

Understanding and Accelerating Collective Climate Action

Summary Report

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Note: This report analyses the current crisis of the climate movement globally and proposes strategies that can help our movements respond to today's ecological, political, and social crises. It brings together the shared understanding of 24 scholars, activists, and practitioners from different backgrounds who met for a week in June/July 2025 to pool our experiences and expertise. We hope it is useful for your own struggles and discussions! Please share it with anyone you think might find it helpful.

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Introduction

The multiple inter-related crises are getting deeper. Seven out of nine planetary boundaries have been crossed, and we are approaching multiple climate tipping points. Business-as-usual is deadly, not only for planetary and ecological health but also for the socio-economic well-being of large parts of humanity.

Hundreds of millions are robbed of the basics like food, safe drinking water, shelter, electricity, education, and dignity of life. The fossil fuel economy largely created the climate crisis, while still being unable to provide access to electricity to almost 700 million people globally. At the same time, we are witnessing a rise in fascism and a backlash against climate policy, as well as new wars and genocide. Defenders and climate justice activists are being criminalised, imprisoned, even murdered. The situation is bleak and the fronts are multiplying. We are losing, and the most vulnerable people of the world are losing badly, with mere survival becoming a luxury. The imperative for climate action is greater than ever before, but the state of global geopolitics and international cooperation is challenging our very humanity.

In this context, the Lorentz Center hosted a workshop called "Understanding and Accelerating Collective Climate Action" from June 30 – July 4 2025, organised by Fabian Dablander, Oscar Berglund, Dipti Bhatnagar, Adam Aron, and Julia Steinberger. The goal was to reflect on the current situation and discuss promising ways forward. The workshop brought together experienced organisers and high-level strategists from the climate movement as well as social movement scholars, historians, social, behavioural, political, and complex systems scientists. While several participants came from Global Majority countries, including South Africa, Mozambique and the Philippines, most participants came from Europe and some from the United States.

After a round of introductions and opening talks on Monday, participants worked in groups to "take stock" of the current moment and the status of the wider climate movement. From this joint assessment, topics that were deemed particularly important were distilled, which participants worked on throughout the week. Towards the end of the week, we again came together and discussed the work of the groups in the context of how to move forward as a climate movement and in the different terrains of struggle that we inhabit. Short summaries of the individual topics were created and time was dedicated to arrive at consensus, wherever possible. Our approach was a microcosm of working across silos, recognising the urgency of the moment, building working alliances between academics, activists and practitioners, and agreeing to disagree. We hope that listening into these discussions may also be helpful for other groups as a contribution to their own reflections.

After the workshop, the organisers finished and cleaned up the writing produced at the workshop and presented it to the participants for feedback. After integrating the feedback, we arrived at this report. The first section presents a synthesis, combining insights from the "taking stock" and the individual working groups. The second section presents the short summaries of the groups, for people who want to dive a bit deeper. We hope this report prompts new reflections and actions that can aid your struggles for a liveable and just world for all.

Synthesis

This synthesis section provides a diagnosis of the current situation and suggests ways forward. Each major point reflects broad agreement among the workshop participants; examples, debates, and more detailed discussions are in the bulleted subsections and do not necessarily represent the position of everyone involved.

Present context

Repression and obstruction: The present political context has hardened. As global heating accelerates, movements must now grapple with increased repression, declining popularity, policy backlash, genocide and war supported by their governments.

Fragmentation and lack of solidarity: The climate movement in the Global North often suffers from a lack of internationalism, international coordination, and solidarity; the focus is often restricted to their particular nation state without learning from similar struggles elsewhere.

Lack of perspective: One weakness of (parts of) the climate movement is that it has not put enough time and energy into reflecting on political strategies and clarifying ideological questions, meaning that movement-external events often lead to internal tensions and conflicts.

Tactical questions: Overall, disruptive protests have been less effective than initially hoped or believed. Disruption alone is insufficient without a clear theory of change, strategic targets, and pathways to escalation or resolution. Singular focus on disruption with the goal of media coverage as the unit of success is insufficient. The ultimate goal of increasing public salience of climate is laudable.

Broadening the struggle

A better future for all, prioritising well-being, fully democratic decision-making, within planetary boundaries requires a movement that places people's material realities, their personal identities and histories front and centre. Economic and geopolitical transformation are necessary, as well as facing the reality of ongoing collapse and instability.

Human well-being and material conditions: The climate movement must broaden to include wider social struggles—housing, food, transport, labour—in order to build a mass base and win concrete improvements in people's material conditions. Some are calling this type of shift “climate populism”, although the term is far from universal in its meaning.

- **Focus on attacking elites, wealth and power.** Through this we can build broader coalitions and engage people who don't necessarily think about climate change. Climate populist rhetoric should centre current material struggles and critique elites and corporations.
- Climate activists should **show solidarity with housing, labour, and utility justice struggles** to connect climate to everyday quality-of-life issues.
- Build networks that **connect local community projects (energy, food, housing, services)** so they reinforce each other and create counter-power.
- Climate populism must **stay accountable to grassroots** movements to avoid elite co-optation.
- **Climate as a link, not a start:** Organising around material interests means that we don't always start with 'climate' as the issue, but rather link the material issues and raise them

into climate, as well as building confidence in our ability and capacity as humans to collectively create better societies.

- **Electoral strategy** (far from universal agreement that this should be pursued, but mentioned by some): To mobilise large numbers and connect with the wider politics of climate populism (like Mamdani, Sanders), climate would have to be in it but not leading it.
- **Social investigation** is required to find out the material needs of people one wants to organise with.

Intersectional struggle – people matter: The climate movement *can* be more effective when it adopts an intersectional / solidarity-based approach and combines the climate struggle with other struggles.

- **Emotions and psychology matter:** Alongside addressing people's material concerns we also need to consider emotions, meaning-making, psychology, ethics, solidarity, joy, fear.
- **Solidarity with vulnerable peoples including migrants:** Global North colleagues must build alongside the most affected and vulnerable peoples in their own countries, e.g. migrants, for solidarity but also for understanding the inter-relation of crises. Including migrant communities strengthens the necessary anti-colonial and internationalist dimensions of transformative climate action.
- **Solidarity, unequal exchange and migration:** Migration is one of the principal relationships between Global North and South peoples, and a key right-wing talking point. Capital flows easily across borders, while peoples lives are far more policed. Solidarity, connecting with migrants and linking climate struggle to unequal exchange is key, and can disempower the far right.
- **Example:** For example, Geef Tegengas combines climate with Palestine liberation against the Port of Rotterdam, which has a large Muslim and working class population in the area. Context matters.

Economic transformation towards postgrowth: Transformation of economic systems, and the political powers that benefit from and uphold them, must be a core agenda of the climate movement. Postgrowth (degrowth in the Global North, delinking in the Global South) is necessary to stop growth-dominance and prioritise well-being within planetary boundaries. We need to tackle the fraught notion of "development" as economic and emissions growth.

- **Engagement with ecological economists and degrowth scholars:** The climate movement can benefit from closer collaboration with ecological economics and degrowth scholars, grounding their proposals for a positive future on scientific advances in these areas.
- **Our different starting points matters:** If we are trying to address the climate crisis using the lens of political economy, we will have different ideas than if the political economy crisis is central and climate is a lens for tackling this. This creates a more complex field of action and strategy. If our starting point is climate, deeper analysis uncovers systemic problems and this can bring the middle class into conversation. However other movements and groups will start from capitalism and political economy. We need the maturity to construct conversations across this diversity.
- Draw lessons from **Global South and Southern European** movements that have longstanding practices of **economic resistance under austerity and crisis**.
- **Economics and human nature:** Based on recent anthropology, human beings are innately capable of creating solidarity groups to maintain egalitarian societies against upstarts and bullies (see Christopher Boehm's Reverse Dominance Hierarchy), but are constrained by material conditions. Right now, we might have more capacity for re-establishing equality than we realise. Circles of solidarity are part of securing human needs within planetary

boundaries.

Geopolitical awareness and vision: We need to view the climate crisis through a geo-political lens, anchoring it in developments in the Global South. Global North countries alone cannot sufficiently address this issue.

- **South-South collaboration is critical:** Focus on South-South solidarity, delinking, ecological reparations, linking this to decolonial worker struggles in the North, and a diaspora organising strategy. Build South–South collaboration on renewable energy to reduce dependency on the Global North.
- **Coordination:** We need more regional and international coordination between different parts of our movement.
- **Climate diplomacy:** The international level of climate negotiations has failed us – but are still one of the only places for Global South voices. Global North allies can support these by engaging and pushing their countries to recognise and support Global South positions. **The Fossil-Fuel Nonproliferation Treaty as a core campaign and demand:** The Fossil Fuel Nonproliferation Treaty is advocated by the climate movement, countries and populations most predominantly from the Global South, to focus the culprits of climate damage, and create international diplomatic opportunities and political will beyond the COPs.
- Any fossil fuel phaseout strategy must be paired with a **just transition** that protects workers, communities, and Global South economies.
- **Focus on debt default/cancellation as the ultimate climate finance:** This can help unite Global North and Global South struggles (see also postgrowth delinking proposals).
- **Diverse states, diverse roles:** The position of the climate movement towards China as a renewable energy powerhouse and largest GHG emitter, Brazil caught between petro-interests and Amazonian destruction, the US as a declining but still destructive imperial hegemony, the multiple petrostates dominating geopolitics and climate diplomacy (Russia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Azerbaijan, etc) all require consideration.

Multiplying fronts, fascism and instability/collapse: The fronts are multiplying. We are facing interconnected crises and must not separate out the climate crisis as an isolated phenomenon. This leads to false solutions and dangerous distractions.

- **Fascism:** The climate movement must explicitly integrate anti-fascism into our strategies.
- **Collapse:** The popularity of diverse collapse discourses (in the UK, France, Germany...) could constitute distractions away from facing the fossil fuel and livestock industries and their allies. But these discourses may also help communicate that we must broaden the struggle beyond mitigation to include adaptation and increasing the resilience of communities, as well as to make space for collective loss and grief, and orient these towards collective action.
- **Prepare for escalating climate impacts** by mobilising society around material interests like food and energy security.
 - Communicate climate impacts in ways that **build constructive resistance** and be careful with collapse narratives.
 - Facilitate cross-regional learning, especially from **communities already adapting under conditions of deprivation**.

Adaptation / geoengineering: The climate movement should find ways to integrate demands for mitigation as well as adaptation.

- The IPCC special reports (rather than the working groups) are already doing this: Special Report on 1.5 degrees, upcoming Special Report on Cities.

- Both **mitigation and adaptation come in regressive, shallow, incremental or transformative forms**: Resisting the regressive (like border walls and detention centres) and supporting the transformative is key, and requires taking power structures into account.
- **Resisting harmful developments of solar geo-engineering**: Hands off Mother Earth Alliance (HOME) is an effort that requires more support and engagement from academics in particular. International initiatives like the Solar Geoengineering Non-Use Agreement are models for countering dangerous corporate-led narratives.
- Counterpoint: **Some forms of geo-physical intervention might be useful** and there are some (good and bad) which the climate movement may not be able to stop (with some of the work already being in progress). This needs more nuanced discussion and more knowledge.

Practical ways forward

Alliances and collaborations

A movement ecology: We need an ecosystem perspective, where we have different groups doing all kinds of different things related to the climate struggle. Strategic alliances are built around developing common political projects (despite differing ideologies and worldviews), while tactical alliances are built on common campaign goals. Clarity on these distinctions, and understanding of the worldviews and limitations of movement allies, is necessary for effective movement successes despite disagreements, without falling into classical fractures. Power analysis helps with building alliances and analysis.

- Building alliances **requires investing in trust, levelling hierarchies, and relationship-building** with rank-and-file members, not just leaders.
- Strategic alliances for systemic change **are best led by directly affected groups**, rather than by enlightened elites or comfortably situated groups, with unspoken attachments to their own power and privilege and little understanding of other people's situations and agency.
- We need to build **broad intersectional alliances with groups attacked by authoritarianism**, prioritising those with systemic change ambitions and counter-power potential.
- **Different groups don't have to like each other**. Nor does everyone need the same theory of change or tactical repertoire. However, understanding of differences is key.

Build **solidarity with Global Majority** struggles through joint campaigns, diaspora community partnerships, and long-term strategy co-creation.

- Solidarity must move beyond moral performance to **reciprocal, decolonial commitment rooted in shared struggle**.
- Practical steps include **political education, anti-racist workshops, and adopting fair share frameworks** that address climate debt.

Alliances and collaboration between movement and researchers.

- We need more **formal and informal spaces where movements and academics** can jointly define needs and strategies.
- Academics should **co-create research questions with activists** rather than imposing their own agendas.
- Academics studying movements **should agree in advance** with movements on methods, outputs, and expectations to **avoid exploitative dynamics**.
- Academics should prioritise **contributing to movement capacities and actions over publications** alone.
- Academics could usefully prioritise studying the **long-term effects of polarising disruptions** and the conditions that flip media coverage from supportive to damaging.

- Academics and activists may find that jointly producing a **compendium of fossil fuel harms** could strengthen advocacy and legitimacy.

Strategy

Strategies and tactics follow from worldviews: Parts of the climate movement have overly focused on making demands on the government rather than engaging in economic disruption. This is a classed assumption. It assumes that the nation state / politicians will listen if you make enough noise (have public opinion behind you). Economic and power analyses would help explain why this is not sufficient.

- Movements should adopt multiple **definitions of “winning,”** valuing power- and relationship-building alongside policy outcomes.
- **Disruption of what/whom for what/whom:** the kind of disruptive protest that disrupts the public (as opposed to economic/power accumulation) for the sake of media attention has clear limitations. The question of effectiveness needs to consider other actors’ failure as well, like media control by economic interest groups, and state-capture by fossil fuel interests annulling the democratic potential of civil disobedience.
 - Disruptive tactics aimed at the public work best when they are non-violent, tied to a concrete demand, and aimed at high-leverage nodes (e.g., fossil infrastructure, financiers).
 - Symbolic disruptive actions (e.g., soup-throwing) should be quickly coupled with material leverage or coalition-building to avoid backlash.
 - Long-term disruption strategies should aim to fracture elite alliances while maintaining public sympathy.
 - The most-established and historically effective disruptive strategies are those of labour struggles and non-violent resistance to colonial power; women’s strikes and LGBTQIA+ challenges to patriarchal and heteronormative arrangements also have a long history.
- **Prefiguration:** Economic disruption means building economic threats to authoritarian/neoliberal fossil capital, whether through renters unions, food or worker cooperatives
- **The power of counter interests and counter strategies:** It’s not that the movement’s plans were necessarily bad, but conditions have changed, counter-strategies are powerful, they know our theories. We need to be mindful of counter strategies and how they are deliberately organised.
- **Activist identity:** Activist identities can be a potential barrier to broadening our movements. This is also manufactured by counter strategies, which delegitimise the figure of the “activist”. However dominant ethnic, patriarchal and heteronormative ideas of “normality” already exclude many LGBTQIA+ people, members of cultural minorities, disabled people etc. who have no option but to create their own communities and identities – which are directly targetted by far-right actors in both policy and street violence.

We need to develop long-term strategies that **anticipate countermovement responses** and exploit their weaknesses.

- We need to strengthen civil society and academic collaborations to **study and expose the enemy’s knowledge and propaganda machinery.** We need to systematically track and expose disinformation networks like the Atlas Network, drawing on both academic research and civil society experience.
- Academics and activists should create **accessible summaries of research** on climate obstruction and enemy tactics.

- We need to **counter disinformation by building coordinated networks** of progressive journalists, think tanks, funders, and academics.
- Movements should distinguish between irreconcilable enemies (e.g., fossil fuel corporations) and **forces that can be influenced or engaged**.

Organisational structure and discipline depends on strategy: Structure and strategy should be aligned, and rethought together.

Loosely organised vs committed. There are distinctions between committed, disciplined organisations and more open and decentralised ones — they build different strengths and will not be capable of the same strategies.

Benefits and dangers of open discussion. There are pitfalls as well as benefits to open discussion around strategy, given ongoing criminalisation and repression. For example, when engaging in economic disruption, we need to see with whom we can collaborate and how.

Communication and framing: Past decades of neoliberal rise to dominance have imposed a false frame of selfishness and lack of ability/desire to cooperate. Activate frames that don't reinforce individualism and neoliberal ideology. Build confidence and power in self and capacity for collective action.

- **Inner/outer distinction:** There is an important difference between on the one hand the public messaging and framing of our efforts and on the other internal strategising, training and deciding how we organise. It takes sufficient training and discipline to clarify the two — and appropriate internal discussion spaces.
- **Movement strategising is much more than discourse.** We can take an issue into account in our analysis, this doesn't necessarily imply anything regarding our strategic focus or our discourse or our alliance building. Let's learn to separate analysis from discourse and the practice of alliance building, and not immediately jump to the concern that "normal people won't understand this."
- **Economic democracy and organising to disrupt harmful power/economy actors:** A growing body of postgrowth and heterodox economic research is pointing the way towards economic democracy to build necessary counterpower to industrial and wealth conglomerates, and combat inequality. Organising labour and community unions is crucial to realising such economic democracy. Key reference here: Jane McAlevey.

Improving learning and collective capacity

Strengthening **movement infrastructure** (media, culture, decision-making, spaces) is essential for building collective strategic capacity.

- Movements should invest in **emancipatory organising approaches**, such as developing better forms of democratic decision-making, popular education, intersectional organising etc. Mainstream organisational tools such as leadership development, accountability, and conflict resolution can also be helpful.
- **Movement facing practical support**, such as professional mediation, website design, and legal support can help wider society unlearn the notion that they are not part of the struggle.

Learning and training within the movement: The climate movement should strive towards better and more integrated political and economic education of its members, not solely more climate education.

- Democratic training in movements as movements — tactics and strategies, movement histories and disagreements, organising principles, relevant reading both activist and

academic – is fundamental to being able to manage complex struggles under huge pressures. It needs to model space for respectful and collaborative disagreement rather than top-down presentations of magic solutions accessible only to the leadership.

- Learning how to work together across difference (e.g. feminist and intersectional critiques of traditional organising models, exploration of different models of organisational diversity and alliance-building) is fundamental to broadening movement participation in a durable way.
- Educating activists on **how power operates** is a critical requirement for coherent strategy.
- **Ideological literacy:** The climate movement should not seek a pure ideology, but it should discuss ideology. This helps avoid false (liberal) solutions and pointless strategies. This involves a lot more political education.
- **Training and practice:** Part of this training is the collective struggle itself, putting ideas into practice, and learning from practice. Popular education methodologies are a powerful resource in this context.

Broadening our repertoire: The climate movement should broaden its repertoire of past movements it draws on, especially the decolonial struggles of the 20th century and indigenous peoples' struggles to defend their land. Groups in the Global North can learn a lot from groups in the Global South, who have extensive experience organising under increased repression.

Summary paragraphs of working groups

The paragraphs below are jointly produced summaries of the individual working groups, categorised into four themes: understanding action, building alliances, understanding enemies, and creating positive visions. Not everyone involved in the workshop agrees with everything written here, but we think that "listening in" to these summaries of our discussions may be a useful resource to contribute to a group's own discussions.

Understanding Action: Theory and practices of movements

Political Education, Strategic Capacity

Movements are networks of organisations, informal groups and individuals – so they can only exist as coherent actors with strategic capacity if they have significant infrastructure enabling this at a *movement* level, beyond individual organisations. But e.g. political education, internal media, movement-level decision-making and things like movement culture, identity, and memory are increasingly weak, partly because of neoliberalism and subcontracting intellectual tasks to academia, social media, radical-but-commercial publishing which are good at outrage and structural analysis but not at "what are we going to do together?". In our discussion, political education (beyond technical and tactical training) was the most visible or achievable dimension – and how we can do it well, appropriately to different levels of experience etc. A key barrier is that activists often fail to see the significance or are resistant to "more talk", but there are some good initiatives in Europe as well as powerful experiences in the Global South to inspire and learn from. What we need is usually not more climate education, but systemic and political: how does climate change connect to capitalism, colonialism etc. Political education is about educating ourselves (internal) and the public (external). It cannot only be theoretical, but has to be applied to our groups, meaning active learning together, instead of listening to theories.

This more enhanced coordination and orchestration within the broader movement is the glue that makes us a movement. It is not about educating individuals, but about developing a

collective ability to think and act. Political education should be around values, communication roles, common enemies, when to come together, actual material spaces of buildings and infrastructure.

Ideology-Strategy-Theory of Change

Ideology, strategy and theories of change are often mixed up in movement discussions about what they do and why. Ideology is a way of understanding power to explain the world. Understood as such, it can help us as movements. It can contain analytical elements (factual understandings) and value-based elements (more subjective ideas about what we want). We agree that a bare minimum understanding of unequal power relations inherent to capitalism is important for very much activist operations (but not necessarily all – one can have tactical cooperation without that). But most movements would benefit from educating about power structures. Here is one way to see the hierarchy of ideas and operations: Ideology (facts+values) → Politics → Theory of Change → Strategy → Tactics.

Paulo Freire explains power, in his 1968 book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed':

The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both... Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all)... revolutionary power moves beyond its role as a necessary obstacle confronting those who wish to negate humanity, and assumes a new and bolder position, with a clear invitation to all who wish to participate in the reconstruction of society.

Forms of Disruption

Disruptive climate protests create a delicate balance between amplifying urgency and provoking opposition. Disruption with the purpose of information/awareness spread is a great first tactic as it can bring those willing into the cause (it's often necessary but not sufficient and has "decreasing returns"). Then, targeting proximal networks of influence will bring others. This may relate to alliance creation, and it works best (in the short term) by targeting adjacent clusters (of people, topics, ideologies, etc.). The clustered process may alienate some not yet in the movement, particularly as it makes identity more salient.

Simple practical take-aways that seem clear: disruptive tactics in climate activism work "best" when (i) they are non-violent, (ii) tie the action's imagery directly to a concrete demand, and (iii) target high-leverage nodes such as fossil infrastructure or its financial backers, where public sympathy is higher and strategic pressure is real. Fracturing elites should be a long-term aim of disruption. Reducing disruption to ordinary people should be an aim, rather the strategy should consider how to include them. Symbolic shocks like soup-throwing can puncture "business-as-usual" narratives but have diminishing returns over time. If they are not quickly coupled to material leverage or broadened coalition work they might slip into backlash loops.

For researchers, there are two urgent evidence gaps: the long-run net effect of polarising disruptions on policy adoption, and the strategic elements that flip media coverage from positive to

negative, from manageable controversy into movement-crippling backlash. Mapping how supportive organisations, narrative framing and timing (e.g., elections) modulate them, could give activists and allies a clearer playbook for scaling disruption without undermining public support. The (incomplete) causal-loop diagram in Figure 1 identifies five feedbacks that focus on awareness creation and possible negative media effects. Some balancing feedbacks that may only act on the long term but that can be targeted by others to suppress action, specifically, the “how-it-should-be loop”, or **attitude-shift** cycle, which activates when the perception of a reduced policy gap leads to less engagement. This can be maliciously targeted by changing the perception of the policy effects.

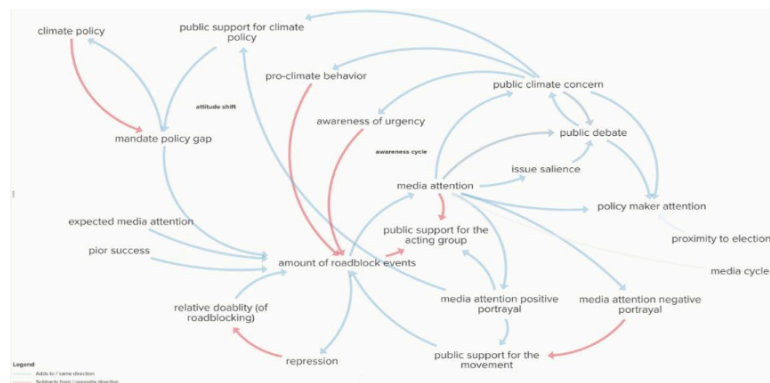


Figure 1. Partial causal loop diagram of the effect of roadblocks.

Academic-Activist Collaboration

Social scientists often adopt an exploitative approach to their research on social movements that focuses too much on unilateral benefit: They use activists for their research and then leave without providing much insight or knowledge in return. This naturally frustrates activists. Instead, social scientists should enter into dialogue with activists and base their research questions on what the activist group actually needs. Often, what is needed is not (only) research, but more capacity / capabilities. For example, the Portuguese group Climáximo has a template email reply for researchers seeking to conduct research with them. They invite the researchers to participate in their activities before agreeing to their research. Several researchers have been mobilised in this way.

There are no formal spaces, and few informal ones or research groups within movements, where academics and activists can meet to discuss how research can inform movement activities. There are several barriers to creating such spaces: most academics' main incentive is to publish papers, while activists often lack the capacity to take on 'non-essential' tasks. Similarly, activists work on more urgent timescales: campaign materials are needed in days, while the research and publication process can take months or even years. Nevertheless, such spaces could be highly productive, strengthening the strategic capacity of movements while increasing academic engagement.

Social scientists who believe that their research can inform the activities of advocacy and activist groups should think again. Does it really? Or are they just fooling themselves? If the research question was not co-created with the relevant groups, it is much less likely to be valuable to them — or even to be noticed in the first place. If social scientists want their research to inform work on the ground, they should team up and get involved with advocacy and activist groups. They may realise that the best approach is to shift focus from publications to public actions, and beyond sharing knowledge to work together, share and build up institutional capabilities.

There is nevertheless a need for an academics-movement interface due to the discrepancy of how things should be in a shared ecosystem of struggle and how things actually are. Academics should engage with and support progressive social movements, and they should refrain from publicly undermining social movements. They should support movements with relevant research, but without taking up too much space in activist circles. Academics who study social movements particularly should make sure that they agree with the movement organisations and networks that they are studying, about how they do it and what the outputs will be.

One thing that, so far, hinders academics in achieving this more ethical and politically productive way of working is the neoliberal culture we live in, e.g. “this is simply not our job”. Connected to this is the incentive structure for academics being focused on very slow academic publications and funding processes, which are all of limited use for activists. The current attack on universities and particular disciplines from fascist political forces makes such collaborations and resistance more urgent — and also more likely to be established because such collaborations often start from self-interest (neoliberal culture is the reality we live in) and eventually move to a collective interest. This would lead to a decrease of the risk of exploitative relationships with movements, and coming to an agreement of engagement. This workshop group of activists, academics and academic activists is a good place to start a network that can work as an interface between movements and academics.

There is a long history of collaborative, engaged and movement-based research but the routines and structures of neoliberal academia mean that most young researchers are unaware of past and present models, while most movements’ dominant experience of research is negative. The most recent methods handbook for social movements research centres engaged and collaborative research methods: related resources are available [here](#). The social movements research journal [Interface](#) has emphasised dialogue between movements and researchers for the past 15 years. Further resources are available [here](#).

From alliances, South-North learning and winning a fossil fuel phaseout

Possible Alliances

The multiple inter-related crises and televised genocides remind us that we need systemic rather than incremental change. For system change, we need alliances “from the bottom (i.e. groups without formal power, wealth, cultural privilege etc) and to the left”. For system change, these alliances need to be led by self-organised groups of those most directly affected, the marginalised and oppressed rather than those most implicated in the system. This is particularly true for strategic alliances rather than short-term coalitions on specific demands. Strategic alliances are built on

common political projects (despite differing ideologies and worldviews), while tactical alliances are built on common campaign goals. Different groups don't have to like each other. Nor does everyone need the same theory of change or tactical repertoire. However, understanding of differences is key.

Within these collaborations, organisers should pay attention to internal power structures, make sure to work with the rank-and-file, not solely leadership, and not let all relations go through a few trusted people who are put on a pedestal. Relationship building, Freirean approaches (e.g., levelling of hierarchies, building mutual learning), and moving at the speed of trust are key for building strategic alliances with a long-term shared vision – it takes time. Winning as an alliance can mean different things, and those metrics should be chosen carefully (e.g., building movement power and coalitional relationships are important goals in themselves, in addition to policy outcomes, which are more relevant for short-term coalitions). In a changing landscape, the ability to change direction is vital, and requires a group with the mandate for such change within the organisation. Movements might want to experiment with more coherent forms of decision making, including clear procedures of strategic input from the broad movement, accountability and learning in order to be more agile and persistent in escalating. Examples discussed include the Narmada anti-dam movement in India, the anti-Shell movement in Ireland, and the Zapatistas' role in the anti-capitalist "movement of movements."

Building stronger connections between climate activists and other social struggles is a major priority, for at least four reasons: 1) it can help expand the size, visibility, and influence of the climate movement, 2) it can help foster stronger class consciousness, which has been deeply eroded in the neoliberal era, 3) it increases understanding of climate as a deeper issue than just greenhouse gas emissions, and 4) it can help neutralise the mass appeal of the Right. The climate movement will need to work with organisers and activists in the labour movement, affordable housing advocates, and utility justice campaigners, among other movements that directly respond to problems around affordability and people's quality of life. We can build on and support existing concrete examples including [public power fights](#), [union campaigns](#), and [balancing](#) the power and financial costs between landlords and tenants. We should also unite with global movements against exploitation, such as those fighting for progressive taxation, debt cancellation, and overhaul of the international financial and economic system. For climate organisers, building relationships may involve showing solidarity with other groups' struggles, without trying to recruit people to "climate" activism right away.

North-South and South-South solidarity

We need greater geopolitical awareness and vision, viewing the climate crisis through a geopolitical lens, and anchoring it in developments in the Global South. Global North countries alone cannot sufficiently address this issue. South-South solidarity and collaboration is critical in working towards ecological reparations and linking this to decolonial workers struggles in the North, and a diaspora organising strategy.

It is critical to build justice and equity into all levels of our work. There is an invitation to Global North movements to meaningfully learn from, exchange knowledge with, and be in solidarity with Global Majority struggles. This is critical given the global geopolitics and will help to fight deep-rooted issues including racism, othering, fear, protectionism, a lack of knowledge and care, among others. Local struggles should be seen not as isolated efforts but as part of a global system of

resistance, requiring a deep internationalist spirit and genuine solidarity, not rooted in pity or paternalism, but in shared interest and mutual liberation.

Solidarity is an understanding that your struggle is my struggle and my struggle is your struggle. This is grounded in a clear analysis of power: capitalism and imperialism extract and concentrate power, often through the erasure of people's autonomy, land, and cultures. White supremacy, as a tool historically constructed by the ruling class to divide, dominate, and dehumanise, must be actively dismantled. This means reconnecting to roots, culture, and ancestry, and embracing the diversity and finding unities in this — both in the Global Majority and the Global North. This paves the path for movements not based on appropriation or white saviourism, but on reciprocal understanding and accountability.

Solidarity can be communicated through multiple lenses: care and shared humanity, an understanding of just and alternative development pathways that avoids emissions and repeating the mistakes of the Global North, or through an analysis of power that resonates with different audiences. Building this solidarity requires relational work, holding nuance across contexts, and collaborating across borders through joint campaigns. One particularly important avenue for Global North groups would be to work together with migrant and diaspora communities from the Global Majority, as the most direct way to build those global connections across geographic distances and fight othering. Other practical steps include political education, anti-racist workshops, testing joint campaigns, co-creating long-term strategies with Global Majority partners, adopting fair share frameworks that address climate debt, and supporting local groups to think of multi-year plans to weave in solidarity with international campaigns in the longer term. Solidarity must not be a checklist or a moral performance, but a relational, strategic, and decolonial commitment rooted in shared struggle and long-term movement-building.

Winning a Fossil-Fuel-Phaseout

The world urgently needs a full, fair, fast, funded phaseout of all fossil fuels. Again and again, the question of why we must urgently phase out fossil fuels has been asked and tragically answered. The true costs of oil, gas, and coal are far too great, measured in impacts on workers, our neighbours, our communities, our health, our lives, our climate and our very survival on this planet. Fossil fuel phase out is critical to stopping the climate crisis while also eliminating many social, environmental, and economic injustices. Phasing-in of alternatives and ensuring energy access to all is critical, especially the almost 700 million on the planet without access to electricity. It is essential that any efforts, struggles, strategies and initiatives for fossil fuel phase-out are deeply anchored in the need to ensure a genuinely just transition where workers and communities in all affected sectors are cared for, fossil fuel producing developing countries are supported and enabled to diversify their economies, and that the revolution to 100% renewable energy generates people-centered and environmentally sound energy systems and do not replicate current systems of exploitations (including from extraction of critical minerals), privatisation and concentration of power. There is significant scope for South-South collaboration to build and deploy renewable energy based on one's own resources in ways that cut dependencies on the global North, lessen international indebtedness and build new forms of economies for well-being (see www.justtransitionafrica.org and Friends of the Earth International's [Pathways to System Change](#) as examples).

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative (<https://fossilfuel treaty.org/>) and the World Commission on Fossil Fuel Phase out (<https://www.fossilfuelcommission.earth/>) are two

important initiatives dedicated to the phase out of fossil fuels that provide space and opportunity to advance such agendas. It is important to have a variety of umbrella and local campaigns that can plot together strategically to cover the fossil fuel fight on different fronts, global fossil fuel governance initiatives working alongside grassroots-led fights, and the spaces of facilitated structured dialogue that bridge global governance decision-makers and the grassroots. This can help build legitimacy, shift narratives, and create pressure from multiple angles.

Academics, researchers and activists can work together to build and contribute a compendium of harms of fossil fuels, which would help the World Commission, the Fossil Fuel Treaty and other relevant initiatives in their advocacy work.

Obstacles, enemies and shocks – opposition research

Enemies and countermovements

We need to better understand the counterforces to our efforts to achieve a just and sustainable world, including how they operate in a granular way. It may be useful to distinguish between forces that are *directly working against our common interests* (the fossil fuel industry, tech oligarchs, agro-industrial complex, military-industrial complex, neoliberal thinktanks/lobby organisations, far-right parties, media corporations) and *social forces that may be slowing down and preventing progress*, and which may be possible to engage with and influence to an extent. For example, within our own networks the radical analysis sketched out here is opposed by ecomodernist progressives, including many trade unions and by mainstream environmental organisations, and is seen as too radical by many in universities/schools, faith-based organisations and the media. Meanwhile values (including hypermoralism), egos and personalities within our own movements can insist on centring themselves to the point of disabling action. We would also hope to be able to use state power at different levels (national, local, municipal) but at present this is more of an aspiration than a reality in terms of the programme outlined here. However, unlike those who are directly working against our common interests these are areas where it may be possible to move some groups, forces, institutions and dynamics in a productive direction.

We need to become better and sharper in analysing and anticipating what possible countermovements and counteractions our own strategies will likely generate and be ready or steps ahead – recognising these forces often act quickly and strategically (and are well resourced). We need to have a long-game strategy.

We need to understand what makes these forces so dangerous (funding, access to political power, ways to manipulate public minds and opinions etc.), when it makes sense to relate to them as ‘enemies’, and importantly, what are key weaknesses and leverage points where we can effectively intervene – not least, where we can exploit their own divisions and conflicting interests.

In order to counter the well-funded and well-organised information and knowledge machinery of our enemies, we need to study them, expose them and fight them, by setting up our own networks of information and knowledge production. The knowledge held by social movements that face the brunt of corporate and state power is important here. Academics can do a lot to work with movements and civil society organisations (CSOs) in studying the enemy’s knowledge machinery, with relatively little economic input. We need stronger networks between CSOs and academics to facilitate this. It is useful to identify terrain of struggle in this sense, as the enemy tries to co-opt them, such as school curricula and the IPCC. We also need to make sure that it draws on

research that exposes their efforts of doing so. We should emulate the enemy's strategy by strengthening and coordinating our own networks of sympathetic journalists, progressive think tanks, progressive funders, CSOs, movement activists and academics.

How the enemy works

The extent of climate disinformation, denial, and delay tactics is massive and poorly understood by our movements and academia. This is not a new phenomenon, but with centuries old roots and many decades of concerted, coherent strategies that we are only beginning to understand and map. The Atlas network, founded by Antony Fisher, has been developed over four decades with a core objective of disabling democratic institutions (including universities) and nation state capacities that would impose any constraint on the freedom of corporates to do as they please. Oil money is central to the funding. Climate and environment is targeted – along with gender and anti-racism – because addressing it is not compatible with the interests of monopolistic oligarchs. They have mobilised through training schools targeted at politicians, journalists and school educators. The work of academics and movements must be to track and expose them. But there are questions about what arenas of action are possible and effective for movements. Debates concern the remaining powers of individual nation states and what powers they can in fact exercise, particularly if they act in solidarity.

Detailed exposure of how the enemy works in a granular way is key, but often not easily accessible. There needs to be more efforts on distilling such insights, and making them readily accessible. Academics in close collaboration with activists can boost this significantly if they have a strategy and some resources (much can be done with relatively small money, such as support for research assistants). There is a need to also think larger and longer-term to generate resources and capacity that can match what we're up against. There are several key insights from granular exposures movements should make more use of – both academic exposures (e.g. Oreskes and Conway's work, Nancy McLean's book: *Democracy in Chains*, Quinn Slobodian's book *Globalists*, exposure of the Atlas network) and concrete (past and current) cases from civil society engagement and action.

One current case is the battle around solar geoengineering where the full playbook is applied of shaping narratives, co-opting and hi-jacking 'vulnerable' governments and movements, artificially created organisations and institutions to give the appearance of an unstoppable wave/movement towards the normalisation and acceptance of, in this case, an existentially dangerous technology. The call for an international Non-Use Agreement on Solar Geoengineering (www.solargeoeng.org) provides a great example of an initiative, initiated by academics, and now supported by both governments and civil society with the potential to effectively counter the dangerous narratives of pro-geoengineers, call out their tactics, reclaim the precautionary principle and advance a genuinely useful multilateral process with global South Governments in the lead, backed by civil society/social movements and academics.

Strategy under fascism

We are facing multiple interconnected crises. This polycrisis, which is exacerbated by geopolitical conflict and rearmament, is the result of capitalist dynamics of competitive accumulation, growth dependencies, and extractivist appropriation in the context of the breaching of planetary boundaries. Fascism is a response to capitalist system failure, including the collapse of popular

legitimacy for turn-of-the-century neoliberalism, not least thanks to the anti-capitalist “movement of movements”. Novel in an alliance with big tech and steeped in anti-ecological, petro-masculinist and ethno-nationalist / neocolonial thought, they are winning. They are managing to spread their hate politics and millions of lives are being hurt and genocides, televised and invisible, should be shaking our humanity.

The climate struggle must now also be an anti-fascist struggle, because fascist governments are major threats to even the most inadequate climate justice goals. Yet the broader climate movement in the Global North has not yet adapted its outlook, goals, strategies and tactics to this new reality. It is high time to do so. What is the goal of the climate movements in this new geopolitical world as the climate endgame approaching? How do we relate to antifascist and other wider global justice struggles?

Broad intersectional justice alliances need to be formed. We cannot win against fascism as an isolated climate justice movement, but only in alliances with all other social forces that are attacked by authoritarianism. From a climate justice perspective, alliances are most important with those groups and movements that are ambitious in terms of their system change goals, their potential for building counter-power, or their potential for forming new anti-systemic alliances.

Small failures

Groups are failing not only because of the enormous resources of our enemies but also because of a lack of experience in emancipatory organising in our own groups. The dominant neoliberal (capitalist), racist and patriarchal culture that exists globally also exists in our movements, and we have to unlearn as we go. Although a focus on climate action is fundamental, it won't bring us closer to emancipatory goals if we don't build effective structures that are a challenge to the system and if we leave millions behind. This includes emancipatory forms of organising (e.g. each one teach one, transformative justice, and community accountability) as well as mainstream organisational tools around leadership, accountability and conflict resolution. This also means considering how power operates in all our spaces, organisations, alliances, movements, workshops, conferences, etc. Too often, people who are broadly sympathetic with the aims of a social movement organisation are too quick to criticise strategic and tactical choices, and too reluctant to contribute constructively. Good examples to the contrary include movement facing practical support offers like professional mediation, website design and legal support.

Preparing for future shocks

While concerning ourselves with mitigation we also need to prepare ourselves emotionally and practically for the (very) likely outcome that we do not stop fossil fuels and instead break through 2C in 10 or 15 years and experience tipping points which might yield runaway heating. In any case, we are experiencing escalating climate damage and we should get ready for more damage. Preparing for those escalating impacts also provides an opportunity to mobilise wider society and address wider structural issues.

People are not going to respond to distress by automatically moving leftward. We have to think 'How is the ruling class going to respond to the shocks?' This includes food shocks. They will cut off our arms and legs, like Obama's bank crisis response. Mobilisation around this issue might be easier than mobilising around stopping fossil fuels since it's in people's material interest if framed

right. Mobilising to deal with the future shocks and the shocks that are already unfolding requires alerting the general public to what the impacts are now and are going to be in the future. That is a version of trying to plug information deficits which has generally been a failed strategy, we need to figure out how to do this, i.e. communicate the science of impacts/damages. (The film *Threads* was mentioned – for the nuclear era).

Mobilisation for this in a constructive way will focus on constructive economic resistance, Transformative Adaptation, mutual aid, community energy and food projects etc. We can also not be giving people austerity, but rather must prioritise meeting their needs; and it also needs to give them a positive social vision. Unlike mitigation, this is an issue where it might be easier to learn practical lessons from each other; especially a lot of people around the world are living in deprivation and are fixing things.

Moreover, the lack of a culture of spiritual and emotional coherence in many Western countries means that facing these unprecedented times, feeling threats to world views and identities, will make many feel unsupported. We also need to get ready on a non-material level (i.e. acting is also about ethics, love and so on) by adopting practices that recognise the emotional and spiritual dimension of our experiences. The global rise of fundamentalist religion is significant here.

Positive visions, economy to utopia

Constructive Economic Resistance

Power analysis of the asymmetry present in the climate struggle, plus awareness that the battle will require economic logics and systems to be changed, leads us to ask where economic resistance can be brought with a constructive strategic design. To build complementary strategies to disruption and non-cooperation that also challenges standard corporate power and fractures the ruling class.

Strategic purposes include: disrupting state and corporate power by creating counter-power; creating bottom-up autonomous zones; supporting models used for centuries by indigenous peoples and subsistence-based communities; resilience in the face of polycrisis; inspiring people and showing the world we want to create, building confidence, relationality and collective strength; offering inspiring alternatives; commoning collective ownership; learning collective action skills; learning to co-create and cooperate on meeting our collective needs and care for each other.

There are many areas to focus on, from land to energy, food and transport, and beyond. Many global South movements have diversity and wisdom on this front, which the Global North can learn from. Practical frameworks and design principles can be developed to remove assets from the market and place them into common ownership systems for the public good. But these should be developed and shared with reciprocal relations with the earth and living systems in high priority (including firewalled wins so they don't go back into private ownership, and separation of ownership and governance so that governance is kept away from profit-making).

There are many alternative arrangements which do this already in many countries, but creative and cultural work to popularise the systems, practises of participation, philosophy and identity of these projects and systems is needed. Creating networks that make local efforts greater than the sum of their parts could be a way to make an impact both on the lives of people who could become more self-reliant on the ground but also to reclaim power from corporate power structures and states.

Examples: local community renewable energy (microgrids), community agriculture, agroecology, community forest management, locally owned housing, etc, owned by the people for the people, squatted settlements and social centres; democratic control over services; forest occupations and other place-based struggles; self-organised services (e.g. women's refuges in the 1970s, solidarity health clinics in Greece), participatory citizen budget, solidarity economy, no profit. There is a *lot* of this in the Global South and in southern Europe especially now that welfare states are breaking down.

We need to synthesise and strengthen existing work, including (a) theory and narrative including creating joint visions of the future world, rooted in peoples' practices; (b) plans and trainings; and (c) narrative strategies.

Mobilising Utopias

Utopian visions (e.g., the positive examples mentioned earlier but also radical science fiction) can help mobilise efforts toward a just world, living within planetary boundaries, focusing on the current limitations of our collective imagination, while mainstream narratives often frame the future through binary extremes — either dominated by evil corporations and/or descending into dystopia (e.g., *Mad Max* scenarios).

The really important point is to how to create alternative, emancipatory, and joyful visions of the future, and how such narratives might challenge "capitalist realism" (Mark Fisher) and connect back to popular counter-narratives, local traditions etc. One way to do this is to focus on actually existing examples and envisioning new worlds like the work of Octavia Butler. Yet this is likely to only have a narrow appeal to leftists and youth; what is needed is a semi-urban vision (realistic) that goes beyond simply good buildings, walkability and shops nearby, but develops an appealing social imagination of better community relations and care. The challenge is for people to be able to return to themselves, their territories and terrains of struggles, as a re-establishment of self, community, place, language, food, culture while retaining cooperation and solidarity.

Some references and resources

- Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty: <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/>
- World Commission on Fossil Fuel Phase out <https://www.fossilfuelcommission.earth/>
- Just Transition Africa <https://www.justtransitionafrica.org>
- Friends of the Earth International "Pathways to System Change" <https://www.foei.org/publication/transform-how-were-making-deep-and-lasting-change/>
- The social movements research journal *Interface* emphasises dialogue between movements and researchers for the past 15 years. <https://www.interfacejournal.net/>
- Laurence Cox's Blog Engaged Research. <https://laurencecox.wordpress.com/engaged-research/>
- [Movement Learning Catalyst](#) strategic training curriculum and other learning resources (Ulex Project, European Community Organising Network, European Alternatives, Maynooth) — starts from the "[Ecology of Social Movements](#)" training
- [Commons Social Change Library](#) — extensive and well-curated collection of resources for movements covering many different dimensions

- Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing (one-page good practice guide from environmental justice work): <https://www.ejnet.org/ej/jemez.pdf>
- Practices of transformative movements: <https://movementstrategy.org/resources/the-practices-of-transformative-movement-building/>
- ABC of movement-level organising: https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/blog_post/learning-to-grow-movements-out-of-organizations/
- Jane McAlevey / Rosa Luxemburg Foundation large-scale organiser training: <https://organizing4power.org/>
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