Strengthening the climate action movement: strategies from contemporary social action campaigns

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Abstract

Keeping fossil fuels in the ground and accelerating a just transition to a sustainable energy system remain essential in addressing the climate challenge. Despite the common aspirational goals agreed upon by nearly 200 countries at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference, it is clear that climate activism still needs to be strengthened. Using insights from a qualitative survey of 47 contemporary social action groups from 11 countries, this paper offers strategies for strengthening the climate action movement. Although these approaches vary across respondents and groups, and have been adopted by some activist groups, they offer opportunities for taking stock. We find that social action groups tend to agree that effective campaign strategies – despite their varied circumstances, locations, tactics and agenda – can be seen basically through the lenses of emphasizing a moral message; offering a unified regime alternative; incorporating a diversity of participants; and using innovative public communication. The paper links these results to other empirical studies and to theoretical studies, offering the climate action movement the opportunity to re-examine its own strategies in this critical point in its history. The paper highlights the continuing need for grass-roots social action as fundamental driver of social change and emphasizes the importance of drawing upon strategies common to all social change movements.

Keywords: climate action; activism; social movement; public engagement

Introduction

Ideally the 2015 Paris climate agreement – a result of a long trip that begun in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 with several significant stops in Kyoto, Copenhagen, and elsewhere – should contain a 'legal instrument...to achieve...stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system...[which] should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner' (the Ultimate Objective, Article 2, of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (United Nations 1992). However, this international ambition remains elusive despite significant advances in scientific understanding that an inadequate climate change mitigation could increase 'the likelihood of severe,

pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems' (IPCC 2014:8. While the Paris Agreement is a vital step towards achieving this ambition, it still misses on key aspects of climate action. The national pledges incorporated into it, even if achieved in full, are still too weak to ensure that dangerous climate change is avoided (Climate Action Tracker 2015). The Agreement also fails to incorporate climate justice and a strong review and enforcement mechanism to ensure countries are locked into the UNFCCC's 1992 Ultimate Objective (above) and 2015 aspirational, but not mandatory, target:

> Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (UNFCCC 2015, Article 2)

Absent these and just like its Kyoto Protocol predecessor, the Agreement will likely fail to deliver the necessary climate action and, without strong and active engagement from the public at large, may fail to pressure decision-makers in regional, national and sub-national jurisdictions. Until fossil fuels are kept in the ground, vulnerable countries are provided necessary support to adapt and to contribute to mitigation, and a just transition to a sustainable economy is addressed at a pace suggested by climate science, stronger climate activism remains a key strand in driving climate action. The #D12 protests[1] in the streets of Paris, on the day the Paris Climate Conference concluded, show that organising for climate action continues. Therefore, strategies and other campaign approaches need to be strengthened and aligned to meet the unachieved goals.

Climate activism has already proven itself as a key mechanism for driving climate action. It was essential in, among others, bringing the climate issue into popular understanding, mobilising the 2014 People's Climate March[2] (also see McKibben 2013), stopping the Keystone pipeline project, applying pressure to universities, churches, and other institutions to divest from fossil fuels, and propelling the ongoing small-scale, local-based transitions through households, local communities and businesses. This cache of successes provides evidence that the social movement for climate action is achieving change, albeit slowly.

Studies of the climate action movement have already gained salience, enriching the literature on its strategies (e.g. Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014; Klein 2014; Diesendorf 2009), ethnography (e.g. Rosewarne, Goodman and Pearse

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[1] The #D12 climate protest, coordinated by 350.org, involved over 10,000 people rallying for climate action and justice.

[2] On 21 September 2014, the power of the networked approach was evidenced in one of the largest gatherings of the climate action movement where 350.org and a number of other organisations coordinated the so-called People's Climate March. *The Guardian* reported that the campaign involved an estimated 570,000 people taking part in 2,700 simultaneous events in 161 countries. In its culminating activity in the streets of New York, an estimated 400,000 people, and 1,573 groups participated, according to the organisers.

2014; Foran 2014), and solidarities and networks (e.g. Routledge 2012; Featherstone 2005, 2008; Cumbers et al. 2008), among others. These works have, in effect, also expanded the already established corpus of knowledge about social movements (e.g. Tilly 1995, 2002, 2008; Moyer 1987, 2001; Mann 1993; Ganz 2004). This paper contributes to this corpus of knowledge by highlighting the continuing relevance of social action – the groups involved in it and their activities – in driving social change. Using insights from contemporary social change groups, the paper confirms fundamental approaches that make campaigns effective and underscores their continuing use in climate activism.

The paper starts by discussing what could be meant by an effective campaign. It then describes its survey participants, selection process, statistical approach, narrative presentations, and limitations. It then presents an analysis of contemporary social activists' know-how and discusses the implications of this experiential knowledge for the climate action movement. A conclusion section wraps up the paper.

Describing effective campaigns

Campaign effectiveness is a broad and contested concept. Since many campaigns may take place over long periods of time before the ultimate goal of the movement is reached, effectiveness is hard to measure (Tilly 2008). This is also true of climate activism, where campaigns are best seen as nodes in a continuum that would ideally culminate in the achievement of a sustainable planet. In some cases, it is not unusual that some goals along this continuum, are unmet, since some of these campaigns may fail or succeed, and some of the goals change (Rosewarne, Goodman and Pearse 2014:81-84). Since the climate action movement may only realise its ultimate goal following a long period of sustained campaigning, its effectiveness can be measured using 'mechanisms' that are visible at the interactional level (Tilly 2002, 2008), i.e. by looking at the dynamics of contentious gatherings and public performances, the campaign per se (cf. Collins 2010).

According to Tilly (2002, 2008), the mechanisms surrounding any campaign remain spatially and temporally constant (cf. Collins 2010). A social action campaign is about communicating what Tilly (2002, 2008) calls WUNC, an acronym for worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment. Worthiness is displayed in the campaigners' sober demeanours by showing the public that they are a decorous people. Unity is achieved by, for example, marching in ranks, singing, and chanting together. Numbers is shown in headcounts, signatures on petitions and/or the capacity of the campaign to fill streets. Commitment is portrayed in campaigners' resolve and willingness to undergo hardships, such as braving bad weather or defying state repression. WUNC establishes the appeal of the campaign and legitimates social movements. As a result, the movements grow and become effective modes of modern politics. The evolution of the climate action movement demonstrates many examples on how

WUNC is creatively and effectively displayed in the many climate action campaigns.

In making recommendations for strengthening climate action campaigns, Delina, Diesendorf and Merson (2014) also focus on 'mechanisms' – which they refer to as dominant dynamics, patterns, elements and key tensions in a campaign – to ascertain effectiveness. That study identifies these mechanisms using comparative analysis of four historical social action campaigns: the 1930 events in the Indian Freedom Struggle; the 1955-1956 bus boycott that catalysed the modern African-American Civil Rights Movement; the anti-Marcos rallies culminating in the 1986 Philippine People Power Revolution; and the 1988-1990 campaigns collectively known as the Burmese Uprising. The study found that the mechanisms for effective and ineffective campaigns in these selected historical moments revolve around: building a new collective identity and a unified regime alternative, communicating the moral message, and enrolling a diversity of participants and networking.

Indicators for 'effective campaigns' can, therefore, be based on their outcomes. These outcomes are spatially and temporally dependent, but can be broadly described when the target audience funds and/or provides other resource support; joins the social action group; and/or actively engages with group activities. The final litmus test for effectiveness, nonetheless, is when campaign objectives are fully realised.

Methods

To substantiate our description of effective campaigns, this paper reports and analyses primary data from an online qualitative survey of contemporary social action groups administered over two weeks in November 2014. The survey determines how these groups build strategies for their campaigns and implement the strategies. The survey instrument is a qualitative questionnaire using a purposive sample. It is not a probability study requiring random sample to statistically represent a given population, but a study where participants are recruited based on a specific purpose and with a specific target audience. In this study, the participants are members of contemporary social action groups, which we broadly define as groups whose lines of activities involve campaigns to affect social change. They include labour unions, professional groups, faith-based organisations, women's groups and environmental groups.

Our survey questionnaire (see Appendix) consisted of open-ended questions asking respondents about: their group's campaign strategies; the elements and characteristics of effective or ineffective social action campaigns; the barriers, limitations and challenges to effective campaigns; and approaches and strategies to solicit and ensure greater public engagement. To assist the respondents with their choices, we have offered a range of choices and used a four-level Likert scale plus an option for 'no experience.' The scale does not have a 'neutral' option. This is done to reduce social desirability bias, the tendency of the respondent to answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favourably

by others (Garland 1991). To allow for a free-flow of additional insights, our instrument contains opportunities for them to voice an opinion, to expand on their answers, or even rebut our predetermined choices. We designed the instrument in this way to allow for some level of interaction.

To this end, we consider the responses to be expressions of personal views or opinions of the campaigner, not of their social action group per se. The responses are interpreted as verbal, rather than numerical statements. To preserve as much authenticity of the statements and narratives and to emphasise contextual respondent-level commentaries, we report the responses as unabridged verbatim quotes as much as possible. Although we let the respondents 'speak for themselves' to reduce interpretive bias, we have also provided active interpretations, analysis and critique of our survey data. As a crude shorthand to refer to respondents' quotes and responses, we use: SAE for a social action group whose focus of campaign is on the environment, SAJ for a social justice group, and SAO for groups that are neither focused on the environment nor social justice.

Since our Likert items and scales produce ordinal data to measure non-numeric concepts, our statistical approach involves calculating the median as a measure of central tendency, not the mean as it would have been for a probability survey. Moreover, the Interquartile Range (IQR), not the variance or standard deviation, is calculated as the measure of statistical dispersion. The interpretation is: the smaller the IQR, the more bunched up the data points around the median; by contrast, the higher the IQR, the more spread out the data points. While this may suggest that the data are quantitative, the reader is reminded that they are primarily verbal opinions.

To further minimise bias, we raise no question involving climate change or climate action. Rather, the topics revolve around broader issues that have universal application to social action regardless of campaign topic. By omitting climate change-related questions, the survey allows respondents, especially those who are neither environment nor climate-oriented, to express themselves freely without making any climate-related assumptions.

Participants

Forty-seven responses were received. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to their location, categories, membership size, and location of work.

Table 1: Respondents

Location	N	%	Membership size	N	%
Australia	18	38%	More than 5,000	7	15%
U.S.A.	16	34%	1,000 to 4,999	6	13%
Canada	5	11%	501 to 999	6	13%
Nepal	2	4%	251 to 500	2	4%
Hungary	1	2%	101 to 250	5	11%
India	1	2%	51 to 100	6	13%
South Africa	1	2%	Less than 50	15	32%
The Gambia	1	2%			
Turkey	1	2%			
UK	1	2%			
Category	**N**	**%**	**Location of work**	**N**	**%**
Environment	39	83%	Local	35	75%
Health	3	6%	State-wide	28	60%
Faith	2	4%	National	28	60%
Social justice	1	2%	International	15	32%
Education	1	2%	Online	23	49%
Petition	1	2%			

All respondents are involved in education, information and awareness campaigns through lectures, seminars, trainings, workshops, pamphlets distribution, etc. In addition to education campaigns, thirty one or 66% of our respondents are also using non-violent direct action, civil resistance, or civil disobedience such as sit ins, rallies, demonstrations, strikes, workplace occupations, blockades, and hactivism[3]. Thirty-six groups or 77% are using both education and non-violent direct action.

The study intends to generate responses that are diverse in terms of geography, focus of activities, membership size, and location of work to ensure universal application of our findings, and to achieve diversified and rich responses. Except for the Caribbean and South American regions, all world regions have been represented in this study. However, majority of the responses have come from Australia, Canada, and the USA (N=39, 87%) indicating that the majority

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[3] Hactivism is the act of breaking into a computer system for a social or political purpose.

of our respondents work within social spaces in the context of highly industrialised societies. Another overwhelming majority have environmental focus in their campaigns (N=39, 83%). Our response rate, 47 out of 1,345 invitations, is also indisputably tiny.

Some may perceive the distribution of respondents and the seemingly limited response rate as imbalances that lead them to question the representativeness of our data. However these have no profound effects on the results. Regarding the small response rate, the respondent size in a qualitative study using purposive sampling need only be sufficient for the investigators reach 'the quality of information…rather than the number per se' (Sandelowski 1995:179). In this paper, 47 responses appear to have given us sufficient variability and richness to be useful. The limited distribution of respondents should not be seen as limitation, but rather as strength, especially when viewed against the paper's current intentions. The three countries where majority of the respondents are located are among the world's high emission states and their approach to climate action is low in effectiveness. Soliciting insights from these groups, therefore, does not necessarily impinge on our conclusions, but most likely leads to more focussed appraisal of social action.

Nevertheless, the survey has several limitations. First, we do not compare or contrast responses from the global north with those of the global south. Spatial comparison is outside the current ambit of the paper. Second, we do not attempt to produce a theory. What we do here is to strengthen an already established understanding about social action movements, particularly their campaigns, by providing contemporary illustrations. Third, the paper, as with other empirical studies, has theoretical and methodological limitations, which cannot be resolved simply by the current data.

Despite these limitations, the identified strategies are consistent with theories and concepts of social movements and social mobilisations (e.g. Moyer et al. 2001; Tilly 1995, 2002, 2008; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Schock 2005; Melucci 1996). We have embedded these established conceptual elements in our narratives to imply the continuing relevance of social action, while aligning them with the strategies suggested by others, particularly those related to climate action strategies.

Practical strategies for effective campaigns

The strategies for effective social action are clustered according to four recurring themes in the response set: the moral message; a unified regime alternative; diversity of participants and networking; and public communication.

Emphasizing moral messages

Psychological stimuli can change people's attitudes towards social change (Markowitz and Shariff 2012; Swim et al. 2011; Haidt 2007). The strategic use of these stimuli in social movements often depends upon people's strongly held

values and moral concerns. Most respondents agree that evoking values and moral concerns in their campaigns has been an effective way to gather support (N=45; median=4 (effective); IQR=1).

When the public realises that their strong sense of right and wrong, and the values they hold strongly, are violated, large-scale activism tends to be ignited (Moyer et al. 2001). Past large-scale social movements strategically used these violations to strengthen social action and mobilise support. Delina, Diesendorf and Merson (2014), for instance, illustrate this in the arrest of Rosa Parks that ignited the modern civil rights movement; the assassination of Ninoy Aquino that spurred the Philippine People Power Revolution; and the violent dispersal of peaceful demonstrators in Dharasana that galvanised international recognition of India's struggle for independence. Tilly (1995, 2002, 2008) associates this part of social action with 'worthiness'.

Common among contemporary values that respondents indicated as important in spurring social action is social justice (N=46; median=5 (strong agreement); IQR=1). Other values that respondents hold on to dearly include: intergenerational equity (N=46; median=5 (strong agreement); IQR=1); conservation of biodiversity (N=46; median=5 (strong agreement); IQR=1); nonviolence (N=42; median=5 (strong agreement); IQR=1); basic human rights (N=43; median=4 (strong agreement); IQR=2); and ecocentric rather than anthropocentric position (N=42; median=4 (strong agreement); IQR=2). The results show that responses congregate between 'important' and 'very important' with low IQRs signifying that most of the responses are bunched towards the median for these values, which is 'very important.' In addition, respondents have also been using the following values and moral in their campaigns: fairness (SAE39, SAO03, SAO04); democracy (SAE35, SAE37, SAE39); integrity (SAE03, SAE37); honesty (SAE37); humility (SAE03); equity (SAE13, SAO03); education (SAO04); love (SAO07, SAE15); faith (SAO07); hope (SAO07); social stability (SAE35); preserving civilisation (SAE35); respect for dignity and rights for all (SAE15); and stewardship (SAE02).

The call for a climate response based on moral values is already embedded in the climate action movement. (The #D12 protest, for example, is hinged on climate justice.) These values include the principle that everyone has the right to life; that justice requires an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens; that humans have obligation to protect children from harm (Dean Moore and Wilson 2013). Since these are all threatened by the consequences of climate change, climate action is also a moral imperative. The moral imperative is key in setting the normative definition of climate action – the way the world *ought* to be (Dean Moore and Wilson 2013) – and in understanding its temporal terms, both intergenerational and immediate (Rosewarne, Goodman and Pearse 2014:91).

Most respondents indicated agreement that their campaigns become more effective if people see that their groups and their members live these moral values in their campaign practices and own lives in general (N=46; median=5 (very effective); IQR=1). Embedding moral values was also a key strategy in past large-scale social mobilisations (Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014).

Movements did this by exploiting events, often shocking, to offer clear demonstrations of how regimes violate people's deeply held values, thus triggering despair and anger. Psychological studies, which established that people start realising the inevitability of change following their experience of value violations (especially shocking ones) firsthand, support the strategy of moral benchmarking to trigger provocative direct action (Center for Research on Environmental Decisions, 2009; Weber, 2010; American Psychological Association, 2009).

Most respondents agree that a shocking event could indeed lead to effective campaigns (N=38; median=4 (effective); IQR=0). Ten respondents or 21 have even said that the absence of a shocking event to highlight their campaigns can be perceived as a barrier in seeking public engagement. In the climate action sphere, shocking events may trigger a large-scale change for activating rapid transition (Wagner and Zeckhauser 2012; Delina and Diesendorf 2013). They may occur in the form of extreme weather events, a contention that one respondent agrees with:

> At this point it seems that highlighting recent unpredictable weather and extreme weather events in the context of climate change has gotten people's attention, and explaining the scientific consensus that irreversible and catastrophic global warming is likely within this century if there is not a coordinated global effort to slash greenhouse gas emissions that begins in the next decade is enough to make those we've spoken to support our call for a national climate mobilization (SAE35).

While extreme weather events can provide triggers for confronting the status quo to some people, their reach and extent may be insufficient to drive large-scale effective action. Sometimes debilitating messages from such events can even result in inaction. Although a tipping point may be necessary to catapult climate action, 'the [climate action] movement may not be granted similar pivot events that could highlight the moral basis for effective climate action' (Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014:402).

Absent shocking events and the preference for optimism, campaign approaches that offer solutions relating to people's 'personal aspirations, desired social identity and cultural biases', as Delina, Diesendorf and Merson (2014:402) suggest and psychological studies support (American Psychological Association (APA) 2009; Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh 2007), could be included in the basket of strategies to activate greater public engagement for climate action. Among the strategies – in addition to confrontational protests and demonstrations – are proximate imageries and narratives of effective climate action such as prefigurative energy solutions occurring in communities, towns and cities to demonstrate ethically preferable alternatives to the fossil fuel regime (Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014; North 2011; Bulkeley and Betsill 2003). SAE21 supports this, suggesting 'building a better-integrated, more

resilient local community that shares a strong set of environmental values and supports efforts to put them into action.'

Conveying moral messages that imply hope, not just anger and despair is indeed key to mobilising people into action. It addresses a perennial challenge in mobilisation when campaigners need to translate discourses that are especially abstracted into 'the mundane politics of everyday life, into a directly embodied political process of movement mobilisation for a genuine strategy for transformation' (Rosewarne, Goodman and Pearse 2014:17; cf. Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014). SAE04 does this by 'pointing out how an issue affects each person – their health, their wallet, their children, the things they value and enjoy. Everyone is an environmentalist when the issue affects them.' In communicating their group's message, SAE37 also invokes proximity:

> I say that "the air I'm breathing in this room is chemically different than it was when I was born" (i.e. 400 parts per million (ppm) today, 360 ppm at my birth). I stress that we have "changed the basic chemistry of our planet" and contextualize it by taking a moment to talk about "this tiny rock hurtling through some random corner of space" and "its thin biosphere that supports all life as we know it," etc. I really speak slowly - with intentional pauses - letting the gravity of our situation sink in (SAE37).

Instigating climate activism is an intensely personal process requiring messages which use experiences that have personal, moral and proximate appeal to the audience. The process of humanising climate change can be done using experiences of moral shock, as illustrated in the case of past large-scale social mobilisations (Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014), and in many contemporary social action campaigns (cf. Rosewarne, Goodman and Pearse 2014:86). Motivating people, thus, revolves around personal experiences – often around the nexus of anger and despair and, in most instances, also around hope and optimism.

Building a unified regime alternative

In the continuum that describes social movements, the most important phase is when a large majority of people start to actively respond to the social issue by engaging in political actions and in changing their personal behaviours and mindsets (Moser 2009). People are often provided with this new sense of collective identity and ownership when campaigners offer a clear and unified regime alternative in constructing new ways of living (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Schock 2005; Melucci 1996). In climate action, this involves constructing a new vision for a stable climate era, for instance, an ecologically sustainable energy future (Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014).

The respondents support this, highlighting that when groups work together towards a unified alternative that follows towards goals and clear demands,

campaigns become more effective (N=46; median=4 (effective); IQR=1). In past large-scale social action, one critical factor for growing a social cause requires the transformation of citizens from mere participants and followers to active members of 'a collectively organised, self-directing and highly engaged social change group' (Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014:400). Unity remains key when delivering a strong public performance (Tilly 1995, 2002, 2008).

The heterogeneity of its approaches, technologies, tools, and tactics is a strong aspect of the climate action movement. Nonetheless, this plurality must be based on a common positive vision (Schock 2005) of how, in general terms, to avoid major climate change. For the climate action movement, Delina, Diesendorf and Merson (2014) suggested that this alternative to the status quo 'may be broad but many groups can agree with, at least in principle.' They determined this to be a low carbon, sustainable future, which can be pursued by various groups using various campaign approaches for climate justice, rapid sustainable energy transitions, and sustainable consumption and production.

Since a unified regime alternative can only be clearly communicated when a group has clear goals, absence or failure to have one, including concrete demands, can be a barrier to effective campaigning, according to SAE33 and SAE35. Aligning group objectives with campaign strategies underscores the necessity of careful planning (N=46; median=4 (effective); IQR=1).

Realistic objectives become essential as SAE36 notes: 'Ensuring that our values, objectives, and messaging are realistic and are about achieving inclusivity with regards to membership, political views, etc. [has led to effective campaigns].' This necessitates 'providing people with concrete ways to take action' (SAE17) and 'encouraging them to take practical steps' (SAE03) on their own (SAE13) and for their own development (SAE15). Some specific strategies include: 'encouraging local communities to undertake environmentally aware projects such as local clean energy and energy efficiency' (SAE11); and 'undertaking projects that capture community interest [such as] getting commitment to community targets, solar bulk buy schemes, and community owned solar farm' (SAE08). There are many other possibilities to construct feelings of shared identities (Della Porta 2005) concerning climate action that campaigners need to visualise and develop at different place-based communities – and to forge meaningful solidarities among these approaches through networks and other forms of interconnections.

Diversifying participation

Fostering diversity of participation, especially in a multi-scale and multilevel social action, is vital. Diversity in gender, age, religion, ethnicity, ideology, profession and socio-economic status of participants leads to greater success in past social mobilisations (Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014). Most survey respondents agree that the diversity of their participants has been a factor for effective campaigns (N=42; median=4 (effective); IQR=1). One respondent highlights the significance of diversity:

> Getting people from different constituencies at the table, making sure all voices are heard and all parties are involved in creating plans of action, including implementation accountability [is one of the other strategies that our group is using] (SAE34).

Diversity of participation also increases the likelihood of tactical diversity, since different groups are familiar with different forms of campaigns and bring their own unique capacities to their respective movements (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Murphy 2005). To achieve diversity in the movement, respondents underline the importance of affiliating with other social action groups. Of the 47 respondents, 35 or 75% said that their groups are affiliated with networks, coalitions, or alliances. Most respondents, including some of those who do not have any affiliation, indicated strong agreement with the idea that affiliations could result in more effective campaigns (N=46; median=4 (effective); IQR=1). Failure to organise joint campaigns and protest actions with other groups, 24 respondents or 51% said, result in ineffective campaign.

Plurality of participation, indeed, is often achieved through interconnectedness in alliances, coalitions, or networks (Featherstone 2005; Schock 2005; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1995) to generate productive connections between different places and organisations (Featherstone 2008). Citing examples from their case studies, Delina, Diesendorf and Merson (2014) argue how networks of local-based groups worked with and supported each other to achieve campaign objectives. In their Philippine case study, for example, they highlighted how the Roman Catholic Church mobilised groups of Filipino peasants, farmers, and fisherfolks years before the anti-Marcos movement achieved the generally peaceful People Power Revolution in 1986.

The effects of networks and affiliations on groups, however, have been varied across the responses. Most respondents indicate that affiliations enable their group to make greater impact (N=35; median=3 (agree to the statement); IQR=1). Most of them also feel that they have become a stronger force (N=35; median=3 (agree); IQR=1) as a critical mass is formed around certain goals (SAE03) because of these affiliations. One respondent mentions that legitimacy and credibility are also enhanced with these affiliations (SAE36). Having a shared notion that potentially creates a common ground enables varied themes to be interconnected and for different groups and actors from various struggles and social contexts to join in one common struggle (Della Porta et al. 2006).

Converging around a common struggle (Cumbers, Routledge and Nativel 2008) reduces campaigners' feelings of isolation: a sentiment shared by some respondents.

The problem is too big to face alone. Coalitions are really the only way (SAE34).

Good to feel [that] you are not alone and that there are other passionate people out there running their own campaigns. Together we make much more noise (SAE08).

Being part of a larger alliance has ... allowed [us] to be part of a bigger campaign, boosting impact (SAE12).

[Being affiliated with other groups results in a] reinforcement of justification for our campaigns (others think the same way, we must be on the right track) (SAE13).

This makes us feel we are not crying in the wilderness and are not mad (SAE31).

I think the greatest benefit of being part of alliances is simply the sense that we're not operating in a vacuum - that there are other people and groups out there who share our concerns, ideals, etc. (SAE33).

The benefits of affiliation are especially present in specific campaign strategies. In relation to climate action, one respondent, for instance, sees the benefit of affiliations in their fossil fuel divestment campaign:

Divestment necessitates a critical mass to be an effective means of social (or especially financial) stigma, so being intimately involved in coalition with other students, frontlines, and financial campaigns against fossil fuel extraction and consumption is [sic] greatly beneficial. Divestment also acts as an organizing tool more than [an] end-goal; it is a way to build these relationships and coalitions to ensure climate justice and equitable distribution of sacrifice as our climate changes (SAE39).

Another benefit of affiliations is the opportunity to share campaign burdens (SAE22). One respondent explains:

The crucial value of an alliance is that it can create a larger virtual organisation but has the value that the sub-units can specialise their work (in the knowledge that other crucial functions are being carried out by other members of the alliance) and that each unit can be self-managing thus avoiding managerial overload and excessive concentration of power in the hands of a few (SAE27).

Of these benefits, however, access to resources recurs amongst responses. Because of their affiliations, most respondents agree that their group can now combine their own resources with that of other groups (N=35; median=3 (agree); IQR=1). Some groups have eventually found new streams of resources and strategies because of these affiliations (SAE10, SAE12, SAE25), including sources of funding (SAE11) and opportunities for sharing, learning and collaboration (SAE21).

Despite these benefits, however, some respondents report disadvantages and limitations of their affiliations. For instance, 20 respondents or 57% said that their affiliations with other groups resulted in some feeling that they are losing part of their independence. Retaining a sense of autonomy, while valuing collaboration, is important (Rosewarne, Goodman and Pearse 2014:84-86).

Some respondents see another disadvantage in terms of reconciling varied campaign approaches, as narrated, for example, by SAE01:

> We struggle with the lack of shared values. Yes, we can unite on a specific issue but often our environmental colleagues want us to model corporate hierarchy or privilege in how we deal with aspects of our work together. The members on the frontlines of coalitions have the most difficult time with this and are often tempted to pull out of coalition. Usually feelings calm down and we feel the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, but from time to time we have to question who we are and what we stand for. We have pulled out of some group decisions and limited our coalition involvement in these instances (SAE01).

Other groups, such as SAE04, raise an observation as to who gets the credit at the end of a successful campaign:

> We need to carefully balance each group's claim of credit for successes in our coalition - make sure everyone gets credit. This is the hardest part of the balance. Keeping our board members happy that we are making a huge difference without them pushing or have us claim all the credit, or getting mad when coalition members claim more credit (or can raise more money) (SAE04).

Sometimes, the nature and focus of work that defines a particular social action group is a limiting factor for affiliating with others. A faith-based group shares:

> It is challenging for religious groups to join civil society coalitions - but it is also essential in terms of resources and reach. The difficulty comes from retaining our ethos and ensuring we don't alienate those who support us because we are a religious organisation… while still ensuring that we are relevant, accessible and heard by non-religious members within the coalition and the coalition's supporter base (SAJ01).

Nevertheless, the advantages of affiliation generally outweigh the disadvantages. Skocpol (2013), for example, argues how a networked-based mobilisation is essential for achieving legislation on universal health care in the USA – one that environmental groups, she contends, failed to undertake during the campaign for climate legislation. The variety of participation and the networked approach has already been embraced in the climate action movement with many campaigns occurring across locations and scales arising as results of network-

based mobilisations (e.g. the 2014 People March[3] and the #D12 protests). To further strengthen network-based mobilisations for climate action, survey respondents suggest:

- Building strong commitment within social networks, including close friends and family (SAE35), and then building support network by network (SAE27).

- Getting people from different constituencies to the table, making sure all voices are heard and all parties are involved in creating plans of action, including implementation and accountability (SAE35).

- Building unusual coalitions, e.g. youth and CEOs, of people working together (SAE34).

Numbers are essential in social movements (Tilly 1995, 2002, 2008). The show of force through trans-local or trans-national solidarities is manifest in convergences, affiliations, and networks (Nunes 2009). The present climate action movement – which is constructed as a solidarity of non-government organisations; anarchist and autonomist grassroots groups; traditional labour groups; left political parties; emancipatory movements around questions of identity; religious and faith-based groups; professional organisations; and indigenous peoples – already illustrates solidarities across diversity (Routledge 2012). To retain this success in future climate action mobilisations, a sustained, dynamic, and cohesive public engagement is necessary, highlighting the essential role of communicating the message widely and effectively in a plural society.

Engaging the public

Reaching out to a large proportion of the population was imperative for effective mobilisation in past campaigns (Delina, Diesendorf and Merson 2014; Moyer et al. 2001). In contemporary situations, there is also a strong agreement among most respondents that extensive media coverage (N=42; median=4 (effective); IQR=1) and critical social problem expositions in popular media (N=39; median=4 (effective); IQR=0) make mobilisations easier and quicker. At times when mainstream media provides extensive coverage, most respondents feel that they have been successful (N=42; median=4 (effective); IQR=1). By contrast, unsupportive media, according to 33 respondents or 70%, pose a barrier to campaigning.

While it is ideal to secure mainstream popular media coverage of a campaign, some social action causes, including for effective climate action, are simply unattractive to media in some countries. Bacon (2013), Bacon and Nash (2012), and Feldman et al. (2013), for instance, give empirical examples how low media attention and unfriendly media stance over climate issues have been prominent

in Australia and the U.S.A., where the majority of our respondents are based. For example, the 2014 Peoples Climate March received very little coverage from major media networks, despite the event's huge turnout. The Paris climate talks, nonetheless, gained popular media coverage, with most major networks and dailies providing coverage.

Nonetheless, there is no guarantee for sustained popular media attention in the extended campaigns for climate justice, stronger emissions reduction, the urgency of transition, sustainable consumption, and other aspects of climate action. At times when popular media take little notice, one social action group found that the Ganz model[4] for organising could be helpful:

> Using a Ganz model for building a campaign that has gradual steps of increasing engagement, having the grass roots build movement so that we can pull in more people at every step and build bigger events and actions. Then the media begins to take notice and cover us, and we often get the prominent person endorsement that will boost our campaign further. Sometimes the action puts the spotlight on the issue and the rest follows. We have had good success with this, especially in our oil-by-rail resistance campaign, which began ten days prior to the Lac Megantic rail disaster[5].

To improve the rate of mobilisation in the absence of support from mainstream and popular media outlets, the climate action movement should strengthen its 'non-traditional' means, modes and channels of communication and engagement provided by online and social media, and the traditional means of face-to-face meetings.

> Having strong direct [communications] to supporters is essential, you can't rely on the media alone. Magazines, postcards, films, email, social media and a website are all very useful; meeting up is also indispensible (SAO07).

When asked about the various modes of public communication that groups are using in their campaigns, the majority of the respondents tend to agree on the effectiveness of face-to-face conversations (N=47; median=5 (very strong agreement); IQR=1). To facilitate personal or peer-to-peer meetings, respondents suggest doing it across kitchen tables and in community conversations among friends and neighbours (SAE08, SAO03), and in communities that meet often and share values such as churches (SAO07).

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[4] The Ganz model of organising is a portfolio of organising strategies developed by Marshall Ganz (see http://bit.ly/Qkmrjh).

[5] On 6 July 2013, a freight train carrying crude oil derailed in the town of Lac-Megantic in Quebec, Canada, resulted in a fire and an explosion that killed 42 people.

In these conversations, campaigners could take the following suggested approaches:

> Framing an issue to make it emotive, memorable, with a clear wrong, and a convincing solution that requires the individual to take action. It needs to be simple enough to be easy to communicate quickly to busy people with no prior interest, but the quick and simple version needs to avoid distortions (SAO07).

> Reframing questions to take into account 'green fatigue' such as 'do you support renewable energy?' instead of 'do you believe in climate change?' (SAE24).

The focus on solutions rather than on the debilitating pessimism of climate impacts has strong support from the psychology and behavioural studies literature (Stoknes 2015).

Moreover, face-to-face conversations must be clearly organised and facilitated using some creativity to tell the story of people affected by climate change (SAE03) and to communicate the climate action agenda, including 'stories of communities that have responded creatively to the realities of climate change' (SAE03). Some respondents suggest 'using the arts, e.g. theatre, music (SAE30), literature, film and visual art (SAE03, SAE18, SAE21, SAO03), stunts and performances (SAE12), and other [related] events' (SAE36). 'Using analogies with similar issues that do have critical problems such as comparing the fossil fuel industry with tobacco or asbestos industry' (SAE13) is also suggested. What is clear in these strategies, however, is the need to make 'a very clear call to action [such as] education campaign through giving presentations town-by-town on a state-wide issue, where after each meeting the attendees are asked to organise their own (SAE04, SAE05, SAE06, SAO07), and school-based education programs (SAE16, SAE25) that are geared where the audience is at' (SAE37).

Moreover, the majority of the respondents are in strong agreement (N=46; median=4 (strong agreement); IQR=0) on the use of internet-based communication tools in campaigns, particularly social media. For one social action group, 'maintaining a website with resources such as handouts, educational materials, bumper stickers, pins and lawn signals, for groups and individuals to use' (SAE04) remains a key campaign strategy. Of course, social media is already widely employed in climate action campaigns. Their use needs to be sustained and exploited to its full potential.

Nevertheless, many respondents (N=43) strongly agree that traditional, 'offline' materials such as newsletters and other printed materials still have role to play in communicating the campaign (median=4 (strong agreement); IQR=0). To expand reach, conventional approaches that need to be strengthened include writing letters to the editor (SAE31), initiating expert submissions in relation to law reform options (SAE19), and lobbying politicians at all levels, from local government to state and federal (SAE22, SAE25, SAO01, SAO03, SAO06, SAO07). This also includes 'producing media stories featuring well-liked and

well-respected community leaders who will publicly state their concerns about climate change and the need for stronger action' (SAE33).

All the above communication strategies aim at reducing constraints on participation, including public perceptions of the risk of getting involved, which occurs when audiences observe an open and collective act of social action (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). Also supporting the argument that all forms, modes and channels of communication need to be explored and exploited in social action campaigns, are critical mass theories of social action, which state that audiences base their perceptions of opportunities to get engaged on patterns of the activities by social action campaigners (Kurzman 1996). These strategies remain vital in translating the hopes of the movement into agendas for social and political change.

Conclusion

Addressing the climate change challenge remains a standing goal despite the modest success of the Paris climate agreement. Since key aspects for effective climate action remains inadequately addressed – the urgency of transition to sustainable economy, climate justice, etc. – climate action needs to be strengthened. This paper uses insights from experiences of contemporary social action groups and their campaigns to offer strategies to strengthen the activist dimension of climate action.

The climate action movement has already claimed many successes. Further down the road, long-term campaign strategies must be sustained to ensure that the fossil fuel regime is changed into a sustainable energy regime, and that climate justice and a just transition to a sustainable society are also achieved. Using insights from 47 contemporary social action groups, this paper offers the following strategies:

- Strengthening messages that concern people's deeply held moral values and relating them to the importance of effective climate action.

- Strengthening the process of building a collective identity for the climate action movement and a unified alternative to unsustainable regimes.

- Ensuring diversity of participants in the climate action movement and exploiting the benefits of networking between like-minded groups.

- Strengthening the use of all possible means of public communication channels, both innovative and traditional, to inculcate the climate action message.

These strategies are by no means innovative. Although campaign effectiveness could never be guaranteed by employing these strategies, they highlight the continuing relevance of strategies that were used successfully in past large-scale

social change campaigns. They are consistent with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks established in the scholarly literature on social movements and the empirically understood structure of effective modern social action campaigns.

Climate activism as a creative process needs to experiment with new ways to critically act in the world, but it also needs to critically reflect on the set of tools it currently has. This moment of reflection is critical as the movement builds its strategies for the long haul while mobilising the public around the necessity of urgent action. This paper offers the opportunity for the movement to examine its own strategies in this critical point in its history.

Acknowledgment

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Appendix: Abridged version of the questionnaire

Part 1: About your group

1. Name of your group, including acronym or abbreviation.

2. Location.

3. Year your group was created/founded.

4. Membership size.

5. Principal category/group orientation: environmental; social justice and/or human rights; other, please specify.

6. Specific social action agenda, e.g. anti-nuclear; religious/faith; civil rights; climate action; Indigenous Peoples; labour.

7. What does your group specifically do?

8. Coverage/extent of work: local/community based; state-wide/province-wide; national; international; online

9. Is your group a member of a network, alliance, or coalition? If yes, please specify.

Part 2: Effective campaign strategies

10. Rate the effectiveness of the following strategies for accomplishing social change. *Scale: No experience; Very ineffective; Ineffective; Effective; Very effective.*

    a. Education, information, awareness campaigns.

    b. Non-violent direct action.

    c. Both.

11. Following on Question 10, what other approaches can you suggest in making social action campaigns effective? Please elaborate on your response.

12. Rate the effectiveness of the following strategies for getting public support and engagement. *Scale: Scale: No experience; Very ineffective; Ineffective; Effective; Very effective.*

    a. Connecting campaigns with moral values.

    b. Involving or engaging prominent people.

    c. Extensive media coverage.

    d. Presence of shocking incident or event that dramatically highlights a critical social problem.

    e. Exposing the critical social problem in popular media.

    f. Careful planning.

    g. Affiliating in an alliance, network, or coalition.

    h. Targeting campaigns towards existing social groups, e.g. faith groups, cultural groups, professional groups.

    i. Engaging a public who share similar interests, or similar faith, or similar profession, or similar age brackets, or similar community or area.

    j. Engaging with friends, family, or relatives.

    k. Engaging in joint activities even though they dare none of the above characteristics.

13. Following on Question 12, what other strategies can you suggest in soliciting public support and engagement? Please elaborate on your response.

14. Rate the importance of the following moral values in your campaigns. Scale: No experience; Not important; Somewhat important; Important; Very important.

    a. Nonviolence.

    b. Social justice.

    c. Right to security.

    d. Intergenerational equity.

    e. Conservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity.

    f. Basic human rights.

    g. Ecocentric rather than anthropocentric position.

15. Following on Question 14, what other moral values can be invoked? Please elaborate on your response.

16. In the absence of a critical social problem highlighted in the media, or exposed by a shocking incident, or supported by prominent people, what other strategies can you suggest?

17. Outcomes from affiliating with a network or an alliance. Scale: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree.

    a. Our group can create greater public impact since we are now part of a bigger group.

    b. We feel we are now a stronger force.

    c. We can combine our group's resources with that of other groups.

    d. We feel we have lost part of our independence.

18. Following on Question 17, what other outcomes have you experienced from being in a network, coalition or alliance? Please describe these sentiments.

19. Challenges and barriers to effective campaigns?

    a. Lack of funds and other resources.

    b. Unsupportive media.

    c. Absence of prominent persons in campaigns.

20. Following on Question 19, what other challenges have you experienced? Please elaborate on your response.

Part 3: Ensuring public engagement

21. Rate the effectiveness of the following modes of communication in ensuring public engagement as defined above. *Scale: No experience, Very ineffective; Ineffective; Effective; Very effective.*

    a. Face-to-face conversations.

    b. Social media.

    c. SMS or text messages.

    d. All or combination of the above.

22. Following on Question 21, what other communication strategies to ensure public engagement can you suggest? Please elaborate on your response.

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