

Shifting from 'climate change' to grounded climate solutions

Early in 2023, Uplift conducted research using deep listening methodology in Co Kerry.* We set out to hear how people feel about climate change, what they need to have a decent life and this might connect with climate solutions. We also sought to understand how people relate to the public discourse on climate, and where they sourced news. A [language analysis](#) on the material collated, was then undertaken by Parable Communications.

This is a short overview of what we learnt and why it matters, concluding with what we can do as organisers, campaigners, leaders, community workers committed to climate solutions. It is the first in a series that will include a resource on [narratives](#) for climate solutions and a guide to building successful strategies and practical action.

What we learnt

People are not the problem. Most people are not connecting to the dominant climate narratives they are hearing. They feel excluded and talked down to. Telling people they don't care, indirectly or directly, by failing to call out 'greenwashing', overly focusing on individuals, perpetuating fear and doom narratives and not talking about solutions is turning people off.

We are not naming who is responsible for climate change. Humans feel the urge to make meaning out of climate related disasters and other phenomena. If we don't explain who caused it, there will always be a tendency to fall back on blaming natural causes or pointing the finger at one [another or adopting wild conspiracy theories](#).

Body metaphors are powerful. Relating climate solutions back to impact on our bodies is the best way of connecting with people who care most, i.e. health, mental health, food. People who care less are activated through changes in their local environment. Concern for grandkids and future generations is a strong connection with older people.

Why this is important

Climate solutions grounded in the material needs of people are the gateway to building popular support, powerful movements and impactful campaigns. When we say what we are for, we break through the immobilisation that fear and doom narratives generate. This means naming the culprits behind climate change instead of naming climate change itself as an agent. Simply blaming climate change reinforces cynicism and leaves people feeling helpless.

Secure homes and reliable public transport are the top priorities for people in Kerry. This is core to releasing energy transition goals and the creation of livable communities. It offers a way forward, provides hope and is achievable.

This is how we win against the far right. 'Your way of life is threatened' is the consistent narrative of our opposition [corporate, political, special interest, hard right]. People who are 'persuadable' are listening to both sides and the right are winning. They have a consistent, dominant narrative that connects with identity and values i.e. emotions. We do the opposite, pulling people into their heads with facts and policy speak. Industry messengers and their political supporters also trick us into reacting to their arguments - reinforcing their overarching story of a dark, depressing future full of loss and suffering.

Politicians need to hear climate solutions from their voters. Government policy and decisions will be the deciding factor for delivering climate solutions. But right now special interests and corporate lobbyists are in their ear and they are not hearing enough from constituents. If we mobilise and channel public support for tangible policy changes we can be louder, especially heading into a cycle of elections.

What we can do

Say what we are for. The things people tell us they need in order to have a good life, fit perfectly with a transition away from dependency on oil, gas and coal - to be able to breathe clean air, drink clean water, eat healthy food, have a warm, secure home, and get to where they need to go with ease. This is a far more motivating basis to mobilise from than protesting abstract climate change. **Proposal:** *Repeat the Kerry research in 2 more areas - big and smaller urban*

Build winning strategies. When we name the specific change we want *[goal]*, make clear who is responsible *[target]*, identify who stands in the way and why *[villain]* and provide meaningful pathways for people to be involved *[agency]*, we can win big.

Proposal: *Launch nationwide campaigns for affordable, reliable public transport and 100% grants/loans to retrofit homes - focus on next programme for government*

Peer to peer conversations are key. Who carries the messages is really important. When people hear from trusted sources, they are far more likely to listen. Much of the public conversation about climate is perceived as 'noise' and disconnected from real people's lives.

Proposal: *Develop and launch peer to peer messaging tech [Uplift currently exploring this option with ChangeLab] & design deep canvassing projects in strategic areas.*

Use local media effectively. People who are persuadable on climate solutions, rely a lot on local media and social media - more than those already convinced who rely more on national media. The more voices and stories focused on climate solutions visible in local media, the greater the impact we will have.

Proposal: *Test scalable tools that target local media with relevant stories i.e. adapt 'Evictions map' for transport and housing solutions - hugely popular with local media.*

Find and lift up leaders and champions. Community leaders across the spectrum can be the champions needed to foster trust, connect with, spread persuasive narratives and demonstrate leadership. Older people in particular do not have an obvious mechanism to take action for climate solutions and are waiting to be asked!

Proposal: *1. Recruit regional organisers to identify local campaigns and leaders. 2. Organise a series of 'master classes' with community and civil society leaders. 3. Scope out setting up a similar organisation to 'Third Act'*

** Deep listening is a highly successful [methodology](#) that involves conducting one to one conversations designed to engage people where they are at and understand their context*

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Narrative Guide - [here](#)

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