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STRATEGIES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL ECO-JUSTICE ADVOCACY

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INTRODUCTION



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Since August 20, 2018 school children haven't been on strike. They are not boycotting the educational system nor is it a local phenomenon. What started as an individual action has turned into a global phenomenon. University Students, elderly people and entire professional groups have joined the strike since then.

Now there's not only one big group of young people advocating for climate justice, but millions of people are striking, protesting, educating, and advocating for a more just and sustainable world.

This is not the first time in recent history that there has been a big movement aiming for eco-justice. In 1970 environmental protection was put on the European agenda, and the 1970s and 1980s were a time of activism around these issues. Also, this period saw the founding of many of the most prominent environmental organisations.

Still, there seems to be a gap between different generations advocating for a more sustainable world. Misunderstandings, arguments, and mutual accusations dominate the discourse.

Members of generation Y/Millennials (born 1980-1995) and generation Z (born 1995-2010) are rarely found in positions of power and question the motives and decisions taken by generations X (born 1965-1980) and the baby boomers (born 1950-1965), who do currently hold the positions of power.

This Booklet presents 10 strategies that are helpful for this dialogue among different generations. Because the topic does not only concern one generation, but concerns all people of all ages around the world.

WHY ECO-JUSTICE?

“The Lord God took the human and put them in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

Genesis 2:15

YOUTH PRIORITY

According to current research from the university of Bath, worldwide, around 70% of people aged 16-25 are extremely worried or very worried about the climate, with the percentage rising in those countries that are more likely to suffer the worst repercussions of climate change. Young people are increasingly at the forefront of climate change activism and advocate for a just and inclusive approach to climate governance.

YOUTH-LED SOLUTIONS

The large consensus supporting climate action movements clearly shows that meaningful youth engagement can be achieved. It requires ensuring youth diversity and representation, safe enabling environments, positive intergenerational partnerships, and genuine opportunities for youth participation and youth-led activities where young people are considered equal partners.

CHRISTIAN CALL TO CARE FOR CREATION

In the stories of creation there were not many tasks given to the humans. Both the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2 coming from different cultural contexts, state that the care for creation is the biggest task of the humans. They are supposed to rule over the creation (Gen 1,26), as God would do themselves.

Historically speaking, this command to rule over the nature and all its inhabitants has been abused to exploit the environment for profit and without taking precautions that resources might be finite.

Nowadays there is a rising awareness of eco-justice. Both individual Christians as well as churches and faith based organisations are taking responsibility and include sustainability as one of their priorities. The feeling of the worldwide Christian community may also have a great influence on this awareness



THE ADVOCACY ACADEMY

AGAPE ECUMENICAL CENTRE
ITALY, MAY 2023

The Intergenerational Eco-Justice Advocacy Academy was a 5-day training program for young people, designed to support young activists for climate justice in developing the necessary skills, opportunities and solidarity, towards a diverse, inclusive, democratic, and sustainable world.

11 young people from Europe, Asia, and Latin America gathered to analyse the situation at the local, European, and global levels from young people's perspectives and through intersectional lenses.

Non-formal education activities enabled them to share experiences, increase mutual understanding, and design a shared strategy for intergenerational advocacy on eco-justice issues.

The participants reflected on:

- Why is it important for Christians to be active advocates for climate justice?
- What is the current scientific take on the planet's future?
- How is climate change affecting the most vulnerable groups? What does climate change mean for people on the move as well as other groups that are discriminated against?
- How can the Bible inspire Christian perspectives on Eco-justice?
- How are places like Agape, in the Italian Alps, affected by climate change?
- What role does age play in addressing eco-justice issues?
- What do I want to test when I go back home?
- How do I start my project? What tools are there? How can I improve my critical thinking and problem-solving skills?
- How do I communicate my project?
- How do we share the lessons learnt at this academy?



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10 STRATEGIES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL ADVOCACY ON ECO-JUSTICE

01. KNOW YOUR TARGET AND BE CONCRETE

Learn how to truly speak to different audiences. Knowing the values and communication styles of the different generations will help you convey the message and generate interest.

There are 3 general levels of understanding:

- **Advanced:** do not waste your energy trying to educate more those who are already aware, instead, try to educate them to become multipliers and join activism.
- **Intermediate:** focus your efforts on them, try to stimulate their imagination and to spark their interest to become even more involved.
- **Beginner/unaware:** don't go all in at first. Try different conversation starters and choose them wisely, to bring the topic closer to their life's experience and vision of the world. You may be surprised where the conversation leads you.

Offer accessible and actionable steps that individuals and communities can take with little to no effort. Is there an energy-saving tip that you can share? Are you doing a clean-up day in the neighbourhood?

Are there any resources available that everyone can access, such as subsidies for individuals who want to change appliances and light bulbs, or programmes or for non-profit organizations or local communities?

Is there any specific person who is valuable in the community for their strong interest in eco-justice, or specific knowledge, connections and resources?

How can these people be reached? How can you, as an activist, help them with their eco-justice claims?

02. BRIDGE THE GENERATIONAL GAP

Create safe spaces where different generations can come together for open and respectful dialogue.

Encourage mutual understanding and cooperation between older and younger activists. Be patient and understanding.

Do not assume that older generations have no interest in the topic just because of their age. Perhaps you have allies in places you don't know of yet. Learn about the **values of each generation** and build alliances on shared values and principles.

For example, did you know that there are organisations such as "Elders Climate Action" and many more that are fully engaged on the issue and are determined to use their resources in cooperation with other generations?

Older generations may not have the same understanding and goals as you do, but they may be great allies, they may have access to resources, networks, and connections that can support eco-justice initiatives. They can facilitate fundraising, offer spaces for meetings or events, or provide guidance on navigating bureaucratic processes for advocacy work.

03. MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

This strategy is two-fold.

On one hand it has a literal meaning: **Go out and create opportunities for others to engage.**

Lowering barriers to participation helps reach beyond the loudest voices in the community.

Organize workshops, informal meetings and get-togethers tailored to the specific concerns and interests of different communities.

For instance, if you live in coastal areas, focus on issues related to sea-level rise and its impacts, while in agricultural regions, highlight the effects of climate change on farming practices. In urban areas, focus on pollution, walkable cities, and sustainable mobility. It also has a figurative meaning, that is engaging individuals and communities at their current level of understanding, interest, and accessibility.

Disseminate tailored information about climate-related issues based on local environmental concerns, and resources available in the community, and that have an impact on the actual needs of the community.

Make sure to talk about things that are known to the community and accessible to all. Above all, do not be hasty, give people the time to process and digest information. If you plant your seeds well, they will bear fruit.



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04. SHOW THE CONNECTIONS

Practise creating connections between eco-justice and other social justice issues.

For some, it may be difficult to see how different justice elements are linked, while others may fight a struggle that is closely linked to yours, and would be willing to join forces.

Frame climate justice initiatives in a way that aligns with the immediate concerns and priorities of the community, such as health, jobs, or economic stability.

This cannot be improvised or generalised. You need to know the community very well, and highlight the impact at a local level: emphasize how climate change directly affects local industries, health, or natural resources.

05. FOSTER COLLABORATION

Encourage collaboration between environmental organizations, schools, businesses, religious institutions, community groups, and neighbourhood associations to reach diverse audiences and build trust within the community.

This will also help address climate change from different perspectives, at national and international levels.

Remember, you don't have to build entire structures by yourself, you can leverage the access, structures and collaborations that others already have in place and have a wider impact with less effort.

06. USE DIVERSE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Ask yourself: what communication channel will my target group use?

Think of all the channels - social media, newsletters, community meetings, and public forums - and use them in a generational-aware way to reach more people.

No matter how important what you have to say is, **you need to get others to listen**. Social media platforms enable you to share differentiated messaging, compiling a mix of information, stories, and resources in a way that resonates with different demographics within the community.

Generation studies help you understand the values and ethics of each age group to support your strategy.

Also, visually appealing and easy-to-understand printed materials such as posters, flyers, and infographics will help you attract attention and convey your message.



07. TELL A STORY

Evidence and facts speak to our brains, but **stories speak to our hearts, and emotions are more likely to call for action in the face of injustice and drive change.**

Create opportunities where community members can share their experiences related to climate change impacts, fostering empathy and understanding.

Communities are rich in stories, experience, and wisdom, the easiest way of bringing it to the surface is through peer-to-peer sharing. Local success stories and initiatives can help you demonstrate tangible results on real people who are familiar to the community and will be closer to people's hearts. This will help mobilise those who are uncertain or would otherwise remain inactive.

08. EMBRACE DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS

When everyone in a room sees the world in the same way, progress is unlikely. Encourage respectful debate and exchanges of views.

While this is not easy and can bring about a considerable amount of frustration, it has several benefits.



- It's good training for your soft skills: it helps you tone your understanding and empathy skills, challenges your own assumptions and biases, and fosters personal growth by broadening perspectives and encouraging critical thinking.
- It's an opportunity to refine your arguments: it challenges you to critically evaluate your own arguments, evidence, and strategies and by considering counter-arguments and adapting approaches to effectively convey their message.
- It drags you out of your own bubble: diverse viewpoints help prevent echo chambers and polarization, thus reducing the risk of isolating yourself within a specific ideological bubble.
- It shows that activism can be a catalyst for a culture of open dialogue and mutual understanding.

09.HARNESS FAITH-BASED INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Faith-based environments are great examples of intergenerational communities, with a strong interest in the care for creation and social justice.

Learn more about the engagement of different Churches or faiths and build alliances. For instance, religious institutions have long ensured commitment to eco-justice causes, and have networks, working groups, and hold seats at the table at international meetings, conferences and forums. Often, they need to fill the “youth quota” and they will be happy to offer you a seat at the table if you show that you are committed and competent.

Congregations are also resourceful.

Older generations often possess wisdom and life experiences that can provide valuable insights into historical environmental changes, traditional sustainable practices, and the impacts of human actions on nature.

They can share knowledge passed down through generations, emphasizing the importance of care for the Earth.

Often, older community members want to learn from the younger generations, and an open and honest conversation can kick-start new processes.

Younger generations possess a sense of urgency on the issue, master the new vocabulary of eco-justice activism, and have the energy to commit and lead new processes in civil society.

Combined, the different generations have the potential to achieve real change

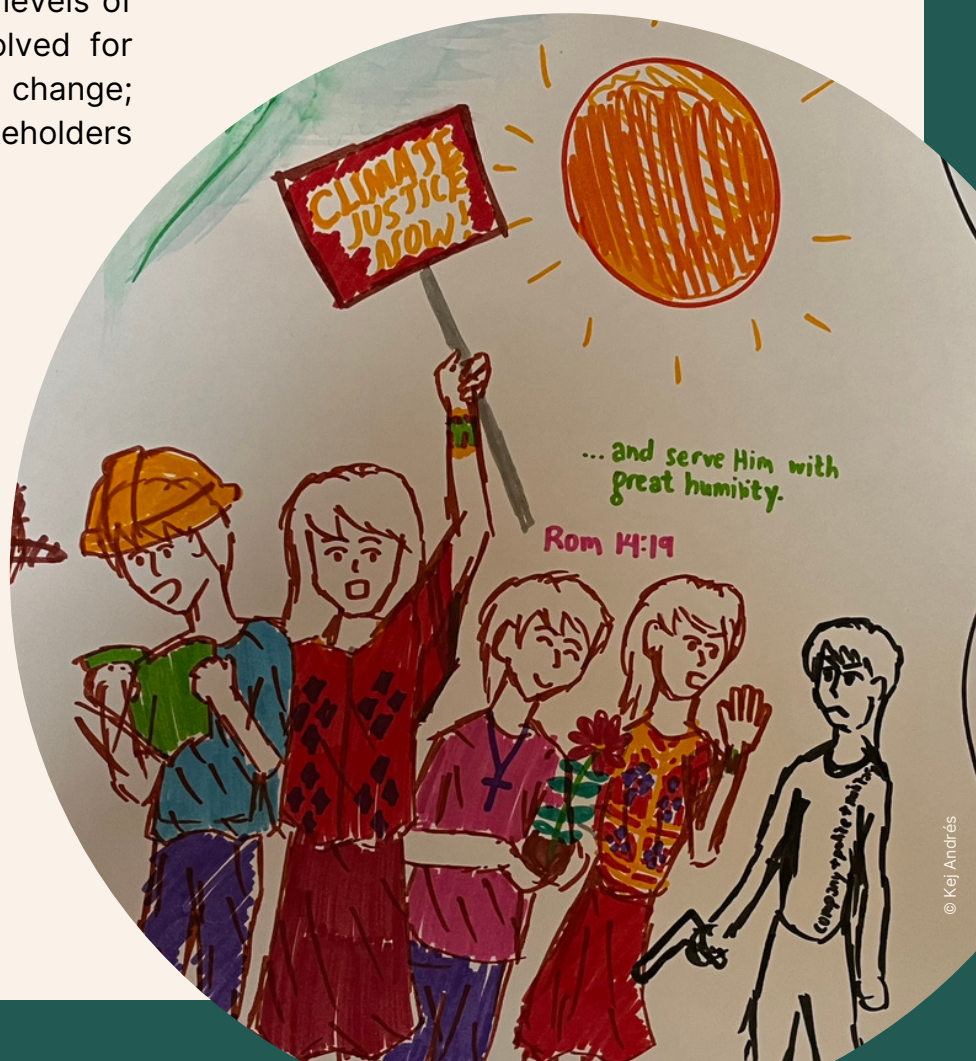


10. WORK LOCALLY AND ADVOCATE FOR POLICY CHANGE

Advocate for eco-justice policies at the local, regional, and national levels. Participate in meetings, write letters, and engage with lawmakers to promote inclusive and equitable legislation.

Not all problems have the same solution and not all levels need to be addressed. For example, there is no need to require action from policymakers if your local initiative is cleaning up the park in your neighbourhood. However, if you want the local government to improve how trash is collected in the park, then it becomes necessary.

No stake is too small and all levels of government need to be involved for comprehensive and tangible change; be aware of who your stakeholders are at all times.





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