



FIELD NOTES | CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENDING POVERTY

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These field notes capture the experiences, ideas and insights shared during a workshop on the interrelated goals of ending poverty and tackling climate change. The virtual session was held on May 6, 2021, during the Cities Reducing Poverty (now, Communities Ending Poverty) annual gathering, and attracted 127 participants from across Canada and around the world.



CONTEXT

On May 6, 2021, as part of The End of Poverty Virtual Gathering, we held a workshop exploring the intersections of climate change and ending poverty. The workshop had 127 participants from around the world and guest speakers from Climate Caucus, Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners (CUSP), and Youth Climate Lab. These field notes capture key insights, advice and tools that emerged from the session.

Climate Caucus: A non-partisan network of 370+ local elected climate leaders driving systems change. It centralizes action and policy, advocates for actions at every level of government, and supports elected official to meet and discuss local actions.

Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners (CUSP): Connects member municipalities (17 from coast to coast), affiliate networks, and key partners to advance sustainability. CUSP works to mitigate climate change through deep GHG reductions and decarbonization, build climate resilience, and advance restorative climate justice.

Youth Climate Lab (YCL): Designs, pilots and scales experiments that tackle problems faced by young people in their fight against climate change. It does so by driving a skills shift to help youth hone their skills; a policy shift to help create policy solutions anchored in intergenerational equity; and a finance shift to support innovative financing mechanisms.

Meet the Practitioners

Rik Logtenberg – BC City Councillor and the founder of Climate Caucus

Megan Curren – Councillor with the District of North Vancouver and Climate Caucus Steering Committee member

Allison Ashcroft – Managing Director of Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners

Celeste Alcena – Community Manager at Youth Climate Lab

Laura Schnurr (moderator) – Director of Community Climate Transitions at Tamarack

 **INSIGHTS****We need to think in terms of whole systems**

Whereas a few years ago we may have been doing change work in siloes, we can no longer afford to separate issues today. Climate Caucus adopted the 1•10•Zero vision (One Planet, 10 Years, No One Left Behind) as a reminder that we always have to be solving multiple problems at once. Both CUSP and YCL also approach this work holistically.

- “Decarbonization is not enough. We have to think about the entire system in which our communities exist.” – Rik
- “Climate change is a symptom. Biodiversity collapse is a symptom. Social injustice is a symptom. We must address the root cause of planetary collapse and social exclusion.” – Megan
- “This is the climate decade and the decade of action on the Sustainable Development Goals and now we’re trying to recover from COVID-19. Cities are stretched. Everything that we do needs to be multi-solving right now; we can’t just be doing things that reduce greenhouse gases.” – Allison

Recognizing intersectionality is crucial

There is a need to view all climate policy and action through a social justice framework. Structural inequalities mean that not everyone will experience climate change equally and the most vulnerable will likely be the most impacted by climate change. At the same time, policies to address the impacts of climate change could worsen structural inequalities if they are not weighed in decision making. The issue of energy poverty (defined as those spending more than 6% of their income on energy bills) illuminates this.

- “Energy poverty is a spatial justice issue. It’s an income issue, a housing affordability issue, a gender inequality issue and a racial inequality issue.” – Allison

Radical inclusivity is the only path forward

Inclusion and collaboration have become buzz words, and risk losing their meaning. We need to revisit and redefine these terms.

- “People at the margins need to have a stronger voice in the decisions that will impact their lives” – Rik
- “We will never be inclusive and center the most marginalized in our community if we’re doing it at too high of a level” – Allison
- “Radical collaboration is honouring different ways of exploring knowledge, whether that’s knowledge in our bodies, land-based knowledge, intergenerational knowledge, creative spaces and art-based spaces.” – Celeste

Honouring traditional knowledge and wisdom starts with ending violence and harm

- “Living in a reciprocal relationship with nature and caring and honouring one another and the land happens through our connection to community and ancestral wisdom. However, ongoing expressions of colonial violence and displacement lead to the disconnection from land and each other, especially for communities of colour. The leadership and answers we seek for the climate, ecological and humanitarian crises we face exist within Indigenous communities who have had relationships to the land for millennia. Yet over-policing, police brutality, and systemic neglect experienced by Black and Indigenous folks and people living in poverty – and the over-representation of these same populations in prisons – is erasing and segregating

these voices and preventing us from getting to a climate future that is sustainable and inclusive of communities most impacted by climate and state-induced violence. Solutions have been lost and systemically displaced through generations of harm.” – Celeste

- “We’ve strayed so far from who we are innately, as loving beings who are part of this natural ecosystem that is the earth.” – Celeste
- “Coming back to and accessing existing cultural and ancestral tools and knowledge is how we’re actually going to find answers, as they exist in communities; It’s not a lack of innovation, but a lack of space to breathe. In the words of my friend – trauma kills the imagination.” – Celeste

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Confront power & embrace discomfort

This work is not easy. It requires us to do deep reflection, to be self-questioning, and have difficult conversations.

- “We have to stop prioritizing our own comfort over justice, as white folks in this space” – Megan
- “People in power are also in a position of comfort, and you don’t drive for change if you’re in a place of comfort” – Rik

Allow space and time for healing and re-rooting

Because of systems of harm and systems of violence, not everyone has had access to the time and space to really breathe and to hone in on their gifts, their power, and their connection to themselves, their ancestry and also the land itself. We need to make space for everyone to have the chance to heal and get re-rooted.

- “The healing work, especially with and for those who have been told by systems of harm that they’re not worthy or deserving of a good life is central to the work of climate action and poverty reduction.” – Celeste
- “We must reclaim our sense of self and our knowledge and roots so that we have the space to imagine and dream and be in our power.” – Celeste

Remember the spiritual and emotional components of this work

Working on climate and racial justice can feel isolating at times, especially for those carrying the weight of injustice. We need to take care of one another, and value personal love and worthiness.

- “We’re not alone in this work. We have so many folks with us and folks who have come before us, and also community to carry us through this work.” – Celeste

TOOLS

Infiltration Manual: Pushing for Ambitious Climate Action at the Municipal Level

Youth Climate Lab partnered with Climate Caucus to develop and disseminate the [Infiltration Manual: Pushing for Ambitious Climate Action at the Municipal Level](#). The guide, created by and for climate activists and climate-friendly city councillors, provides an overview of how municipal governments work; guidance on identifying and mobilizing supporters; recommendations for getting access to council and bringing forward asks; and tips for self-care for youth representatives. This resource is

useful for anyone that wants to empower voices that are not being heard in discussions around climate action.

1•10•Zero City Councillor’s Climate Action Handbook

Climate Caucus produced this [Councillor’s Handbook](#) as a toolkit for elected leaders and their allies to take action on climate change. It helps readers to recognize the crises we are facing, adopt a “change framework” (e.g., the Sustainable Development Goals), set a vision and targets, establish a committee, and take action (in areas such as transportation, buildings, zero waste and circular economy, nature-based solutions, and food security).

Energy Poverty and Equity Explorer Tool

The [Energy Poverty and Equity Explorer Tool](#) produced by the Canadian Urban Sustainability Practitioners allows policy makers to explore and understand the prevalence and extent of energy poverty in different neighbourhoods, cities, and provinces. By measuring energy cost burden alongside the existence of drivers and characteristics--such as housing age, type, condition and affordability, household income, and poverty--policy makers and program managers can more effectively target, address, and overcome its root causes.

Power Wheel

The Canadian Council for Refugees developed a [power wheel](#) as a way to understand intersectionality, power and privilege. It is a useful tool for anyone working on issues related to climate change and poverty reduction.

Interested in viewing the recording of the workshop?

[Watch it here.](#)

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