climate change’ (Figure 2).

322 The most common sources of information about ‘climate change’ were other people
323 (54.73% of the interviewees) and the radio (30.52%). Informants of different age,
324 gender, and level of schooling used different sources. In general, men accessed climate
325 change knowledge through the radio more often than women, who mostly accessed this
326 knowledge by talking to other people ($p < 0.01$). Similarly, people who had completed
327 middle school had heard about climate change at school, whereas people with no
328 schooling generally accessed climate change knowledge by talking to other people ($p <$
329 0.01). We also found an association between the climate change knowledge source used
330 and providing explanations that match Western scientific notions of ‘climate change’ (p
331 = 0.002). Standardized residuals of the Chi-squared test show a positive association
332 between providing explanations of ‘climate change’ that do not match Western
333 scientific meanings and relying on ‘other people’ as climate change information source
334 (std.res = 3.66). On the contrary, providing climate change explanations that match

335 Western scientific notions of climate change was positively associated with school
336 attendance (std.res = 2.05) and access to TV (std.res = 2.49).

337

338 [FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

339 In explaining ‘climate change’, informants often referred to broader socio-
340 economic changes affecting them (i.e., globalization and integration into market
341 economy). From those that provided an explanation (n = 51), 48%, 41%, and 9%
342 referred to atmospheric, socio-economic, and biological changes, respectively.
343 Meanwhile, 14% of respondents referred to change in general. Only 17% referred to
344 combined effects in more than one system. For some, ‘climate change’ was not an
345 unprecedented phenomenon, but part of a cycle, like exemplified by the definition
346 provided by a young male informant: ‘*Sometimes there is a lot of rain, sometimes not.*
347 *The elders explain there was a time when no rain came in a whole rainy season*’
348 (Anonymous, April 2021).

349 When explaining the meaning of ‘climate change’, the most reported atmospheric
350 changes were temperature increase, lack of rain, shift and shortening of the rainy
351 season, drought, and general changes in weather patterns. Changes in the biological
352 system included forest degradation, plant and animal diversity loss, and soil erosion,
353 and those in the socio-economic system referred to changes in crop phenology or
354 productivity, but also the increasing use of technologies, access and importance of
355 money and material goods, pollution, dietary changes, and changes in knowledge access
356 and circulation. Some informants also associated the concept of climate change with
357 changes in habits and customs. Specifically, interviewees mentioned changes in the
358 traditional value-system, abandonment of ancestral practices, and intensification of a
359 utilitarian relationship towards nature. For example, one informant mentioned: ‘*There*
360 *used to be a clan that was in charge of asking for the rain, but now they don’t do it*
361 *anymore, so the rain does not come*’ (Anonymous, April 2021). Some informants also
362 referred to super-natural forces and considered ‘climate change’ as their punishment.
363 Bassari view spiritual beings as having a conscious agency in the physical world, which
364 depends on the good relationship and mutual respect between humans and spiritual
365 beings. In that sense, interviewees often referred to the punishment of ‘super-natural
366 forces’ for the abusive or cultural disrespectful exploitation of nature. Like a middle-
367 aged male explained: ‘*Nothing is like before; the people of nowadays are not anymore*
368 *like the people of before. Before, there used to be more respect* [to the customs and

369 traditions], *now there is no respect. This is why things get worse*' (Anonymous, May
370 2021).

371

372 **3.2 Bassari reports of environmental change**

373

374 Beyond the definition of the term 'climate change' prompted in surveys, during SSIs
375 and focus group discussions Bassari did report many environmental changes. Most
376 observations referred to changes in the socio-economic system (37% of the total),
377 followed by changes in the physical (30%), atmospheric (18%), and biological systems
378 (15%) (Supplementary material 1).

379 Most changes in the atmospheric system referred to a decrease in precipitation,
380 including changes in the abundance and distribution of rainfall and fog decrease. As a
381 middle-aged woman described, '*Nowadays, it does not rain as before. Before, when the*
382 *first rain arrived you knew there would be rain. Nowadays, sometimes the first rain*
383 *arrives and there are four days without rain or even a whole month!*' and she continued
384 '*Sometimes you could spend two or three days with "okubina"* [specific type of fog],
385 *but last year we did not even see it one day*' (Anonymous, January 2020). The general
386 perception of a drier climate was noticed in the shortening of the rainy season (later
387 onset, earlier end). Informants also mentioned temperature rises. Wind changes were
388 rarely mentioned without prompting, but those who reported them provided extensive
389 information about changes in wind strength and temperature.

390 Changes in the physical system related to river regimes, well depletion, soil erosion,
391 and wildfires increase. During focus group discussion, hydrological changes seemed to
392 be of especial concern, e.g., '*Behind my house there was a stream where we fished*
393 *during the rainy season. It does not exist anymore*' (Anonymous, February 2020).

394 Informants widely discussed the faster depletion of water in the wells, which posed
395 problems, particularly for women, who are obliged to carry water from a greater
396 distance. Furthermore, soils were said to have warmed up due to a lack of humidity.
397 Decreased soil fertility was also reported, which informants closely linked with soil
398 erosion: '*When we open a new field, it does not give like before. The soil is dry and*
399 *tired (...). The wind and the strong rains take all the richness away. When a heavy rain*
400 *comes, water cannot penetrate the soil and just runs off all the soil*' (Anonymous,
401 February 2020).

402 Interviewees also mentioned several changes in the biological system, with the
403 disappearance of wild fauna as a major topic. Bush-meat plays a central role in Bassari
404 culinary culture, but it is no longer (or rarely) consumed. Observers cited the local
405 extinction of elephants, panthers, hyenas, hippopotamus, crocodiles and other large
406 animals, as well as certain bird and fish species, which “*had run away*”. Certain monkey
407 species were also mentioned as having vanished, a local extinction seen as ‘positive’
408 since monkeys damage food crops. Concerns were also raised about the disappearance
409 of certain wild plants; respondents mostly mentioned a decrease in edible species for
410 household consumption and sale, such as baobab, weda or madd, shea tree and African
411 locust bean, as well as trees and other species specially valued for their timber, such as
412 the local raffia palm.

413 Bassari also mentioned changes in livelihood activities, primarily in agricultural
414 practices. People were acutely aware of changes in crop sowing times, lower harvests
415 due to drought, and increased crop pest pressure, particularly during grain storage. As a
416 young woman farmer explained: ‘*Last year, I stored my peanuts in these recipients, and
three months later, it was all powder!*’ (Anonymous, February 2020). Interviewees also
417 mentioned that livestock had to travel further to find fresh pasture and they all agreed
418 that livestock epidemics were becoming more common.

420

421 **3.3 A network of changes**

422

423 Most reported changes drive other environmental changes. Only a few socio-
424 economic changes were exclusively mentioned either as impacts (i.e., infrastructure and
425 human health) or as drivers (i.e., governance, demographic, economic, supernatural
426 forces) (Table 2).

427 [TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

428 In general, elements of the ‘atmospheric’ (32.1% of observations) and ‘socio-
429 economic’ systems (32.1%) were reported in a higher number as drivers of
430 environmental changes, compared to elements of the ‘physical’ (18.5%) and ‘biological’
431 systems (17.3%). Impacts on the ‘socio-economic’ (31.5% of observations) and
432 ‘physical’ systems (31.5%) were more frequently reported than impacts on the
433 ‘biological’ (23.5%) and ‘atmospheric’ systems (13.6%) (Figure 3).

434 [FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

435

436 **3.3.1 Drivers of environmental change**

437

438 The relationships among changes reported by the Bassari underscores the complex
439 interrelations and multiple reinforcements among environmental change impacts and
440 drivers (Figure 4).

441 [FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

442 The centralization outdegree score of the network was low (1.72%), suggesting that
443 the Bassari perceive many drivers of environmental change. Moreover, 65% of the
444 impacts mentioned were associated with more than one driver.

445 Our measure of nodes' outdegree suggests that water-related changes, specifically
446 changes related to 'precipitation' and 'continental waters', were the most important
447 drivers of environmental changes. Another important driver was 'resource extraction',
448 which had the third highest outdegree (Table 3). The decrease in seasonal precipitation
449 impacted a wide range of elements including wind temperature, aquifer recharge,
450 wildfires, soil fertility, wild plants productivity and distribution, livestock, pasture
451 availability, and crop yields and mortality. Given the local importance of farming, the
452 effects of precipitation changes on the agricultural system were a common concern. As
453 an old man explained: '*Before, there was less rain, but it would last for the whole day,
454 we called it "tib ind eyam"* [=rain of the good harvest]. *Nowadays it rains for a shorter
455 period of time but stronger and the rain takes away the soil and plants*' (Anonymous,
456 February 2020).

457 [TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

458 Changes in 'continental waters' (i.e., rivers and streams) were also reported to
459 impact many other elements, including wild flora and fauna, pastures, crops, livestock,
460 transport infrastructure, and human health. Interviewees also reported that the drying up
461 of rivers resulted in temperature increase and changes in wind seasonal patterns.

462 Bassari related increasing resource extraction with impacts on the atmospheric,
463 physical and biological systems. In general, interviewees referred to the
464 overexploitation of nature mostly through small-prey hunting (e.g., birds, small
465 mammals), honey, palm-wine, wild edible fruits and timber harvesting, and well-water
466 consumption. For the Bassari, intensification of species extraction drives defaunation
467 and deforestation, as one of the interviewees explained: '*When the season comes,
468 everybody goes in search of madd* (wild edible fruit with high market value). *Before we
469 would leave some fruits for the birds or animals to eat. Also, some fruits would fall near*

470 *the mother tree and produce new seedlings. Now fruits do not reach the ground, that's*
471 *why it's rare to see a small tree!*' (Anonymous, March 2020). Bassari also related
472 increasing extraction with rainfall decrease arguing that tree species that 'call for the
473 rain' are now rare. As explained by an elder woman: '*The rain does not come like*
474 *before because we cut many trees*' (Anonymous, February 2020). Moreover, as
475 explained by a focus group discussion participant, the decrease in forest surface and
476 river-bank vegetation also impoverishes local diets, as many wild edible plant species
477 became rare.

478 Finally, some changes in elements of the socio-economic system were regarded as
479 drivers of environmental change (Table 2). These include population growth and village
480 expansion, access to services (e.g., schools, doctors) and material goods (e.g., solar
481 panels), technological innovations (e.g., introduction of new crops and varieties,
482 pesticides and fertilizers), land-use changes (e.g., agricultural expansion), and changes
483 in governance and the economic regime. One interviewee, for example, explained land-
484 use change as follows: '*If you go back 15 years from now, to go from our household to*
485 *the household of X you had to cross a lot of bush. Today, all this bush are fields, and the*
486 *land can't rest*' (Anonymous, February 2020). Bassari often refer to the shift in local
487 values as a driver of change, and particularly the growing importance of money, the
488 abandonment of local traditions, and the instrumentalization of nature. For example,
489 some interviewees linked the decline in game productivity to abusive hunting, while
490 others suggested that the decline in wild fruit productivity was a punishment for
491 harvesting too much for commercialization: '*Trees do not give like before (...) because*
492 *now people harvest to sell, not to eat. That's why trees have stopped giving*'
493 (Anonymous, February 2020).

494

495 3.3.2 Impacts of environmental change

496

497 The centralization indegree score of the full network was low (1.06%), indicating
498 that there were many impacts connected to many drivers. According to the indegree
499 node measure, the nodes impacted by the most drivers are 'terrestrial wild flora',
500 'continental waters', and 'soil and land'.

501 Changes in 'terrestrial wild flora' were reportedly driven by changes in the
502 atmospheric, physical, and socio-economic systems, including precipitation decrease,
503 temperature increase, decreased availability of continental waters, higher rates of

504 species extraction, demographic and land-use changes, and changes in values. On the
505 latter, one informant commented: '*We used to have ceremonies and many cultural*
506 *practices for trees to give a lot of flowers. Now nobody practices them anymore,*
507 *therefore trees give less fruits*' (Anonymous, December 2019). Some informants
508 specially highlighted the impact that practices oriented to generate income have in wild
509 flora: '*Nowadays people cut trees near the river because they only think of earning*
510 *money. Those areas are forbidden by the tradition*' (Anonymous, December 2019).

511 Changes in 'continental waters' were allegedly driven by decreased precipitation,
512 intensification of agricultural practices and livestock keeping, land-use change, and
513 increased extraction of terrestrial wild flora. Increased resource extraction was also
514 linked to the drying of rivers: '*We cut all the raphia. It was the raphia that retained the*
515 *water*' (Anonymous, February 2020). The disappearance of freshwater fauna is also
516 mentioned as a cause of river drying up.

517 Changes in 'soils and land' were reportedly driven by changes in rainfall and wind
518 patterns, wild plant species abundance and distribution, and agricultural practice
519 changes, such as shorter fallow periods, chemical inputs increasing, or changes in
520 ploughing methods.

521 Finally, some changes in socio-economic system elements are predominantly or
522 exclusively considered environmental change impacts (Table 2). These include
523 transportation infrastructure expansion and improvement, effects on human health, and
524 changes in pastures and grasslands, livestock, and cultivated plant species. Impacts on
525 human health were deemed positive due to increased access to health services, but also
526 negative, owing to the increase of vector-borne diseases and the adoption of diets high
527 in processed foods and sugar. The effects on pastures, crops and livestock were complex
528 and stemmed from many simultaneous environmental and socio-economic drivers of
529 change. A good example of the complex local discourse about the synergic effect of
530 multiple drivers is one from an old local male farmer: '*It's now that the livestock need to*
531 *go that far looking for food. Before there was always a "bas-fond" [lowland fertile*
532 *areas] with good grass and herbs for eating, but now bas-fonds are for rice and rivers*
533 *have become dry. People used to have only few cows, now there are many cows. And*
534 *not only ours! "Aga" [transhumant herders] coming from the North arrive each year*
535 *with their big herds, they cut down the trees to find fodder for their sheep, but they do*
536 *not respect anything. They leave the cut branches around the trunks and then big trees*
537 *are also burn with wildfires*' (Anonymous, February 2020).

538 **4 Discussion and conclusions**

539

540 Before discussing the main findings of this work, we start by acknowledging three
541 important limitations. We are aware that 1) due to epistemological differences it is not
542 possible for us to fully assess Bassari knowledge by just interacting with community
543 members for a limited period, 2) by focusing on consensual information, we are
544 ignoring the sociological complexity that determines how knowledge is locally
545 distributed and how environmental change impacts are differently lived by different
546 socio-demographic groups within the Bassari (e.g., according to gender, age, or social
547 status), and 3) that some of our conclusions are drawn from information collected using
548 different samples. Thus, while not claiming that the results presented here represent
549 Bassari worldviews, but rather our interpretation of them, we believe this representation
550 can help to better understand the impacts of climate change in the context of global
551 change.

552 Herein, we discuss the main results and debate the existing tensions between
553 scientific and situated and plural understandings of climate change, based on
554 Indigenous, embodied, and experiential knowledges.

555

556 **4.1 Situated perspectives of the global climate change discourse**

557

558 Bassari were, in general, not very familiar with the term ‘climate change’. Most
559 interviewees had either never heard the term or provided definitions that do not match
560 the Western scientific meaning of the concept. These results resemble those among
561 other local communities of the Global South, where the scientific discourse of climate
562 change has barely reached (e.g., Byg, 2009; Fernández-Llamazares et al., 2015),
563 suggesting a lower familiarity with the Western scientific discourse of anthropogenic
564 climate change than in less isolated regions. For example, on the Marshall Islands
565 (Pacific archipelago), 80% of the interviewees had some awareness of the Western
566 scientific notion of climate change (Rudiak-Gould, 2011), and in South England, only
567 2.9% of respondents were not familiar with the term ‘climate change’ (Whitmarrsh,
568 2009). Overall, however, it is difficult to draw a conclusion, as there are very few
569 studies explicitly asking about the term ‘climate change’ in Global South communities
570 (Rudiak-Gould, 2011), and most studies have assessed this familiarity indirectly, by

571 documenting local observations of climate change and its impacts (Boillat & Berkes,
572 2013; Marin, 2010).

573 Our results show how access to global ‘climate change’ knowledge is mediated by
574 gender, age, and level of schooling. Among the Bassari, young well-educated men were
575 more familiar with the Western scientific concept than the rest of the population. Our
576 results also point to wealth as a mediating factor for access to the Western scientific
577 discourse on climate change, as people with access to TV were more aware of the
578 Western scientific discourse around climate change and locally only members of few
579 wealthy households own and have access to TV. Since people’s perceptions and
580 understandings of climate change can influence their behaviour toward adaptation and
581 mitigation strategies (Naess, 2013; Patt & Weber, 2014; Spence et al., 2011),
582 differential access to Western scientific climate change knowledge may lead to wealthy
583 young well-educated men being more engaged in the implementation of externally-
584 driven (often top-down) climate change adaptation interventions, and thus to a better
585 representation of their interests and needs compared to those of elders, women, or
586 people without access to schooling. However, we recognize that to build effective
587 adaptation strategies, a focus on the diversity of people’s lived experiences and
588 everyday adaptation is crucial (Moulton & Carey, 2023). Drawing from our
589 ethnographic experience, we recognize the pivotal contribution of women and elders to
590 local adaptation. Despite not accessing Western scientific representations, through
591 decades of observation and experimentation other groups have accumulated a wealth of
592 knowledge that ensures that adaptations respond to the needs and desires of local
593 communities’ and are culturally appropriate and locally feasible.

594 To the level to which the concept of ‘climate change’ has made its way to the
595 Bassari communities, it has merged with situated notions of change to form new
596 meanings. Survey participants who stated familiarity with the Western scientific
597 ‘climate change’ concept, did not only refer to changes happening in the atmospheric
598 system, but also referred to climate change information and meaning with local beliefs
599 and their own traditional representations of the world. Several interviewees stated that
600 ‘everything is changing’ (referring to changes in the environment, socio-economic
601 system, and way of life). Drawing on situated knowledge and worldviews, others
602 interpreted ‘climate change’ as cyclical or as a punishment from super-natural forces for
603 inappropriate behaviour. Thus, our findings agree with those reported for other
604 Indigenous peoples and local communities, showing that situated interpretations of

605 changing climatic conditions have ontological foundations (Boillat & Berkes, 2013;
606 Rosengren, 2018; Scoville-Simonds, 2018). Our research also confirms that local
607 communities do not always absorb the Western scientific climate change discourse
608 despite having access to it (Fernández-Llamazares et al., 2015; Marin & Berkes, 2013),
609 which might be explained by the epistemological gap between the information heard
610 and the one perceived (Hulme, 2009; Marin & Berkes, 2013) and the lack of trust on
611 Western scientific experts (Hmielowski et al., 2014).

612

613 **4.2 Climate change from the lens of the ‘everyday’**

614

615 While Bassari people are not necessarily familiar with the ‘climate change’ concept,
616 they reported many changes in the atmospheric system, with cascading effects on the
617 physical, biological, and socio-economic systems. Similarly, previous research showed
618 that communities that live in close proximity to the environment have detailed
619 perceptions of weather changes (Fernández-Llamazares et al., 2015; García-del-Amo,
620 2021; Green & Raygorodetsky, 2010; Reyes-García et al., 2023b). However, by
621 employing a network approach, our results quantitatively assess the relative importance
622 of the various drivers and interactions between climatic and non-climatic changes, with
623 conceptual and practical implications.

624 Conceptually, the complex network of drivers and impacts derived from Bassari
625 responses revealed the difficulty of disentangling climate change from the web of
626 material and immaterial relations that shape people’s interactions with their environment
627 (Barnes et al., 2013). Comparably to other Indigenous and local communities (Boillat &
628 Berkes, 2013; García-del-Amo et al. 2023; Peloquin & Berkes, 2009), the Bassari did
629 not see climate change as an isolated phenomenon. Atmospheric changes were
630 inextricably linked to other environmental, social, spiritual, and politico-economic
631 changes that are transforming their life. Interestingly, this blurs the conceptual
632 distinction between climate change impacts and impacts from other socio-economic and
633 environmental drivers, implying that viewing atmospheric changes solely through a
634 climate change lens marginalises and obscures other changes with more immediate
635 significance for people (Nyantakyi-frimpong & Bezner-Kerr, 2015; Ribot, 2014).
636 Accordingly, current scientific research also underscores the importance of shifting
637 away from disciplinary approaches to climate change research and acknowledges the
638 importance of synergies and trade-offs between climate, environmental, and other

639 underlying socio-economic and cultural changes (Arneth et al., 2020; IPCC & IPBES,
640 2020).

641 From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the importance of shifting our
642 focus away from conceptualizing climate change as a biophysical problem that can be
643 tackled in isolation. Understanding ‘climatic’ drivers as distinct from ‘biological’,
644 ‘physical’, and ‘socio-economic’ drivers leads to the development of climate-change
645 policies that are disconnected from broader trajectories of socio-environmental change,
646 preventing holistic action.

647 Regarding the local mechanisms of causality and role of immaterial / spiritual
648 entities in Bassari explanations of change, Bassari rationales for the causes of local
649 environmental changes combined a mix of material – i.e., changes in elements of the
650 atmospheric, physical, biological, and socio-economic systems – and immaterial causes
651 – i.e., super-natural forces and changes in the value system. Similar elements and
652 mechanisms of causality can be found in traditional Tibetan (Byg, 2009; Huber &
653 Pedersen, 1997), Amazonian (Reyes-García et al., 2023c; Rosengren, 2018), and
654 Andean communities (Boillat & Berkes, 2013; Scoville-Simonds, 2018), with
655 interpretations of weather/climate change where local people also experience, know,
656 and understand many of the complex environmental changes through super-natural
657 forces and spiritual entities. Importantly, in most cases, material and immaterial
658 explanations were linked to local human behaviour, either through direct environmental
659 impacts (e.g., overhunting, deforestation) or indirectly, by influencing super-natural
660 forces (e.g., angering them).

661 In this regard, Bassari’s holistic perspective provides an alternative view of climate
662 change, focusing on the complex synergistic effects between drivers of change, moving
663 beyond the understanding of single elements to the understanding of these elements
664 through their interrelations. Additionally, incorporating perspectives from other
665 knowledge systems necessitates the inclusion of a set of political questions concerning
666 not only whose and what knowledge counts, but also “what worlds” are permitted to
667 exist (Goldman et al., 2018). While most climate change research has focused on
668 material aspects of adaptation, resilience, and vulnerability, our findings highlight the
669 importance of immaterial aspects (such as values or super-natural forces) in the way
670 Bassari understand and interpret change. This entails that values, beliefs, and symbolic
671 representations of the world absent from Western science need to be taken seriously if

672 we want to foster inter-epistemological and inter-ontological dialogue for a fairer
673 climate knowledge.

674

675 **4.3 Other framings, other responses: epistemological and ontological plurality 676 for justice and change**

677

678 Global framings of climate change privilege Western science, marginalizing other
679 ways of knowing that are embedded in lived experiences and cultural memories (Bee et
680 al., 2015; Hulme, 2010; MacGregor, 2009). Climate change assessments reproduce
681 power dynamics that stem from colonial histories and their continuity in current
682 capitalist relations (Corbera et al., 2016; Hulme & Mahony, 2010; MacGregor, 2009).
683 The consideration of ‘climate change’ as a discernible and abstract problem that stems
684 from greenhouse gas emissions happens within a set of values and social relations that
685 are embedded in the status quo of a global and patriarchal capitalist economy and is not
686 free from political implications (Demeritt, 2001; Hulme, 2008, Nightingale et al., 2020).

687 By prioritizing certain voices in the generation of climate change knowledge, certain
688 interests are prioritized in the design of adaptation and mitigation strategies. For
689 example, the Western scientific construct of climate change has constrained the
690 conception of solutions, leading to the prioritization of ‘technical fixes’ (e.g., carbon
691 offsetting) that do not challenge the root causes of climate change (Nightingale et al.,
692 2020). As argued by Hulme, instead of addressing why our society is designed around
693 emission intensive production and consumption processes, the global construction of
694 climate change as a physical problem “*readily allows climate change to be
appropriated uncritically in support of an expanding range of ideologies... of green
colonialism, of the commodification of Nature*” (Hulme, 2008, p. 9). Accordingly,
695 feminist and decolonial scholars argue that efforts to promote climate change adaptation
696 need to ask critical questions about how climate change knowledge is generated and by
697 whom, directly addressing structural social inequalities and social and epistemological
700 justice questions (Bee et al. 2015; Cameron, 2012; Todd, 2016). Such effort will be
701 fruitless without a deep understanding of how climate change differently affects people
702 on the ground – mediated by gender or other key intersectional dimensions of difference
703 and inequality, whether ethnicity, race, poverty, indigeneity, or coloniality (Buechler &
704 Hanson, 2015).

705 Contrastingly, when the knowledge systems and views from marginalized voices are
706 acknowledged and inherent power inequalities rooted in histories of colonial extraction
707 made explicit, very different research and policy priorities emerge, which can lead to
708 more transformative solutions (Orlove et al. 2023). Our results highlight the complexity
709 of social, ecological, economic, and cultural relations that mediate how local people
710 experience, interpret, and enact change, contributing with empirical ground to the
711 claims about needing to reframe the way we, as Western scientists, conceptualize and
712 engage with ‘climate change’. Our research brings at the forefront people’s lived
713 experiences – including emotional, spiritual, and moral dimensions –, pointing to the
714 importance of considering climate change from a relational perspective. Understanding
715 climate change within the broader trajectories of socio-environmental change will
716 encourage acting systemically, beyond technical fixes.

717

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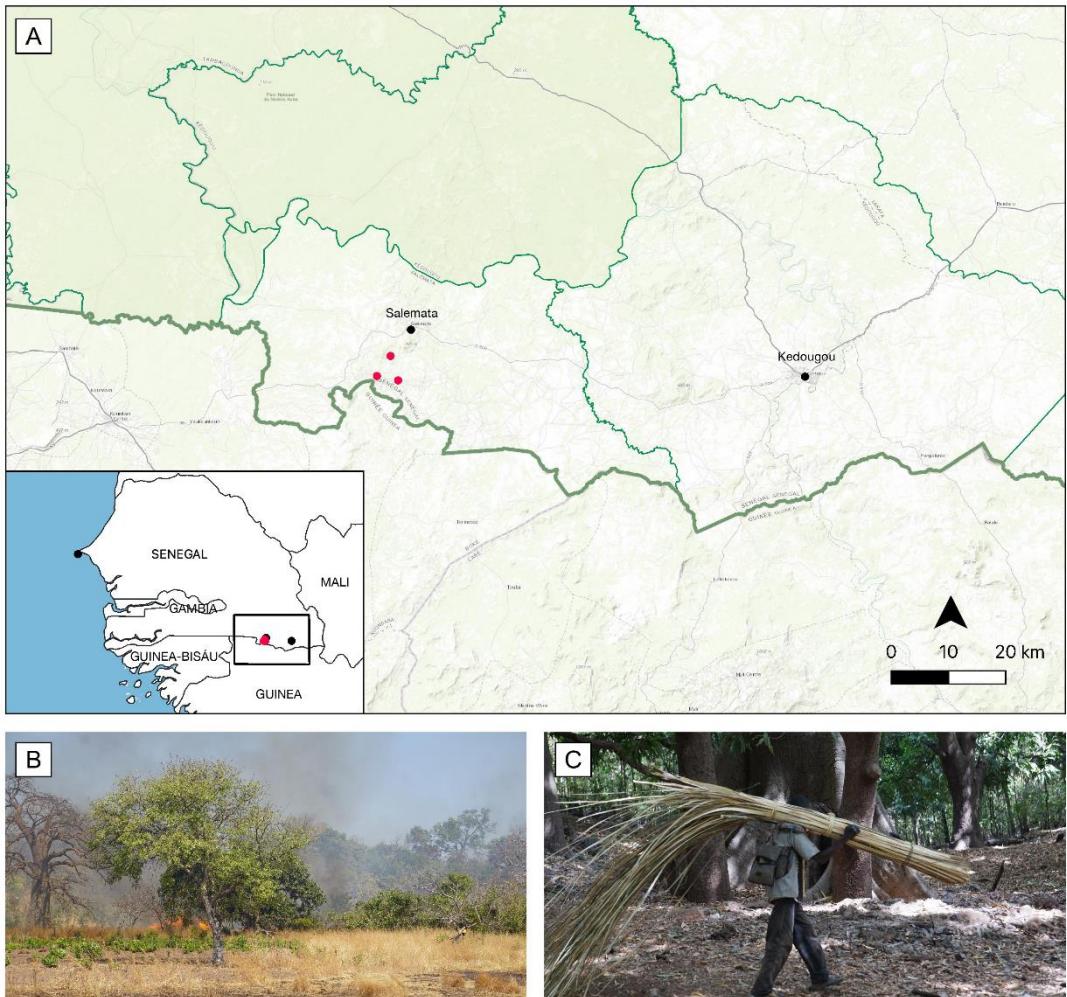
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997 **Figures**

998 Figure 1: Location of the study area and illustrations of environmental changes reported
999 by the Bassari. (A) Map of the study villages. (B) A spontaneous wildfire near a
1000 household. (C) A Bassari artisan transporting bamboo stripes for the construction of
1001 fences. Due to higher rates of resource extraction, the plant is becoming increasingly
1002 rare.

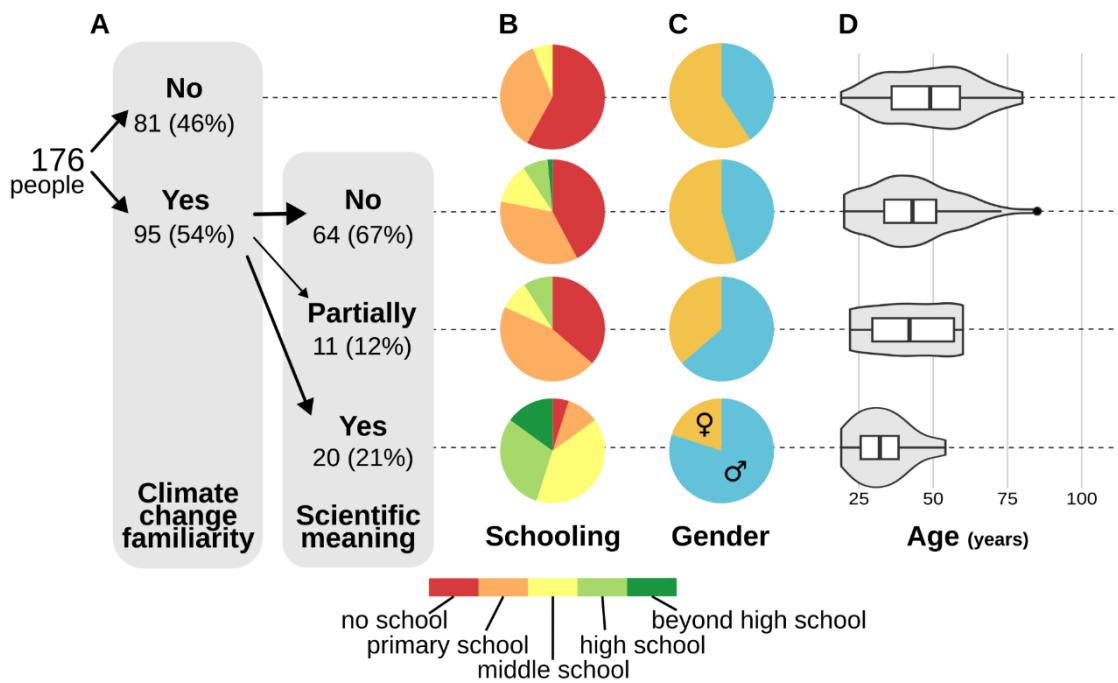


- Case study communities
- Market town (Salemata), administrative town (Kedougou), national capital (Dakar)

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1005 Figure 2: Socio-economic correlates to the local understanding of the scientific concept
 1006 of 'climate change'. (A) The first bar displays familiarity with the term 'climate
 1007 change', and the second matching between people's definitions and the scientific
 1008 understandings of 'climate change'. Pie charts (B) and (C) and violin plots (D) represent
 1009 the distribution of individual socio-demographic characteristics within each subgroup.

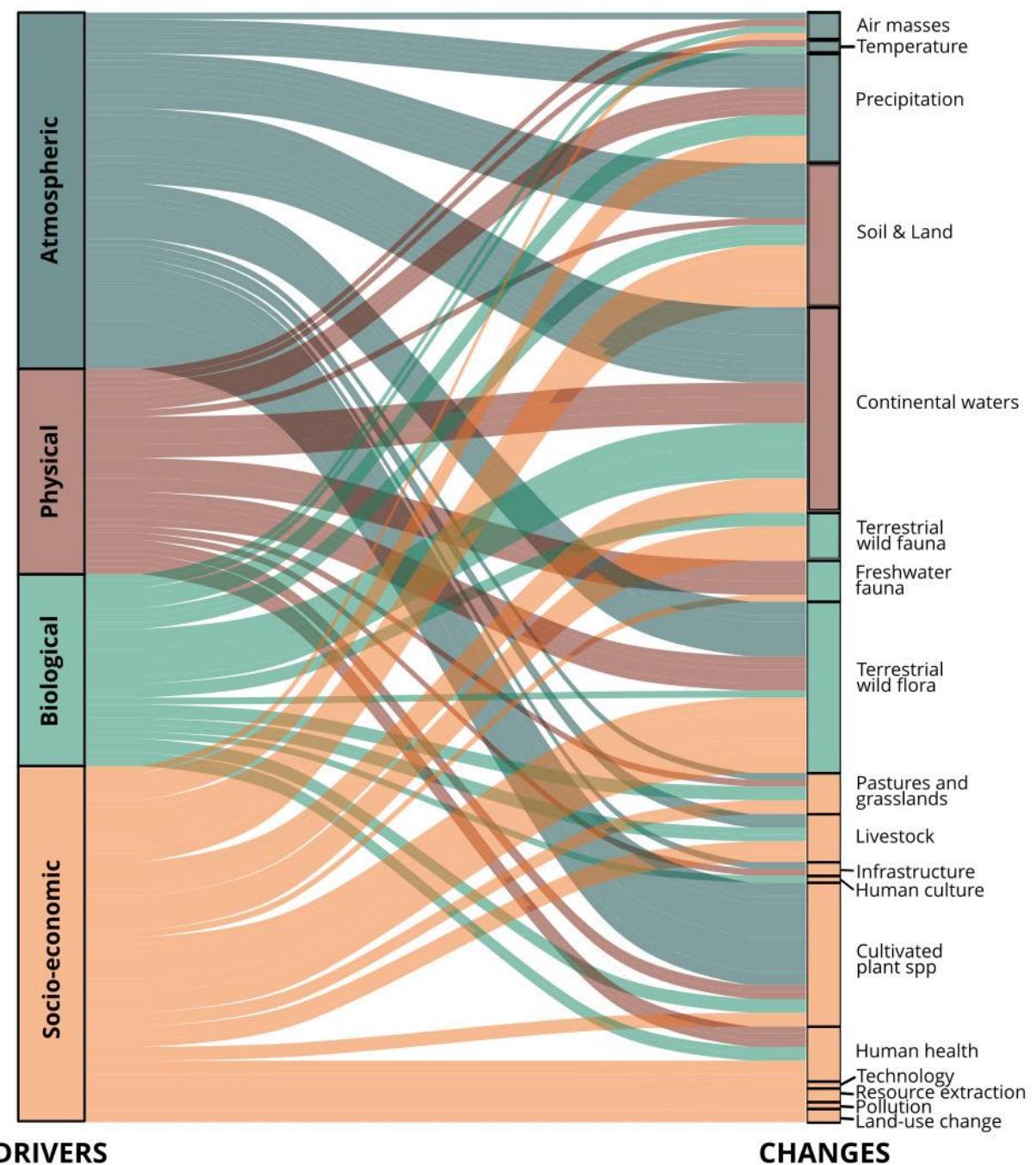


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1012 Figure 3: Sankey diagram showing the reported relation between atmospheric, physical,
1013 biological, socio-economic drivers and socio-environmental changes.

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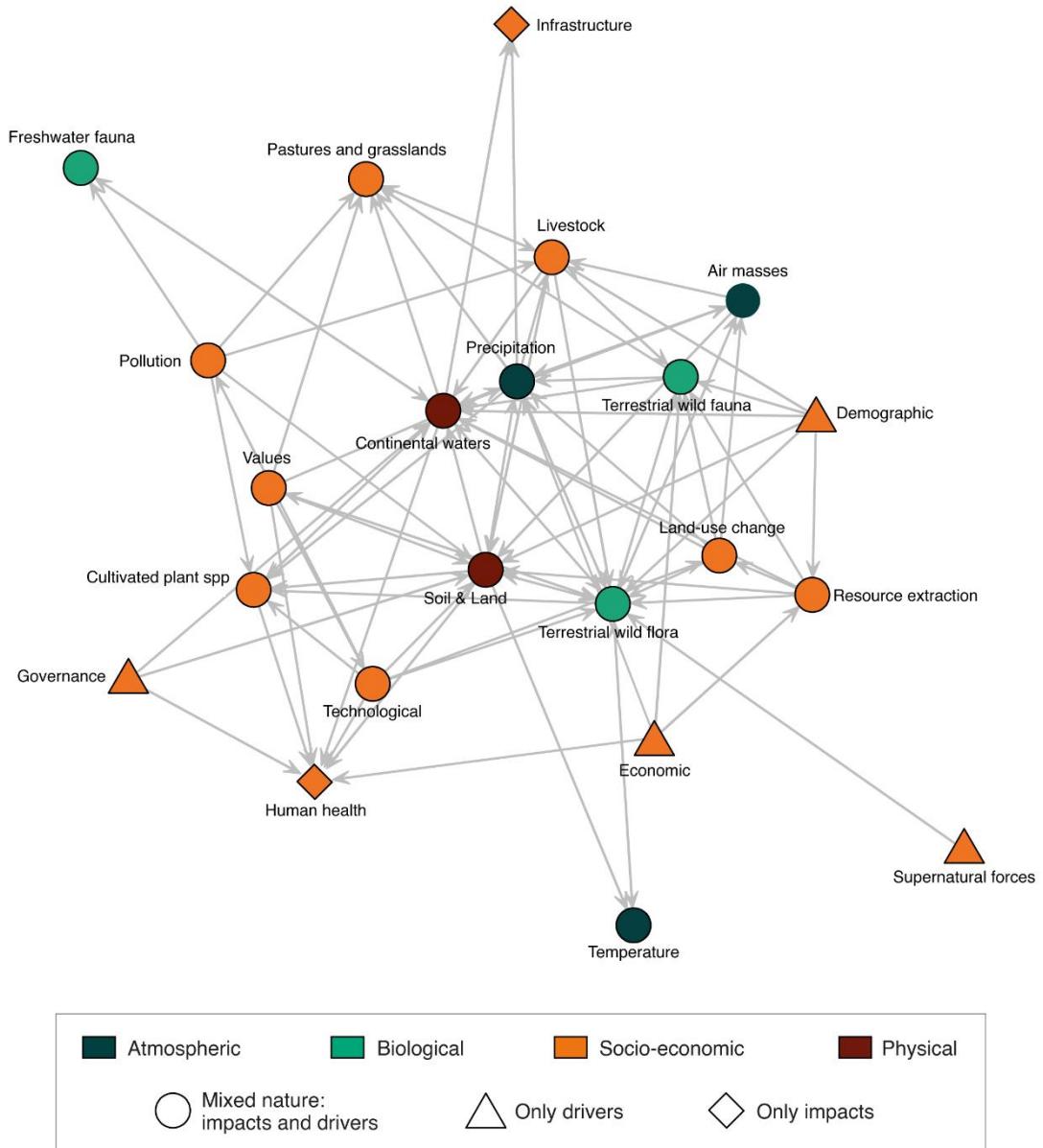
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1019 Figure 4: Network plot: representation of changes (drivers and impacts) collectively
1020 perceived by the Bassari.

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1026 **Tables**

1027 Table 1: Summary descriptive statistics of the sample composition

1028

Method	Sample size	Variable name	Descriptive statistics
Survey	176	Age	21 from 17-25 years (12 %) 58 from 26-40 years (33 %) 74 from 41-60 years (42 %) 23 from 61 to 100 years (13 %)
		Sex	48 % men 52 % women
		Level of schooling	79 no schooling (45 %) 59 primary school (34 %) 21 middle school (12 %) 13 high school (7 %) 4 beyond high school (2 %)
Semi-structured interview	47	Age	0 from 17-25 years (0 %) 10 from 26-40 years (21 %) 19 from 41-60 years (41 %) 18 from 61 to 100 years (38 %)
		Sex	72 % men 28 % women
		Age	4 from 17-25 years (6 %) 10 from 26-40 years (14 %) 39 from 41-60 years (57 %) 16 from 61 to 100 years (23 %)
Focus group discussions	69 (in 3 groups)	Sex	49 % men 51 % women

1029

1030 Table 2: Categorization of subsystems according to whether they are only impacts,
 1031 mostly impacts, mostly drivers, or only drivers

1032

Categorization	Subsystem	Ratio (Indegree/ou tdegree)	Outdegree	Indegree
Only impacts	Infrastructure	Inf	0	2
	Human health	Inf	0	10
Mostly impacts	Pastures and grass- lands	6.00	1	6
	Cultivated plant spp	5.00	4	20
	Freshwater fauna	3.00	2	6
	Terrestrial Wild Fauna	2.67	3	8
	Terrestrial Wild Flora	2.17	12	26
	Soil & Land	2.09	11	23
	Temperature	2.00	1	2
	Continental waters	1.92	13	25
	Livestock	1.20	5	6
	Air masses	0.57	7	4
Mostly drivers	Land-use change	0.50	6	3
	Precipitation	0.30	40	12
	Resource extraction	0.17	12	2
	Pollution	0.17	6	1
	Values	0.11	9	1
	Technological	0.11	9	1
	Governance	0	3	0
Only drivers	Demographic	0	8	0
	Economic	0	4	0
	Supernatural forces	0	2	0

1033 Table 3: Ranking of indegree and outdegree values for each of the subsystems

1034

Rank	Subsystems	
	Outdegree	Indegree
1	Precipitation	Terrestrial Wild Flora
2	Continental waters	Continental waters
3	Resource extraction	Soil & Land
4	Terrestrial Wild Flora	Cultivated plant spp
5	Soil & Land	Precipitation
6	Values	Human health
7	Technological	Terrestrial Wild Fauna
8	Demographic	Pastures and grasslands
9	Air masses	Livestock
10	Pollution	Freshwater fauna
11	Land-use change	Air masses
12	Livestock	Land-use change
13	Cultivated plant spp	Infrastructure
14	Economic	Resource extraction
15	Governance	Temperature
16	Terrestrial Wild Fauna	Values
17	Freshwater fauna	Technological
18	Supernatural forces	Pollution
19	Temperature	Governance
20	Pastures and grasslands	Demographic
21	Infrastructure	Economic
22	Human health	Supernatural forces

1035

1036 **Supplementary material**

1037

1038 Supplementary material 1: Classification and coding of the observations of environmental change and respective drivers reported by the Bassari
 1039 in the semi-structured interviews with consensus in the focus group discussions. Numeric values correspond to the proportions of times a driver
 1040 system was cited for a given change.

System / Subsystem	Changes	Atmospheric	Drivers (in %)		
			Physical	Biological	Socioeconomic
Atmospheric system					
Temperature	Changes in mean temperature (not further specified)	0	50	50	0
Precipitation	Changes in the amount of rainfall in a given season	0	16.6	33.3	50
	Changes in the length /duration of dry spells	0	0	0	100
	Changes in the predictability of rainfall	50	0	50	0
	Changes in fog thickness / density	50	50	0	0
	Changes in the frequency of fog or misty days	50	50	0	0
	Changes in the length / duration of fog	50	50	0	0
	Changes in air moisture / humidity	100	0	0	0
Air masses	Changes in wind strength or speed	0	0	50	50
	Changes in wind temperature	50	50	0	0
Physical system					
Continental waters	Changes in freshwater availability	0	22.2	44.4	33.3

Soil & Land	Changes in freshwater quality (not further specified)	0	100	0	0
	Changes in the phreatic level	100	0	0	0
	Changes in abundance of rivers or streams	33.3	0	33.3	33.3
	Changes in river / stream water flow, volume, level and/or depth	100	0	0	0
	Changes in the timing of seasonal fluctuation in river / stream / lake water level	20	0	60	20
	Changes in the number of natural freshwater springs	33.3	66.6	0	0
	Changes in the intensity of river / lake floods	100	0	0	0
	Changes in the speed of aquifer recharge	100	0	0	0
	Changes in soil fertility	33.3	0	0	66.6
	Changes in soil moisture / humidity	66.6	0	33.3	0
	Changes in soil temperature	0	50	50	0
	Changes in soil water infiltration	50	0	50	0
	Changes in rain-induced soil erosion and soil loss	50	0	0	50
	Changes in wind-induced soil erosion and soil loss	50	0	0	50
	Changes in wildfire frequency	20	0	0	80

Biological system

Freshwater fauna	Changes in the abundance of freshwater animal species, excluding fish (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, crustaceans, etc)	0	66.6	0	33.3
	Changes in the abundance of freshwater fish	0	100	0	0
Terrestrial Wild Fauna	Changes in the abundance of terrestrial fauna (mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, etc)	0	0	28.57	71.42
Terrestrial Wild Flora	Changes in the abundance or density of wild plant or fungi species	0	40	20	40
	Changes in the distribution of wild plant or fungi species	16.6	16.6	0	66.6
	Changes in the regeneration of wild plant species	0	50	0	50
	Changes in wild plant or fungi species mortality	66.6	0	0	33.3
	Change in the productivity of wild plant or fungi species (without further specification)	55.5	11.1	0	33.3
Socio-economic system					
Livestock	Changes in the frequency of livestock disease	25	0	25	50
	Changes in livestock behaviour	33.3	0	33.3	33.3
Cultivated plant spp.	Changes in crop maturation time	100	0	0	0

	Changes in crop mortality rates	83.3	66.6	0	0
	Changes in crop productivity / yield	62.5	12.5	25	0
	Changes in the frequency of crop 'pests' (insects, birds, larvae, etc)	0	0	0	100
	Changes in the frequency of successful cropping seasons	100	0	0	0
	Changes in length of cropping 'season' (not further specified)	100	0	0	0
Pastures and grasslands	Changes in pasture cover, surface or abundance	33.3	33.3	0	33.3
	Changes in the species composition of pastures	0	0	66.6	33.3
Human health	Changes in the frequency of conflicts over natural resources	0	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Changes in the incidence of human diseases (flu, allergies, etc)	0	33.3	0	66.6
	Change in the incidence of human waterborne diseases	0	100	0	0
	Changes in the shelf life of food products	0	0	100	0
Infrastructure	Changes in frequency of problems with transportation	33.3	33.3	0	0
Values	Changes in cultural-identity-spiritual values	0	0	100	0

Other drivers	Land-use change	0	0	0	100
	Pollution	0	0	0	100
	Resource extraction	0	0	0	100
	Technological	0	0	0	100

1041