Driving Climate Action through Community-Based Empowerment and Capacity-Building

Conference E-Poster. CALS 601 - Leading Climate Action in Society Part 2
Miriam Ponette, graduate student - MA in Climate Action Leadership. Royal Roads University. December 2023.

PROBLEM

Canada's GhG emissions continue to be far too high to meet the IPCC's goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees (IPCC, 2022), due to insufficient action at every level: government, private sector and individual.
This, in spite of sufficient climate solutions being readily available (Hoff, 2022) and despite most Canadians considering climate change to be a top priority (Klein, 2020. p.79).
Although Canadians are concerned, there is a disconnect between concern leading to action (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

WHY ?

- Due to weak government leadership coupled with an overabundance of often conflicting information, individuals are unclear on which are the most important actions they can take (Ponette, 2023). They need to have confidence in credible information, and hear inspiring stories of a positive future to work towards (Stoknes, 2017).
- Individuals underestimate the concern of those around them, so their personal contribution feels like 'a drop in the bucket' (Bouman & Steg, 2020, p.14; Fritsche & Masson, 2021).
- Need to lean into psychological motivators for climate action, including ''group identification, social norms, emotions and collective efficacy'' (Fritsche & Masson, 2021, p. 115, as cited in Ponette, 2023) as well as working locally and at the group level (Harth, 2021; Iype, Sheppard, Cote & Salter, 2015, p.5). ''If I believe my friends and neighbours will do something… then I will too'' (Stoknes, 2017).

SOLUTION

Foster civic engagement of the general public through :

- Empowerment
- Knowledge mobilization
- Capacity-building

Individuals / Communities

Private sector
Government

With a focus on fostering innovation and tailored local solutions

Intended outcome:

Increased participation in climate action and increase of new initiatives

Additional benefits:

- Build locally-relevant solutions
- Increase resilience through strengthened social fabric
- Contribute to participants' well-being / address eco-anxiety
- Indirectly foster political will (at all levels) for
-    further action
- Contribute to local green job creation
- Reduce barriers to education by providing free training opportunities
- Emphasis on local-level climate mitigation (municipalities influence 50% of emissions)

(Ponette, 2023)

APPLICATIONS

- Through organizations such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and ICLEI Canada, provide information to local governments on the benefits and potential outcomes of community empowerment, as well as offer training programs for municipal staff and community-based organizations to provide knowledge mobilization and capacity-building opportunities for community members
- Advocate for funding to hire staff members to carry out these capacity-building and knowledge mobilization opportunities. Advocate for hiring of diverse and equity-deserving community members, who can provide culturally tailored approaches and who have trusted access within their own communities (Empower Me, n.d.)
- Ensure all staff are trained in equity-based and anti-oppressive approaches, to ensure accessible, equitable, safe and culturally relevant dissemination of training and knowledge mobilization opportunities
- Ensure all community members are paid for sharing their expertise when involved in focus groups, committees and any other activities where they are providing insights on their experiences, particularly when working with equity-deserving communities. (Mohnot, Bishop & Sanchez, 2019)
- Advocate for funding for the above and to ensure that new initiatives can quickly transition from volunteer-dependent initiatives to programs with hired staff. (S. Fralin, personal communication, November 14, 2023)

Courses and other learnings that have informed this work

CALS500 - Climate Science, Impacts, and Services; CALS501 - Leading Climate Action in Society Part 1CALS502 – Communication for Climate Action; CALS503 – Climate Risk Management; CALS694 - Internship with Kambo Energy Group; CALS691 – Designing a Practitioner Portfolio; Tamarack Institute Community Climate Transitions Cohort; Extracurricular readings; Personal experiences; Professional contract with Municipal Climate Action Commission; Professional research on mitigation competencies for the Climate Action Competency Framework (v2)

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