



# STORIES OF EXCLUSION AND BELONGING IN CLIMATE ACTION

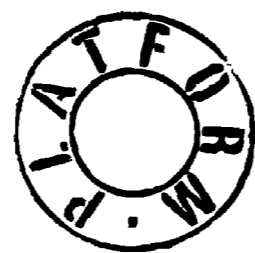


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# CONTENTS

<b>WELCOME</b>	1
<b>A NOTE TO OUR READERS (OR LISTENERS)</b>	2
<b>BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT &amp; PARTICIPATION</b>	3
Barrier 1: Institutional failure and marginalisation of alternative approaches	4
Barrier 2: Classism and the punitive 'individual responsibility' framing	4
Barrier 3: Exclusionary 'one-size-fits-all' 'Activist' identity	6
Barrier 4: Lofty academic and science-based framings	6
Barrier 5: The white-lens and eurocentric 'othering' of the earth	7
Barrier 6: Racism expressed through exclusion, tokenism and expectation to be taught	8
Barrier 7: A saviour complex offering charity not solidarity	10
<b>INVITATION FOR MOVEMENT ACTORS</b>	11
Invitation 1: Decolonizing, Honouring & Resourcing Leadership	12
Invitation 2: Centre International Perspectives, Colonial Legacies and Reparations	14
Invitation 3: Use Arts-Based Organising to Make Climate Action More Inclusive	17
Invitation 4: Practise Compassionate Organising	19
<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>	20
<b>OUR PROCESS</b>	22
<b>WHO WAS INVOLVED</b>	23



# WELCOME

Dear Reader,

At the start of 2020, in a year that unbeknownst to us, a pandemic was brewing. In this context, Leeds Tidal and Platform London partnered to create The Climate Equities project. Born out of a frustration at the lack of decoloniality, diversity and representation in the climate movement, we wanted to step back and understand the 'why'. As people with lived experience of feeling outside of the climate movement, we wanted to move beyond our own assumptions as to the causes, and speak to the next generation of people wanting to make change. With the help of funding from Rosa Luxemburg foundation and Network for Social Change, we developed an action research project that stepped back to interrogate these root problems.

Our intention when we began was to use this research to co-create an arts-based political and popular education programme for and led by young people (aged between 16-35) within climate frontline communities. This is still a longer term vision, but our research and consultation work led us to observe the need for an initial intervention before creating an arts based programme. We've called this intervention; Compassionate Organising.

We observed that social movements and established organisations alike, are leaving a trail of folks burnt out from taking action, as well as disenfranchising young people. We needed to address organising cultures that so often replicate patterns of harm, and create a strong foundation for how we work together to sustain resistance. Enter our Compassionate Organising Toolkit, which you can read about in our accompanying toolkit document.

Alongside this, we hope sharing our Stories of Exclusion and Belonging in Climate Action will support individuals and collectives to understand the barriers that people feel when taking action, in order to collectively find ways forward. We imagine a world in which people can continue to move from a place of joy in their work and organising - which is how so many of us start out. Why wait for that world of tomorrow, when we can start to live our future today!

We are just a small group of people, with some offerings to you. We hope there is something here that supports you in your work. We see this work as being situated within the wider Climate Justice movement. If you'd like to understand more about this term, please listen to our soundscape 'What is Climate Justice?'

Happy reading,

The Climate Equities Team.



## A note to our readers (or listeners)

This research report and our Compassionate Organising Toolkit can be seen as complementary documents. They are outcomes of the research conducted through the Climate Equities Project which was piloted in Leeds, West Yorkshire, UK. We conducted focus groups with young people, as well as interviewing practitioners in Leeds, the North West and from across the UK. As part of our methodological approach, we centred lived-experience wisdom and knowledge, and ensured a compassionate space where people could bring their whole selves; as well as remunerating people for their time to honour their lived-experience expertise. One participant shared that “being listened to is really nice, the care in the space is bringing air and light into my heart”

We know that many of you reading this will have limited capacity. So take your time! We’ve kept this report as short as possible, but if you want the summary you can flick through and read the headlines - see what catches your eye and read on from there. If you would like a little more information and to see exactly what some of the young people and practitioners that we interviewed said, then do read on.

We have acknowledged most people in our quotes throughout the document, but you will see that some of them are missing an acknowledgement. Some practitioners chose to stay anonymous, and our focus group and interview contributions were given anonymously, so those quotes have been left unattributed to a specific person. We have also created a glossary. This is to ensure that everyone can read this work with ease, as we know that language and terminology can be a barrier.

As you will see, invitation 3 is around arts-based organising. As part of practising our politics - we have collaborated with two amazing artists in the delivery of this work. Whilst we gave them a small brief, we also encouraged them to respond to the work however they felt called to as artists. You can enjoy Camille Etchart’s beautiful artwork and design all the way through both publications, and you can listen to the musical response of musician and producer Lawrie Burton, AKA - on the soundscapes below.

Alternatively, if you don’t love reading - you can listen to our soundscapes as a way of digesting our research and interviews on the go.

You can learn about the following topics:

- What is Climate Justice?
- Barriers to Climate Action
- Invitations for the Climate Movement
- Invitations for Arts and Climate Action
- Compassionate Organising

You can access them for free on Soundcloud or Youtube, and any major streaming platform including Spotify, Apple music, Tidal, TikTok, Instagram, Amazon, Soundtrack, Pandora etc - by searching ‘Climate Equities Soundscapes’ or for any of the track names above.

## BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION

A main component of our research was understanding the barriers that people felt in participating in the climate movement or in climate action. While there is a great need to increase accessibility and broaden participation in the climate movement, our research findings as well as personal experiences of engaging in movement spaces were often disempowering.

Many of the young people and practitioners we spoke to described negative experiences of engaging in the mainstream climate movement, including concerns about **racism, classism, whiteness, inaccessible language, cultures of blame and division** as well as an **alienating framing** of the crisis and solutions. We’ve summarised these insights under headings below, which underpin the recommendations for movement actors in the next section of the report.





## Barrier 1: Institutional failure and marginalisation of alternative approaches

It was not a surprise to hear from young people that many felt failed by institutions and places that should play a key role in their development and learning. They shared that the government, communities and places of employment could be doing more to provide education for young people who are not typically part of the climate change dialogue. Amongst the young people we spoke to there was a shared regret that educational institutions, organisations and workplaces don't campaign on social justice and climate change, or support young people to take part in climate action. "...I think it was hard finding these places to begin with. And it's a matter of, rather than them coming to you, you've got a search for them." said a Focus Group Participant. As a result, taking part or engaging with these important issues felt like something extra to do.

In addition, focus group participants shared that they didn't know where the opportunities to engage are, as it is not communicated or promoted adequately. They also shared that where there is opportunity to engage, climate-frontline communities often have to go to these tables rather than these organisations coming to their spaces. There was also recognition that political leaders and climate policy can be very decisive, and fail to unify people for the greater good of the planet, or help people realise how big of a problem climate change really is. "If we can't be united, how can we tackle what needs to be tackled? If there aren't really clear rules, how can we get people to recognise how serious an issue is? [we] need policy to help people realise how big an issue is." Focus Group Participant

*Key Learning: the first barrier was simply the longstanding issue that social movements have very little institutional backing in the UK, and as a result operate on the fringes of society. This inevitably leads to issues around accessibility and discoverability. Whilst it is important not to depoliticize or water down the issues, movement actors may want to engage more readily with educational institutions, in order to better reach young people, families and communities.*

## Barrier 2: Classism and the punitive 'individual responsibility' framing

Class disparity was understood by both practitioners and young people to be a significant barrier that impacted the means to participate in climate movements. A young person shared; "I think it's a class based thing, how it affects you in your class and like, where you are in the world. So I think a lot of people do care about the environment. They just don't have the means to like, actually organise and make choices. I think that's like, the biggest barrier, for the rest of us." Whilst another shared "I haven't seen an organisation or like a movement that specifically works around working class impacts around climate change. And even, working class solutions toward climate change...with people being strapped for money.

*And the duality of politics, or preservation, and preservation of the environment, there's a lot of stuff that hasn't been talked about a lot. But there's not a dedicated space for that kind of stuff"*

Similarly amongst practitioners, the climate movement was often described as "very white and middle class" and there were numerous iterations of the sentiments that "people don't necessarily have any sort of space in their practical day to day life for too many issues, unless they're very privileged. So people are naturally going to focus on the thing that's kind of threatening them the most at that point in time." A number of practitioners expressed their views on climate movement spaces, and deemed them performative, competitive and individualistic.

In addition to this, young people felt that when climate action is framed as an 'individual responsibility' it can induce unhelpful feelings of guilt; particularly amongst those who identified as working class. We heard differing things among young people, where some felt that many working class people lacked adequate resources (time or money) to respond to climate issues through ethical purchasing\* or taking part in protest movements. While on the other hand, some saw themselves and working class people as already having a low-consumption lifestyle, and not being responsible for the historical and current drivers of the climate crisis. "I have a conscience, like environmentally. We do recycle. And we don't consume a lot of fast fashion and these things. But then the flip side, yeah, we didn't like, take boats to Jamaica".

These differing positions aren't mutually exclusive, but reflect the different ways that dominant individualist climate narrative can be felt; either eliciting feelings of 'guilt' and 'not enough', or evoking resistance to the 'blame and shame' narratives offered. This sentiment was shared amongst practitioners too, where many concerns were raised around how "punitive cultures are unsustainable".

Key Learning: It is vital that movement actors recognise positionality, and the structural advantages that enable some to engage in climate movements. In addition, it is crucial that we move away from focusing on individual responsibility, which can elicit a punitive culture of blame, particularly towards those who are least responsible for carbon emissions, and not responsible for the colonial roots of the crisis. Not only does this generate classist barriers to engagement, but it also obscures the systemic and colonial foundations of the crisis, thus impairing our efforts to challenge it.

\*NB: Who actually benefits from individuals making ethical purchasing decisions as a climate solution is an important question but beyond the scope of this research.



### Barrier 3: Exclusionary 'one-size-fits-all' 'Activist' identity

For the young people we spoke to, we learnt that 'activist' was a tricky term to identify with, due to feelings of inadequacy relating to what this term implies and stands for. "There's like specific language or specific ways of being. I eat meat and when I say that, I feel judged or uncomfy" - noted a young person. As a result of not feeling able to categorise oneself as an 'activist' some young people didn't feel able to take part in climate action. "The naming of 'We are the climate activists' can be a barrier over people". This raised questions amongst the group around what activism should look like, and criticisms were shared about the types of high risk action that groups like Extinction Rebellion were taking for example, which are not safe for marginalised groups who already experience unwarranted over policing.

Similarly several practitioners interrogated the notion of what is considered "activism" or what makes you an "activist" when considering barriers to engagement. "The stereotypical environmentalist approach, I think, is a barrier. Because you don't have to live 'nature' to be a climate activist. And I think that's one of the key issues because people perceive that you have to be a tree hugger....And a lot of the people in this space are like that." Other interviewees spoke of how "a lot of what is valued tends to alienate lots of communities of colour that already exist in that state of harm, and in that state of precarity" when observing the tendency of climate activism to stand for choosing the preservation of the planet and nature, and not mentioning the human cost. "I think that's such a huge barrier for people of colour as well, because it's like, why would I care about like an animal when people that I know are dying".

*Key Learning: It is important that movement actors recognise that 'activist' identities and cultures, with a prescribed set of behaviours and values, don't resonate for everyone interested in taking climate action. This expectation can create unhelpful pressure to either assimilate into a one-size-fits-all identity to find belonging within climate movements, or be left feeling inadequate, unrepresented and separate from those spaces and communities. As movement actors we must make an effort to disrupt these stereotypes that are a disservice to the movement. By naming these unhelpful norms, and ensuring the cultural practices we engage in collectively are explicit and consensual, we can create more inclusive responses to climate change.*

### Barrier 4: Lofty academic and science-based framings

Language was the most common barrier named by practitioners during these interviews. Most practitioners reported that climate issues were not framed in a way that was accessible for most. "Lofty roundtables ignore that, because obviously they're run by people, inevitably Oxbridge cis white men. But when you break it down to be about what people are worried about - like financial worries, housing, futures, children, health - these are all climate change issues. It is about language, and it's about meeting people where they're at."

There was agreement across the board that the language used to inform and educate around climate change was often very academic. "The people who are most affected by the injustices, often don't necessarily speak the language that we are speaking as 'professionals or experts or campaigners'. People have different access points. And sometimes we replicate the inaccessibility of the topic by talking about it as scientific statistics or objectifying stuff." There appeared to be consensus amongst practitioners that framing climate justice as a science issue is a barrier. "inevitably, it is not going to appeal to a broad range of people. It's very white and very much about 'wildlife', 'icebergs' - it's off-putting the way that the movement has been framed."

These findings were echoed by the young people we spoke to, who similarly recognised that the articulation of the climate crisis and climate solutions makes it harder for people wanting to engage in it, and subsequently more difficult to share their learning among peers and family. 'The language is pretty dry, let's be honest. Like 'climate change', 'emissions' it's all dry.' It was also noticed that the media doesn't report on the positive stories or the small acts of resistance that are happening in local communities. Some of the young people we spoke to felt that if more of this was reported on, it would increase a sense of togetherness and agency to act.

*Key Learning: As movement actors and particularly those working in communications, we must make an effort to connect the science with real everyday impacts, as well as positive examples of local communities tackling this. This will better build understanding of how lives are being directly affected locally and across the world, as well as what engagement in solutions can look like.*

### Barrier 5: The white-lens and eurocentric 'othering' of the earth

A few practitioners highlighted the vast disconnect between the dominant white liberal understanding of the climate, and a decolonial relationship to our climate and environment. "Climate embodies everything in a way it hugs every issue. It's like, we don't exist away from our planet. (...) having climate away from everything, distances away from our own understanding of who we are. Like having our mother away from our discussion of identity also limits our perspective on ourselves."

"When we think about climate change we use a white lens. And actually, when we think about our communities, traditions and spiritualities, there is no separation. It is absolutely impossible for me not to be in relation to an ecology, I am part of it. In the Quran there's an invitation to Salaam the tree, because the tree is your ancestor. So you know, there's all of this abundance of what our traditions offer - and the work of being anti-colonial is the remembering of this interdependence. We are in live conversation and dynamic conversation with our realities. There's no separation. It's just not possible".



*This separation from our earth, and the separation between the climate crisis and other social issues was recognised (implicitly and explicitly) by some practitioners and young people as a colonial legacy. A vast majority of practitioners and young people recognised the interconnectedness of the climate crisis, with other systems of oppression (capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism) and its interdependence with other everyday struggles (poverty, migration, health, policing). Some named that this connection was rarely recognised and spoken of in dominant climate spaces. 'One of the issues at the moment is that people are taking those different challenges as separate, people looking at just climate change, and just economic inequality, and not confronting the ways they're intertwined, or they're going to become increasingly intertwined.' One practitioner gave examples of how climate movements could make climate issues more relatable by starting with everyday environmental violence that communities contend with such as; 'loss of space, food apartheid, malnutrition, Prevent, surveillance culture, healthcare system, COVID, impact of intergenerational trauma, diaspora, physiological genes, distress of displacement'.*

Other participants identified that this tendency to 'other' and separate the climate from ourselves, and other connected struggles, made climate movement cultures feel alienating, or like the activity within the spaces would not help them address the aspects of climate breakdown that were most concerning to them. "environmentalism, I find it to be quite alienating, and some of the people that go there who are environmentalists can be very difficult people to spend time with because they don't really understand how so many things are interconnected. And it's like climate first, everything else after...what really woke me up is working with people of colour, who actually went the other way around" - a practitioner shared.

*Key Learning: It's important that movement actors recognise how the eurocentric understanding of the environment as separate to ourselves, which posits humans as superior to the environment, is just one of many systems of knowledge. Acknowledgement of this is vital to bring more plurality to our solutions, and build stronger and broader coalitions in the fight to overturn the extractive economy. Secondly, by accepting the interconnectedness between struggles (as all rooted in the same 'imperialist, white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy' - Audre Lorde), and divesting from the colonial 'divide and rule' dogma, as well as our superiority over the earth and indigenous systems of knowledge, we can shift towards more holistic solutions rooted in solidarity.*

## **Barrier 6: Racism expressed through exclusion, tokenism and expectation to be taught**

There were many grievances shared about experiences of racism in the forms of tokenism, invisibilization through a lack of representation, and erasure through not crediting and honouring work and ideas. These disempowering white group level behaviours led to disengagement from those who had chosen to enter those spaces to take action on issues they are personally affected by, and feel strongly about.

There was a sense that these spaces are often extractivist in their nature; "tokenizing people or expecting them to educate people about their situation." Sai Murray. Movement actors from dominant groups often expected those with marginalised identities to teach them about their experiences, and advocate for themselves to make spaces more inclusive - rather than taking on responsibility to learn about their own racism, and taking accountability for harm.

In addition it was noted that potential coalitions with organisations that serve marginalised communities were often overlooked, and that dominant groups tend to overfocus on 'diversity' on the surface level, as an afterthought when it comes to public-facing events. "They want to increase the number of brown faces in their space, without even making links with organisations that are serving their needs first, ensuring that they're safe." Shannon Jackson

Additionally Shannon Jackson shared that when space was given to share experiences and bring different perspectives to the issue, there was often an overfocus on efficiency in white spaces, which undermined the need for self care, and compassion when sharing vulnerable human experiences; "in a lot of white spaces, your story has to be simplified. And you have to tell it quickly. And it's like a main highlights thing"

Similarly within the focus groups the lack of representation in relation to race and class was also expressed as a barrier to engagement by the young people we spoke to. Participants were unanimous in sharing the importance of representation, not just for race and class but other marginalised identities which are also not visible in the mainstream climate movement such as queerness or disability. We heard calls from young people for more working class representation in particular, to enable better awareness around language

Racism through extraction and erasure was present in dominant movement spaces when considering whose stories and voices were recognised and given credit. "We have been telling you for years that you need to stop. You need to stop extracting our country, you need to stop. You need to stop digging, because what you're doing is damaging the environment, damaging the climate. You're not listening to us. But all of a sudden, a few white academics and scientists have told you, and now you're listening to them." Yosola Olajoye Another practitioner highlighted the antidote to this as; "It's honouring them as leaders as visionaries, and not extracting, which we know many organisations and white institutions are prone to do". Selina Nwulu

*Key Learning: Movement actors who identify as being from dominant groups (white, middle class, cis-gender, heteronormative, neurotypical and able-bodied), must recognise how we reinforce oppression through disempowering group level behaviours. It is vital that we continually reflect on how we uphold and collude in systems of oppression as well as taking responsibility for our own learning and unlearning. In addition it is essential that we recognise the need to step back, listen and centre the wisdom and expertise of frontline communities and marginalised experiences, in order to step up to working in solidarity.*

## Barrier 7: A saviour complex offering charity not solidarity

*In addition we heard scepticisms shared about white climate spaces, where the dominant response is to offer charity rather than solidarity, and collude in oppressive victimising myths to ignite large scale mobilisation. One practitioner noted how some mass movement organisations used specific words and framings to evoke urgency, and appeal to white saviorism tendencies to elicit mass action. This was found to be dangerous as it reinforced the myths that uphold white supremacy, and erases the struggle of frontline communities. 'You're not saving the people of the rainforest... they are saving themselves. There's this problematic understanding across all charity work, it disempowers and it dehumanises those people who are fighting and surviving.'*

Saviourism as a strategy was seen as not only harmful for positioning those most impacted as 'helpless' and 'idle', but was also regarded as highly ineffective. In its essence the charity model reinforces power relationships which serve the extractive economy by erasing the expertise we can learn so much from, and inhibiting our political analysis and potential for coalition building as a movement. *"I just don't believe we should bring anything to any community... We have to not underestimate the wisdom and capacity of communities to connect"* Farzana Khan

**Key Learning:** *Movement actors must uplift the powerful grassroots resistance of front-line communities locally and internationally, as well as recognise the unique role we can play in increasing the impact of this work, by utilising the structural advantages we hold to serve these struggles, rather than playing into harmful victim narratives that erase resistance. To work with true solidarity we must listen, ask and show up for groups we are working in solidarity with, whilst assessing the ways that we can leverage our power in accordance with that.*

## INVITATIONS FOR MOVEMENT ACTORS

We first want to acknowledge that many of the recommendations presented below are not new, and are already practised by movements and movement actors who centre racial justice and an intersectional analysis in their work, here in West Yorkshire, the UK and internationally. In addition we recognise there is never a one-size fits all approach or solution, and what we are 'recommending' should not be taken as such. Our recommendations are based on strong themes that came out across many conversations. They have been written as values and principles rather than prescriptive outputs and goals, which may look very different when applied in different local contexts and movement spaces.

When we set out on this research, we wanted to find out what worked and what didn't, so we could build an arts-based educational programme in a way that ensured best practice, that adds to, and does not replicate what was already being offered within our movement spaces. What we found in the process of doing this research warranted sharing publicly, so that others could avoid repeating harms, and join us in reducing barriers to engagement. We hope this material can help lift the burden on those of us with marginalised identities, having to continually challenge harmful practice, or educate others about our experiences.

We do not want to take credit or present these recommendations as new. What we are offering is a shining light on the recommendations our research uncovered, as well as uplifting some organisations who are spearheading this work, for movement actors to resource and build relationships of solidarity with. Our Compassionate Organising Toolkit that follows this report is an offering to our movement, which addresses the gaps found in our research, where recommendations discovered did not have local actors currently leading on this work.

You can also listen to our invitations via our soundscapes:

- Invitations for the movement
- Invitations for the Climate Movement
- Invitations for Arts and Climate Action
- Compassionate Organising

You can access them for free on Soundcloud or Youtube, and any major streaming platform including Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal, TikTok, Instagram, Amazon, Soundtrack, Pandora etc - by searching 'Climate Equities Soundscapes' or for any of the track names above.



## Invitation 1: Decolonizing, Honouring & Resourcing Leadership

### What does this mean?

Through conversations with practitioners and young people, we heard a strong emphasis on the importance of platforming, honouring and adequately resourcing the leadership of those with lived experience expertise of climate impacts. *"Turning that hierarchy of marginalisation on its head." "Who is at the bottom and how can we give them the most voice in this?"* Yosola Olajoye In particular it was emphasised that those living in the Majority World as well as young people, and diaspora communities living locally, have a key role to play in directing allocations of resources, defining what success means for our movements, and sharing international perspectives to shift narratives beyond western colonial standpoints. *"I think there's something about honouring people that have been there, from honouring our ancestors to older generations, and honouring those ideas that have already been out there and crediting them properly. It's honouring them as leaders as visionaries, and not extracting, which we know many organisations and white institutions are prone to do. I think a lot of it is not reinventing the wheel but just elevating those people who have been saying those things for some time."* Selina Nwulu

### How can it be done?

#### Remuneration, citation and not expecting free labour

It was acknowledged that communities with these expertise are often some of the most marginalised and under-resourced; who are often left to pick up pieces from difficulties brought on by social and economic deprivation. We heard calls for addressing the inequity of how resources are distributed to enable more representative leadership and leaderful environments. An equitable redistribution of funding and resources (without restriction and strings attached) will boost the power that marginalised communities have to lead action and achieve change that is self determined - not exploitative, extractive or extracting for the benefit of those already in positions of power.

There is a tendency in leftist movements to expect free labour of those speaking at conferences or interviews from positions of lived experience expertise, when often those asking are in paid positions, and would offer remuneration to speakers with academic backgrounds which continues the inequity of knowledge sharing and recognition. I think there's something broader about who we listen to, who's seen as voices of authority.

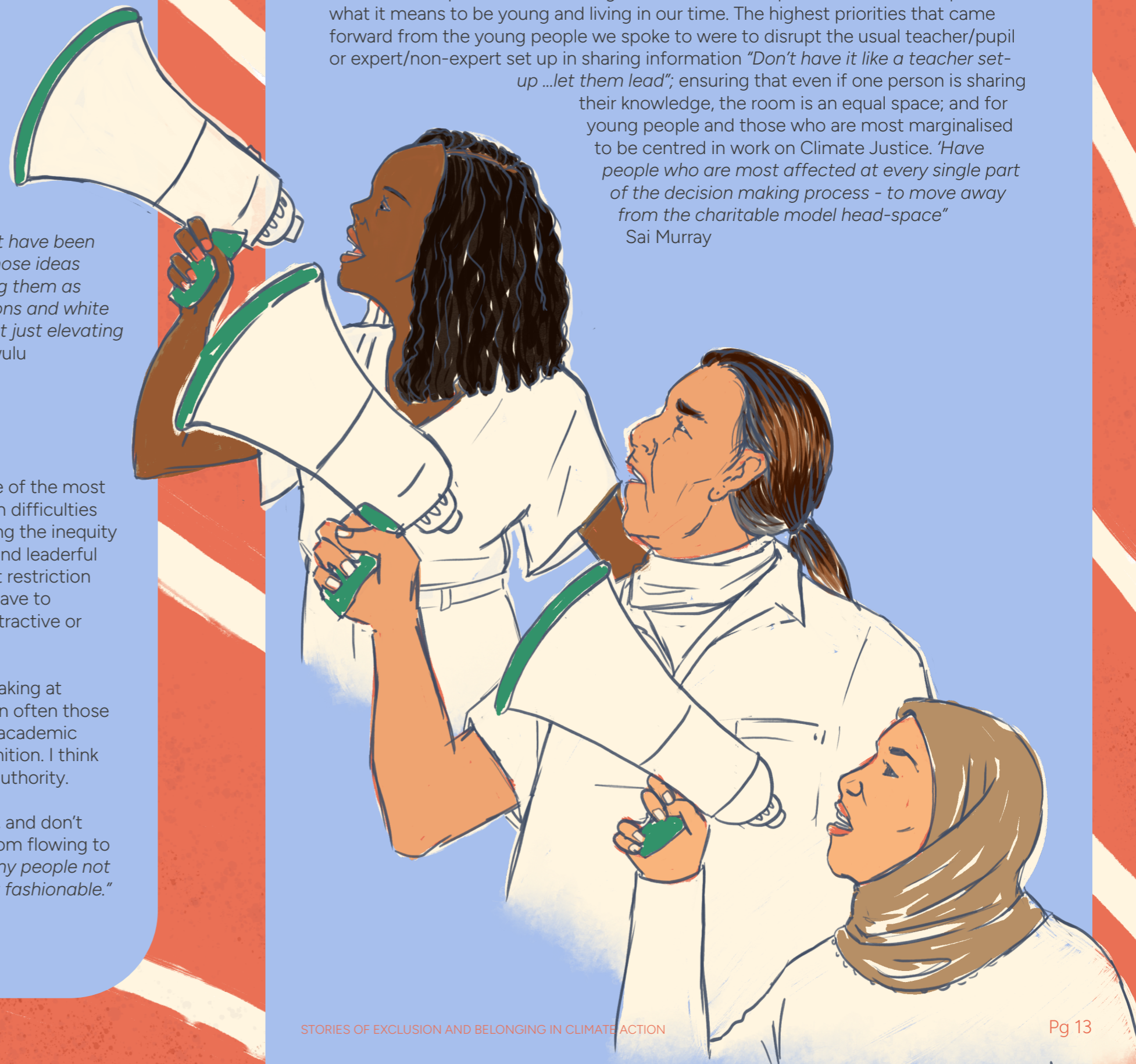
We contribute to repeating cycles of oppression when we invisibilize labour, and don't cite the ideas we are quoting - which prevents resources and recognition from flowing to the source. It's quite painful when those views are not paid. *"I've seen so many people not being quoted for the things that they've been saying for years before it got fashionable."* Selina Nwulu

#### Disrupting the expert / non expert binary and decentralising learning environments

In focus groups, we found that young people from communities that experience marginalisation felt disparaged or tokenised in movement spaces, even in spaces meant for them. Representation is not enough, and there was a call for spaces to centre their experiences, knowledge and wisdom as experts in their lives; experts in what it means to be young and living in our time. The highest priorities that came forward from the young people we spoke to were to disrupt the usual teacher/pupil or expert/non-expert set up in sharing information *"Don't have it like a teacher set-up ...let them lead"*; ensuring that even if one person is sharing

their knowledge, the room is an equal space; and for young people and those who are most marginalised to be centred in work on Climate Justice. *'Have people who are most affected at every single part of the decision making process - to move away from the charitable model head-space'*

Sai Murray





## Invitation 2: Centre International Perspectives and Acknowledge Global History in our Solutions

### What does this mean?

Amongst many young people and practitioners we spoke to, there is a desire for climate spaces to better understand how legacies of capitalism and colonialism have fueled the current climate crisis - in order for these spaces to be relevant. *"Knowing how it affects my community, how does it affect black people, how does it affect the people around me? It's not personal at the moment. The more I can see the way that it's affecting all of these people, the more I feel ready to mobilise."* Focus group participant

Alongside this it was observed that there is an overfocus on western solutions to climate breakdown, which tends to overt our responsibility to really rethink our supply chains, overconsumption and resource management. This can lead to missed opportunities to build movements that work across issues, leave people feeling misrepresented in struggles, or not clear on the relevance of climate change and colonial legacies to our everyday lives. *"I didn't fully understand the scale of the climate crisis until it reached quite a high level of education, which isn't obviously available to loads of people. And it can be a challenge to sort of distil into relatable information."*

Naomi Harriot-brown

How we frame the problem determines the solutions we deem necessary. By having an internationalist perspective on the history of the crisis; the climate solutions we fight for have a better chance of also addressing the historic harms and inequalities that fuel the crisis.

### How can it be done?

Framing our narratives and storytelling around our shared struggles and 'interdependence'

*"Learning about Ken Saro-Wiwa, which I think is the epitome of social justice, human rights and climate justice all in one gave me a way to understand how all these things interlink"* Selina Nwulu. Some examples for how to embed this included for movements to work across issues to find common ground, and build collective understanding of our interconnected struggles. One practitioner shared; *"it's transformational when there is a deep understanding of our interdependence. I look forward to a future where our interdependence is because we're human, and not because of scarcity, any form of lack, or oppression"* Farzana Khan.

Another practitioner shared an example of the value of making links between community action, health, climate and system change: *"It's about trying to just connect those dots - it could be about making it locally relevant and rolling into this sort of joyous empowering package of 'I can get around in this really fun way, whilst also not contributing to this'. It's not super easy to live that now, but how can we do it? And what role do we have? And what role do the bigger powers and decision makers have?"*

Naomi Harriot Brown.





## Centring reparations & broadening our euro-centric understanding of what's recognised as climate action

Another example for how we might embed this principle, was to take care and consideration for the ways in which cultural differences and different understandings of what's seen as climate action and climate solutions are respected. *"Could we platform the reparations narrative from the grassroots rather than establishment voices?"* Sai Murray. Many research participants spoke of how important it is to centre a reparations narrative in the 'solutions' that we consider, which is a solution often not presented in mainstream climate spaces.

## Using storytelling to demystify issues, and move away from technical and science based framings

Many research contributors spoke of the need to share information in digestible formats, in order to centre the histories of colonialism and capitalism and how these things connect with the present. There were calls for ensuring that the history of 'how we got here' is always shared and embedded in a non-technical way, as well as demystifying climate solutions and the information on climate change.

Storytelling was an often mentioned means for doing this in an accessible way. Either through speaking from the 'I' about our own lived experiences, or learning from our family, cultural histories and our elders; who have or had traditions that were more connected to the land, plant medicines, and sustainable lifestyles. *"Memories of parents growing food but feeling shame about not having branded products at school or being able to afford them. 'Why are we growing potatoes? Why can't we just have a bag of chips like other people do?' and how this connects to strategies of capitalist development and modernity - centralising agriculture, agribusiness, centralised economies - while being shamed out of being a farmer, promised stability and employment in the west, monopolising safety for global south folks."* - Farzana Khan. Another form of storytelling that came up was through using the arts. We've shared more in the section below on the role the arts can play in transforming our organising.

### Movement Spotlight: Racial Justice Network's '13th Recommendation'

During our research we had the honour of speaking to Mama D Ujuaje, Melany Zarate and Sai Murray - who amongst other climate and arts-based practices, are also members of The Racial Justice Network's Race and Climate Justice Group.

Their organising work is very much spearheading the first two invitations found in the research. Both through hosting a monthly learning space, which platforms climate visionaries, leaders and elders; including those hailing from Kenya, Brazil and Columbia to share international perspectives from their frontline struggles. And through their work disseminating the ['13th Recommendation: a framework for bringing international perspectives to the climate agenda'](#) throughout their engagements with the wider climate movement. These learning spaces have been instrumental in deepening our understanding of climate justice.

More info, videos and provocations about The 13th recommendation can be found [here](#). The monthly learning space is held on the last Tuesday of the month from 6 - 7.30, and is open to all. Here is [the link](#) to join future sessions.

## Invitation 3: Use Arts-Based Organising to Make Climate Action More Inclusive

### What does this mean?

When setting out to do this research as a team, we were aware of how the arts were already being applied by many practitioners to successfully create inclusive and engaging communities of resistance. We intentionally set out to interview 'Movement Practitioners' who self-identified as having lived experience of marginalisation, and who engaged in the arts or popular and political education around climate justice issues (see Process section below for more details).

Across both those already engaging in the arts, and those who worked with other forms of popular education, we found there was a shared desire for new ways to connect with issues that are often communicated in scientific or individual-focused ways. *"It can be a bit academic and complex when you're trying to understand the climate crisis and structural inequality issues. And so if they can be communicated through art that's great."* Naomi Harriot-Brown. Alongside this, there was a desire for ways of organising and taking action on climate change to be more hopeful, nourishing and sustaining. Arts-based organising has been a key part of all social movements and cultural shifts in society since the dawn of time, it is central to human self-expression and collective liberation. *"Art is essential to play, communicating and learning - it is part of life and our day to day."* Sai Murray

Yet very often it is seen as a nice addition, or even something that excludes as only 'artists' can do art. *"What is the arts? What is that to people who've grown up in the Niger Delta? And who haven't had the benefit in 'Renaissance and enlightenment' thinking to recognise that the arts are this particular set of things. It's absolute crap. We live art all the time, we are art, we are science. What isn't art, really what isn't?"* Mama D Ujuaje. For Movement Actors with a desire to broaden and deepen engagement, our invitation is for the arts to be seen as central in our work towards addressing climate change; whether through collaboration with artists, including arts-based methodologies in how we facilitate, or rethinking what an 'output' and even 'activism' look like.

Through using arts-based organising, there is space for everyone to participate. The arts can be a way of levelling the playing field, shifting culture, and telling new narratives. We see arts as everywhere, and art-based methodologies and tools as an essential part of centering climate justice in our work. By the arts we mean play, dance, drama, drawing, design, music, DJ-ing, illustrative minuiting, set design, woodwork, doodling, participatory facilitation and games, the list goes on. Anyone can use arts-based methodologies in their work, and collaborating with artists and practitioners can also be a great way of broadening the reach of work. *"People think art is the cuddly thing that you add on that makes people feel good. Of course, there's catharsis in art, but it's actually a site of inquiry. It's a muscle and a discipline"* Farzana Khan

## How can it be done?

### 'Start from the Heart' - Storytelling as an art form for reframing climate action and creating intergenerational spaces

Storytelling as a tool and an art-form was a theme that came up consistently amongst the movement practitioners we spoke to. It was seen as a means to create more equal spaces; "Art as a tool for dialogue in spaces where people have different language [and access] needs." Yosola Olajoye; For engaging people in complex issues and reconnecting with our whole being as a site of intervention; "Arts is a useful tool to engage people in [...] big issues, which are hard to get a hold on and hard to grasp [...] because it's a way of getting through filters..." "Arts helps us to draw connections and feel connected to the self and nature and connect all the disparate aspects of life together." Sai murray.

"I think stories are really good ways of talking about stuff, concepts are helpful, but then most people are just like, what the fuck does that mean? But then if someone gave me a story to illustrate the concept, and then told me the concept, rather than people assuming that concepts are known" Nonhlanhla Makuyana.

When we 'start from the heart', we connect with one another through our bodies and emotions, creating a more lasting and memorable shared experience. We immediately broaden engagement when we express ourselves through our authentic and relatable shared humanity, rather than communicating only through learnt statistics, concepts or facts which will most appeal to those who already engage in these topics. "A lot of issues are exacerbated because we keep telling ourselves the same stories and dominant narratives. Alternative stories can help people visualise an alternative future" Naomi Harriot-Brown

### Tool: Fireside Story Sessions

An example of how to embed this could be 'fireside story sessions' an activity developed by Rowan Mataram. This activity involves taking case studies relevant to the work you are doing, and tell them as children's stories round a fire. Invite everyone, have food, hot drinks and maybe even marshmallows. This way, everyone can learn together whilst being inspired by stories of resistance or a just transition. The intergenerationality of having children present can also bring fresh inquiring minds to what can feel complex issues, as children often bring a simplicity to solutions that adults fail to find.



## Invitation 4: Practise Compassionate Organising

### What does this mean?

One of the biggest barriers and challenges that we heard from all of our focus groups was that the cultures that were prevalent in organisations, organising and activist spaces and particularly in NGO's, were stopping people from engaging in continuous and sustainable ways in the climate movement. Alongside this, the narrative around urgency that we spoke about in barriers, was seen as creating spaces that are uninviting from the start.

"Anti racism can't just be about educating white people and non-Black people, and it also has to be about joy. And it also has to be about redistribution, rebuilding our lives, and how we relate to each other. So I think, I think that's what comes to me when I think about the question of what's important for our community - its not to be defined by struggle, but joy, and by continuing to re-envision what our futures can be".

Selina Nwulu

### How can it be done?

We are not alone in being a group of people thinking about how we can work, live and organise more compassionately. Organisations such as Healing Justice London, Decolonising Economics, The Nap Ministry, Lumos Transforms and Radical HR Collective amongst others are doing trailblazing work in this area. However, this still felt like an area identified in the research with the most room for expansion for the movement ecology we exist in. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this research and funding to contribute to this fully, which would be life long and continual work, we wanted to close the research with a community offering, which brings together a collection of facilitation and organising tools that we have been practising throughout the project, as well as in our other fields of work. You can read our Compassionate Organising Toolkit as a compliment to this report, for some suggestions on how we might begin to embed a more compassionate organising culture across our movement spaces. "How can we look after each other, instead of just squeezing more stuff out of each other? I think that's



# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## Decoloniality

This is a term coined by Anibal Quijano; a Peruvian sociologist. It is an ideology that looks at the injustices of colonisation. It acknowledges that colonisation didn't just end when colonising powers left, different forms of oppression and violence were employed in order to keep people suppressed. It caused an erasure and disconnection of knowledge, culture, languages, ways of being, ways of organising etc. This school of thought proposes that we divorce from what remnants of the colonial era in order for those descending from that have experienced colonisation to thrive.

## Compassionate Organising Toolkit

Our idea of how we organise in our community that centres our needs, our collective humanity, our lived-experiences, prompts belonging, equity, consciousness, nourishing of one another and is considerate of our past traumas.

## Framing

How we communicate an idea, a story or information; it looks at how we organise and package what is to be communicated and who to with the aim of our audiences interpreting the message conveyed to them in a specific way. We frame everyday either consciously or subconsciously and framing can be powerful as it can influence discourse and behaviour, might evoke intended emotions and shift the way we think.

## Alienating

The act of making someone feel isolated.

## Climate-frontline communities

These are groups of people that have an immediate and the most unfavourable experiences of climate disruption.

## Discoverability

The ease at which something can be found.

## Depoliticize

To be void of political activity or influence.

## Punitive

Inflicting or intending punishment.

## Disparity

An unequal and unfair treatment of one group in comparison to another.

## Iterations

This is when something(s) are repeated a few or many times.

## social capital

Access to resources derived from relationships and networks in order to drive action

## Movement actors

People who play a part in the development of a movement

## Positionality

This refers to how our identities are shaped based on our race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationalities etc.

## Precarity

When something is uncertain or insecure.

## References

<https://www.wm.edu/sites/dhp/decoloniality/index.php#:~:text=Decoloniality%20refers%20to%20the%20logic,of%20colonization%20and%20settler%20colonialism.>

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# OUR PROCESS

As researchers who came to this project from our own lived-experiences of marginalisation in the mainstream climate movement, we entered into this project with our own assumptions and biases. It was therefore essential that we understood the variety of barriers that people experienced, beyond our own encounters.

Our research and consultation period ran from January 2020, to February 2021. We initially envisioned carrying out this phase of the project in person, however ended up adapting our process and held interviews and focus groups online due to the restrictions of the pandemic. Before embarking on the research process, we invited seven movement mentors and elders to join our Advisory Board to guide and shape our consultation process.

We held three focus groups with thirteen young people from climate-frontline communities based in Leeds, Manchester, Halifax and London, who self-identified as having felt excluded by climate movements. The purpose of the focus groups was to identify what young people think about climate change, about current way movements are tackling climate change, to acquire an understanding of the present barriers to engagement that young people from marginalised backgrounds are faced, and to embolden them to make key recommendations for the movement as a whole and for the next phase of our project.

We also held fourteen interviews with 'Movement Practitioners' who self-identified as having lived experience of marginalisation, and who engaged in the arts or popular and political education around climate justice issues. Our intention for these conversations was to find out what works, doesn't, and what else is needed to build more inclusive and engaging communities of resistance.

## Who was involved?

### Acknowledgements

This process would not have emerged and grown without the wisdom, expertise and generosity of the following collaborators. In particular we really valued the input of young people as we recognise that young people are the least responsible for climate change but among those who are

#### Advisory Board Members

Yosola Olajoye  
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Aneaka Kellay  
Emma Goodway  
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Selina Nwulu  
Julie Longden  
Nonhlanhla Makuyana  
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