

A Global Case for Climate Narratives

Ashoka is partnering with the Skoll Centre at the University of Oxford researching strategies that unlock individual agency for climate action.

While everyone has a role to play, many of the biggest changes need to be driven by decision makers in business and government. This project focuses on how individuals shift the systems they're part of by expressing collective public demand for action. The central tenant of the project is co-creation with local narrative shapers, social entrepreneurs and climate experts.

In July and August 2023 we ran discovery workshops in four locations. Here are the main insights from these workshops, which explored the gaps and challenges we are currently facing in order to later develop impactful solutions.

4 ECOLOGICAL HOTSPOTS – 4 GLOBAL CASE STUDIES

The pilot of this project will be run in four locations concurrently: Indonesia, Nigeria, Mexico and the United Kingdom. We chose these countries according to a combination of criteria:

- **National GHG emissions** – All locations are in the top 25 emitters as captured by production emission measurement standards (we based this on World Bank data on total greenhouse gas emissions from 2019, which was the most recent year for which data was available).
- **Non-production GHG emissions** – Nigeria and Indonesia are both fossil fuel exporters, which doesn't show up fully in their country profile (those emissions mainly show up where the fuel was used)
- **Globally important carbon sinks** – The world's main carbon sinks are the ocean, forests, and soil. Indonesia has a goal to make its forests a net carbon sink by 2030.
- **Diversity of cultures** – in the pilot we want to learn quickly, and having a diverse set of countries is intended to accelerate that learning.
- **Ashoka office and network strength** – the work will lean heavily on the local team. These four offices have a strong Ashoka network (Fellows and other relevant actors) and a team with desire and capacity to deliver.

MAIN INSIGHTS & DISCOVERIES

- There is a growing sense that the mechanisms for public will to be expressed to politicians has been weakened. Formal democratic pathways had been eroded. Support doesn't equal outcomes. This means the demand needs to be stronger, expressed using more forceful levers of influence. New tactics are needed.
- Local communities are often left out of the conversation, but they are also where the impacts are likely to be felt first and worst. They've been seeing their communities be neglected for so long; they're seeing them degrade. Tapping into the existing trust-based relationships that exist outside of the urban centres is an avenue for growing the base of climate support.
- Everything we do in climate change needs to improve the lives of working people – people are terrified that ambitious legislation will backfire on them, they'll take to the streets and protest. So it needs to come from them.

MAIN INSIGHTS BY COUNTRY

United Kingdom

- **The movement is getting frustrated:** There's an increasing sense of desperation as government fails to meet the challenge and prioritises fossil fuel interests. There is hunger for something more radical that captures the opportunity.
- **Spotlighting what's possible:** Move from fear to longing – creating and envisaging the new.
- **Moving beyond the single-issue focus:** Focusing on the intersectional issues and building support across movements will be more powerful than elevating climate change above others.
- **Linking climate to issues people care about:** For the majority of people where climate won't be their number one issue, leverage the narratives that are already compelling to them.

Nigeria

- **It's the systems that have failed, not the people:** The systems need to be re-wired, and business and government leaders are well placed to change this. Yet many political/business leaders are uneducated about climate change.
- **Tie together the livelihood conversation and the climate conversation:** Just telling people why they should stop using firewood or cutting trees is not enough – they need to be able to afford to provide their family with food, send them to school etc. In particular, we need to bring in the oil and gas host communities.
- **Find the decision makers within communities:** The importance of traditional leaders is immense. If we really want to create a shift in the system, the people with influence and trust within their communities need to be on board – if they make a decision, it's going to happen.

Indonesia

- **Inequality is interwoven with climate change:** Power and resources are not flowing to the communities, to the local tribes. Corruption is holding existing power dynamics in place, with the leaders of extractive industries being the ones who put politicians in power.
- **The fear of creating an economic vacuum:** If we remove the most profitable industries, what are the alternatives? Unfortunately, the extractive industries are the most profitable, or seen to be.
- **Faith-based actors have trust and incredible power:** Conservation of nature is a moral obligation as it is a way to protect God's creation.

Mexico

- **Growing gap between community solutions and decision makers:** this is an increasing challenge in the field that requires a cohesive framework for public-private-community network building to occur.
- **Technology as bridge builder:** we are seeing a growing opportunity enabled by tech to bridge and unite public will towards shifting the political and corporate will.
- **Need for new, emerging individual and collective narratives:** there is a need to connect the individual to the collective and systemic dimension of the climate crisis
- **We are nature narrative:** humanity's relationship with nature is broken and extractive, and therefore we need to rethink it.

CONTRIBUTORS

This project has been shaped by many hands: narrative and climate experts from around the world. We want to specifically acknowledge the on-going input by the following people:

- Ashoka Fellows: [Nicole Rycroft](#), [Oren Yacobovich](#), [Luis Alberto Camargo](#), [Rob Hopkins](#), [Alison Tickell](#), [Sascha Haselmayer](#), [Immy Kaur](#)
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A full list of the contributors across all four countries is available upon request.