Winning Climate Justice Campaigns with Kenzie Harris

Iain McIntyre

Can you tell us a bit about how you first got involved with campaigning and activism, and the path that you've taken since?

Kenzie Harris

So I'd been a part of several kind of NGO service-based volunteer projects over the years, and then in 2019 when I started my graduate degree, like many others, I became involved with the 2019 climate wave, and that's when my actions took on a more grassroots, transformative approach. So I became involved in the climate movement in my local community and also at the national level, through a network of young people called Climate Strike Canada. So I'd been educating community members locally on banks and credit unions and then the call to target banks, which originally came from the Stop The Money Pipeline campaign reached the Wetʼsuwetʼen Nation here in so-called Canada.

So just a bit of context for those outside of so-called Canada, Wetʼsuwetʼen made international news in February of 2020, when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police violently arrested hereditary chiefs and indigenous land defenders on their sovereign territory, where the Canadian state is building the coastal gaslink pipeline without free, prior and informed consent. And Canada's biggest bank, which is the Royal Bank of Canada, funds that pipeline.

So in 2021 some of us in Climate Strike Canada's network teamed up with some members of a lateral network for students known as Divest Canada to start a youth led campaign against Canada's fossil fuel funding banks, and that group is now known as Change Course. So I worked on some of Change Course's initial education materials, and by the time I finished my graduate studies, we had secured funding. So I got to work briefly as a digital campaigner for the organization, which was a ton of fun. And near the end of my graduation, I was also hired as a trainer for the Climate Justice Organizing Hub. And when I graduated, I also became a librarian for the organization. So in that role, I reviewed requests and developed content to share knowledge accessibly according to the needs of grassroots activists in so-called Canada. And eventually I moved on from Change Course, and then on from the Climate Justice Organizing Hub to where I work full time now, which is the Global Grassroots Support Network for Blueprints for Change.

And lastly, because I think there's a pretty important part to my path, there have been some significant challenges along the way, the main one being that between my transition from school to full time work, some underlying conditions that I didn't know that I had really worsened significantly. And so this was the beginning of 2022. So I've had to adjust pretty much everything about how I do my life, and that certainly includes how I participate in movement spaces. So at this point, I've been spending a lot of my time learning from the media that's been created by disabled movement folks, and also just advocating the spaces that I'm in for disability justice. And now most of my efforts are done through online networks, since that's the most accessible to me, and I'm hoping that the next step is moving more of my efforts towards peer-to-peer care for disabled folks. So yeah, I would say that's been my path so far.

Iain McIntyre

I can sort of see there's definitely been a shift towards projects that involve sharing knowledge. And you talked about a few factors in there, but what else has drawn you towards that kind of sharing knowledge, sharing learnings?

Kenzie Harris

My path definitely has done a lot of that, and I think a big part of that is that both of my parents work in education, so that's definitely offered me an opportunity to look at the different strengths that they offered in their approaches and kind of take what I want to learn from that. So it definitely doesn't surprise me that I value the power of knowledge. They definitely instilled that in me. And actually my background is in human nutrition, but my graduate studies applied what's called 'knowledge mobilization' to human nutrition, and I think that's where I really fell in love, on a kind of deeper level, with this idea of using knowledge and the importance of knowledge.

So that term 'knowledge mobilization' is fancy, but it basically just means, how do we make knowledge easy enough to understand, make it relevant to people's wants and needs, and ultimately actionable for people? And at the research to action level, the amount of research that's not used is estimated to be 90%, which is a lot. And I think anyone who's done research, that is a terrible figure for the amount of labor that goes into doing that work. And I think even if you don't know that statistic, I think for campaigners who are on the ground, we know that knowledge is not enough. You have to meet people where they're at.

And so it was really cool to learn about this academically, whilst also on the other side of things, I was in the community. I was talking to community members about climate issues and trying to apply some of that learning. So I still apply that in my approach today, and I think that that's something that I'm very passionate about sharing with others as well.

Iain McIntyre

So yeah, you mentioned the Global Grassroots Support Network, that that's an initiative that you're primarily involved in. Could you tell us about what the network does and how does it fit in, I guess, with Blueprints for Change?

Kenzie Harris

Maybe I'll start with Blueprints, which was founded in 2018. It was a volunteer collective, and it was focused on compiling campaigning and organizing field experience to create written 'How-To' guides for the use of fellow progressive activists. So then the GGSN was founded under Blueprints in June of 2022. So that's where most of the project's energy and contributors reside now.

And the GGSN was created for the purposes of being a community of practice that brings together projects and individuals supporting grassroots, justice-oriented activist groups around the world. So our objective is to share knowledge around common challenges that people providing support to activists face, and also to exchange ideas on solutions. We also have regional coordinators that connect locally in parts of the world where it's really difficult to be an activist, so they can benefit from that exchange and access direct support. So currently we have coordinators from Latin America, East Africa, the Asia Pacific, Türkiye and India, and ultimately, the goal for us is to compile our collective knowledge on good practices for supporting grassroots, justice-oriented activist groups, to benefit from one another's innovations and together, ultimately, to improve support for grassroots movements around the globe.

Iain McIntyre

The justice lens is central to the work of the network. So I guess for listeners who aren't familiar with the sort of terms or approach, can you tell us a bit about what 'grassroots' and 'justice' kind of mean for the network and yourself?

Kenzie Harris

Yeah, yeah. So that term that I threw out there, 'justice-oriented activist groups' is a bit of a mouthful sometimes, but we use that to apply an intersectional lens to who we include in the GGSN. So this is because we understand, of course, that structural inequities cause power imbalances within society, and we know that differing exposure to forms of injustice, because communities are impacted differently and unequally based on their social identities, the characteristics of one injustice ultimately cannot be separated. They're intersectional.

So how this looks in the GGSN is that some projects that individuals included might focus on particular issues related to justice. So they might say, "We focus on social justice, we're climate justice activists. We do human rights, gender and sexual rights, decolonization," things like that. So for the GGSN, these would all fall under our umbrella of what we include for justice-oriented activist groups. And then as for the term grassroots, that actually was a pretty difficult thing to define, because if you were to try to take the definition for grassroots that we often use in the Global North and apply that to different regions in the Global South, you would effectively eliminate entire regions because they wouldn't be eligible under that definition.

So what we did was, in the initial stages of the network, we had a few folks from these different regions work with us to develop a working definition that applied across the whole world, which was a difficult task. So what we came to was a definition that says: "A grassroots group has at least one of the following attributes." So there's four that we defined. It's that: One, they're largely driven by people power, so motivated volunteers, although we recognize that paid staff might help facilitate and coordinate some of that energy. Number two is that they're self starting and self organizing, especially when they're formed. Number three is that they share power and decision making responsibilities amongst members to some extent. And the fourth is that they have some degree of autonomy to define their strategy, tactics and culture, especially at the local level. So yeah, we had quite a few people help us with that definition. And so far, it's been pretty helpful for us.

Iain McIntyre

You've touched on this already, but where do you see the network sitting within, I guess, broader movement ecosystems?

Kenzie Harris

So, I mean, there's a lot of parts of this work that I feel are really critical to the success of movements. Firstly, I would say that we know that history repeats itself. I think we've seen a lot of examples of that in the recent years, so being able to explore the successes and failures of previous movement moments and even current movement moments can really help us to direct our energy more strategically.

Also, I would argue that grassroots knowledge often isn't very well documented, and that's for a few reasons. Organizing is really fast paced. It's often really busy, and so it can be really difficult to remember or even just prioritize documenting things like lessons. And in my experience, usually there's a reflection period at the end of an action or campaign, but then, as a grassroots organization, the question is, where do you share that? How do you disseminate those findings? Third, I would also say, related, of the movement knowledge and theory that is documented, it's often not accessible to activists. If you're working on a campaign, again, you're probably pretty busy, and I don't think there's many people who

are going to take the time to read a 60 page academic article on the effectiveness of divestment strategies. Some people will, most probably won't. So if there's someone who can read through that and extract information that's really helpful for activists and produce, say, a one minute read of key lessons and store that in one common place so that activists don't have to search for the answers that they need, they can go to this one place that they know they can trust, that really conserves a lot of their time and energy, that can allow them to put that towards more organizing activities.

Another big part of our work is that we document people's questions and challenges so that if a question comes up again, they'll be able to turn to that. So for example, we had a question on how to navigate infiltration, which is a big topic, so we documented knowledge related to that in case people have more questions about it. And I would also say it's helpful if you're trying to develop a resource, to be able to draw from similar examples is really helpful. Like when I was trying to develop an Access Guide, I was able to pull from other people's access guides. So that gave me sort of a blueprint to start with. Or in some cases, you can even entirely remove requiring creating a new resource, because something great has already been developed.

Iain McIntyre

To what degree is this kind of work valued and supported by different parts of movements?

Kenzie Harris

Yeah, I mean, there's a few parts to this. I would definitely say, in general, people see this as important work. When I explain it to people, they get it pretty immediately. But also like I said, I guess it's the third time I'm saying this, this audience is very busy, so we understand that, and we do our best to make things accessible for people. I think the same way that care activities, even sometimes long term visioning, can take the back burner, it can be deprioritized when you're rapidly responding to crises, it happens with this kind of activity too.

So some organizations have started to prioritize the dissemination of their resources in libraries like the GGSN, which is really great, it's sort of the final step in their campaign process. But still, there's a lot of personal nudging involved, because it's not always a habit, and people are busy. So it's great that I have this role, that I can do that. And usually, if I just say, 'Hey, that's a really cool resource, can I upload it to the library?' They're more than happy to do that. I also think related, sometimes people don't think they have important knowledge to share, which I think stems from a few things. I think it mainly stems from the idea that you have to be professional, you have to have credible knowledge, which I think stems from this idea that institutionally obtained knowledge is better, and it's the ultimate form of knowledge. Which we know is not true. We know that lived experience is extremely valuable, especially in this space.

So I mean, and also, we're all trying to transform the world, that's a huge task to be taking on. So you know, while we can turn to examples in history, we're all experimenting with how to do that. So sometimes I think we get stuck on feeling like we're not the right person to speak to something, but in many cases it's so much better if you do, because, like I said, we are all trying to figure this out. And we're all going to make mistakes along the way. And I know that there's a tendency in movement spaces to feel afraid of making mistakes, but it's inevitable in this space when you're taking on something as big as we are.

Iain McIntyre

So I guess in terms of encouraging people to share, encouraging people to collaborate, encouraging people to sort of throw in their ideas and being able to pose questions and so forth, one of the roles that the network plays is to facilitate networking and online and direct discussions. Can you talk a bit about the nuts and bolts of what you do?

Kenzie Harris

Absolutely. So the meetups that we hold are probably the bulk of what we do with our general community. And they're based entirely on the needs of the support providers and the grassroots that are involved in our network. And then we follow this up with online guides that compile the knowledge exchange. So nothing is ever just whatever happens in a meeting. It's always followed up with documenting that. And so most of our offerings are based on what comes up for regional coordinators, but we also do consider what comes up for our general audience.

So for example, conflict management is something that shows up, both with our regional coordinators and also our general audience. So we had several organizations that were doing similar type work, that we partnered with and held an event that brought together different communities. We exchanged knowledge, and then we developed a roundup of different suggestions and tools from around the globe, which was really cool, and it's available in The Commons Library.

Another example of a meetup that's a little bit different would be our regional meetup. So sometimes we hold these regional specific calls, and other times we open things up to the wider network. We use our Slack pretty infrequently. That's where people can raise questions, and then folks can respond to that. But I would say that the Zoom calls are really where our community comes to life. Again, it does take some nudging sometimes to get people to show up to that. Sometimes they feel like, 'Oh, I don't really know if I have something useful to respond to this.' So we do our best ahead of time to share where we expect people to join from, the kind of work they do, the kind of things they need help with. And we do find that that helps with engagement. And of course, we want it to be meaningful to the people who are joining. We don't want them joining just to join.

And then there are a few activities we do outside of our meetups, and some things that you won't see on Slack, for example. That's typically things that we're doing with regional coordinators. So doing that sort of tailored support to the specific needs that are coming up from the grassroots. And there it's more hands on, so we're all kind of working on, 'Okay, I can contact this person and this person, and we can kind of come together and come up with an appropriate response.' And I'm hoping we do more of that. We have plans to do more of that.

Unfortunately, that's not something that most people will see, and it's probably, arguably the stuff that I'm most excited about doing. But of course, because of the security of the activists, we can't share much of that. So some of that looks like, you know, offering specialized training, offering support with media coverage. Certainly security support is something that comes up a lot, and so our regional coordinators do a great job at reaching out to folks regularly to do that. And yeah, we've seen some really great success. Definitely, there's a lot of direct support needs that come from the Global South, and I think if we want to engage them in knowledge exchange, you have to meet those things first. So that's why we're sort of shifting a lot of our efforts towards trying to fill that gap.

Iain McIntyre

Awesome. Another side of your work, you've talked about the documenting of discussions and trying to draw out the lessons from those and summarize them, but you've also helped to produce this amazing resource on climate campaigns, How We Win, which is a report, and it covers history and lessons drawn from 14 successful intersectional climate justice campaigns. Can you tell us how did this project come about?

Kenzie Harris

Yeah, so How We Win was a 2023 research project supervised by Dr Jen Gobby. I connected with Jen during my time at the Hub. So this was actually a project that I did on behalf of the Climate Justice Organizing Hub. So when an organization wants to share their resource on The Commons Library and on the GGSN library, then we do that so that it can be shared more widely. And so for this one, Jen being the fantastic person and educator that they are, they reached out to see whether the Hub had any research needs that the students in their class could do for their assignment.

I would definitely advise if there's educators who do have flexibility on some of their research assignments, this is a really great thing for organizations like the Hub, because we don't often have time to do this sort of in depth research, and then for students, nobody wants to have their research assignment sit on a USB and nobody look at it and it not have an impact. So it can be really motivating. And I hope the students felt that way. They produced really fantastic research, and I'm happy to chat

about it, but yeah, basically, the students needed a proposal for the research project, and we certainly had one.

Iain McIntyre

How was the report hoping to meet the Hub's needs and that of movements more broadly?

Kenzie Harris

Yeah, the research was summarized for use by the Climate Justice Organizing Hub, which is a support structure designed around the needs of grassroots social movement organizers in so-called Canada, and it aims to respect organizers' knowledge regarding their own challenges and priorities. So they use responsive troubleshooting skills and strategy sharing and other capacity building activities to help organizers to build a critical mass that's working towards a just transition.

So I was working, as I said, as a trainer and a librarian for the Hub. And as a trainer, I knew that one of the steps that was included in the Hub strategy design process that I was sharing with people is that you should try to compare your campaign to similar campaigns and see what lessons you can learn. So it made sense that documenting campaigns that have seen success in one place would be a really great place for people to give this a try. And then, as a librarian, as part of my role, I documented knowledge for use in our programming, and it was also used directly by organizers based on their needs. So we had received a suggestion to archive lessons from successful social movements in so-called Canada a few times, and also this was right after the pandemic began. And so a lot of activists had really lost hope and momentum and were feeling really down in the dumps.

And so it just made sense to my former colleague Isabel and I that a research project that was focused on wins would be potentially worth exploring to restore some hope, because sometimes we were so focused on the challenges of organizers, we thought that this would be kind of a different feeling, we hoped at least, to leave organizers with.

Iain McIntyre

And how we win is obviously the key question that we all want to know, and that's a very big question. So how did the students go about compiling these lessons and comparing the case studies? Because there was a whole bunch of them working on it.

Kenzie Harris

Yeah. So there were 14 campaigns included in the report. So at the beginning, the Hub team put together a list for students, and so ultimately they came to this 14. We also determined what our parameters for success were, because that is a really important thing to define, and it differs. For listeners, I guess it's important to note that about half of the campaigns, I think it is actually exactly seven campaigns, that are included in the report are still ongoing, but they've seen success in other ways. So they may have seen material gains, physical, financial, legal or electoral advancements. So we included all of that in our definition of what we saw as successful. And there were seven students, and I'm going to read their names off. This was the University of McGill where they were studying.

So I'm hoping I get their names right, and my sincere apologies if I don't, because you deserve to have your names pronounced correctly. But their names were Cassandra Ciafro, Anna Henry, Frida Sophia Morales Mora, Thomas Nakasako, Dafne Ozcan, Nico Serreqi and Leah Vadez Reyes. So all of these students, under the supervision of Dr Jen Gobby, they did all of the labour for this research. They did a thorough literature review on different aspects of intersectionality and trying to understand that concept, and trying to understand success and trying to understand where social movements have gone since 2000, so they had a big literature review that they put together. They also analyzed all of the different 14 campaigns and provided an explanation for each of those campaigns. They did some interviews with folks. They did all of the thematic analysis. They produced a fantastic final report over the course of the semester. So they did the labor for this work.

And I really just want to emphasize a huge thank you to those students, because this has been such a fantastic project to be able to share with folks, and to Jen as well, who put a lot of thought as well into including us in this project. And also thanks to the campaigners who said yes to sharing their knowledge to support other activists, because it's busy being a campaigner, and so I totally understand why people say no, but we're really grateful that they said yes, because the knowledge that they shared is awesome.

Iain McIntyre

What are the various ways that you've been getting this report out there and sort of disseminating its findings?

Kenzie Harris

There's a few ways. Mainly, and actually, maybe I'll just start with the fact that research reports are super important to credibly answer our questions and to propose strategic actions that have the evidence to back up why that actually makes sense. But again, like I've said, how those reports are presented, often people don't have the time or capacity to read those. So the first step was taking that original report and making it a bit more digestible for audiences.

So we've shared this on the Hubs wiki page, which is available for the use of activists. And so what we did was, in addition to sharing the original research report. So if you do want to check it out, it is available on that page. Basically, I just had to go in and pare down some of that information. So not everyone needs to know the methods of a research report. Campaigners, unfortunately, don't really care. They just want the key takeaways at the end. So I did also include a shorter summary of each of the campaigns, because often people want to take a look at those, and compare that again to what their campaigns look like. And what I also did was go through some of the raw data to pull example quotes, to see if there was anything that may have not been significant thematically, but might have been significant to activists, which was a lot of fun to get to look at all the different knowledge that organizers shared. So yeah, it made sense to share a longer, but still shorter, form version on the Hub's wiki, since the Hub often does go through these in sort of longer format activist groups. So that's one place you can find it. And then on The Commons Library, we took that right up and pared it down even further. So it is now what I would consider to be pretty bare bones, and this was in an effort to make that knowledge even more accessible.

So if you want to see the longer form version you can, if you want to see the even longer form version you can, there's a place for that. But really we just wanted to make this knowledge get out there to folks. And The Commons Library is one of those places where, I mean, when I was first starting, if I typed something in the search bar, I had questions, The Commons Library was the first thing that came up. So we have that shared there, and then we also have it shared on the GGSN's library as well for the people in our network.

Iain McIntyre

And could you tell us about some of the key findings regarding how climate campaigns have achieved their goals, sort of from the mid to late 2000s to the present?

Kenzie Harris

So the report looked at key themes that were described as challenges and also factors that led to the success. So firstly, they found that, and this should be no surprise to folks, campaigns that originate from communities that are supported by other groups that continue to be led by most impacted community members, those are the most likely to be successful. Probably the main reason for this is that the grassroots is the community that you're trying to engage, so they know how to speak to people who are most impacted by the issue.

And another finding that wasn't explicitly sought by the report, but that emerged upon further review, was really what tactics are most useful to be used by different groups. So rather than the findings of the report being 'use this strategy most often,' although I would argue that that did emerge, and that's of no

surprise, direct action. What emerged more was about using them all, using a diversity, but identifying where each group can be most useful. So for local communities, these are best situated to organize effective direct actions, so blockades, sit ins, etc. And they're also best at community engagement, again, because they are the community. So, you know, canvassing, community events, teach ins, they are the best at doing that, and then where allies from other communities best come in, so the communities that are not most impacted by the major issues at hand, is again organizing direct actions in solidarity. And also by organizing mass engagement campaigns. So letter and petition campaigns, and also by using mass communication, so social media. This all supports the success of campaigns.

If I can add here, activists love to critique the use of campaign and letters and social media. I think I would gently remind you that we're all stretched thin, and a lot of us have a lot of things that we're navigating in addition to the pressure of life. So one point that the researchers made that I'm really grateful they made is that mass public pressure needs to be made accessible, and we do that through things like online engagement, mass call campaigns, etc. And the examples in the report showed that. They had huge numbers coming out to support those kind of things.

And then the last kind of big group that I didn't mention, is NGOs. Following the leadership of the grassroots is essential, and where they can best support is also with mass communication, but specifically with media. They can be really helpful with providing connections and also with supporting legal and policy processes. So providing legal aid is definitely super helpful, and also funding to activists is one that's often really missed if they're arrested at direct actions, and yet that's something that is increasingly becoming an issue. So if you're an NGO, please help with that, because our organization alone, the GGSN, cannot cover all of the arrests and the needs that are emerging for that.

Iain McIntyre

Were there any other particular findings or insights that you kind of found surprising?

Kenzie Harris

The one thing that I found surprising was actually what wasn't included in the results, which is that I really thought that infighting and internal conflicts were going to show up as a major challenge, because that's what we hear in our community, and often that results from unaddressed issues of oppression, which is not surprising as a difficult thing to manage within groups. It did come up as an issue when trying to engage in coalitions and the diversity of opinions and perspectives. I do suspect that's not because it wasn't a significant challenge. I think that's just not something that came up in discussions.

But like I said, we have heard this from our audience. This is an issue that tears groups apart, and has torn several of the groups that we're involved with apart. So there was one organizer against the TMX pipeline who spoke to this directly, this idea about, you know, how do we learn from mistakes? How do

we avoid pushing people out? But we were pretty surprised, I mean, I was pretty surprised to not see that. But if there are folks who are interested in this question, we have responded to it a few times in a couple of different related ways. So that is available in The Commons Library if people are interested, but I suspect it was an issue, just didn't show up in the interviews.

Iain McIntyre

Yeah, maybe the focus on winning made people not want to. You can't win if you can't work out...

Kenzie Harris

'Oh, we never fought. No, it was rainbows and butterflies!'

Iain McIntyre

You mentioned the prioritizing of, and it comes in the report, community engagement and coalition building. I guess, even though the report maybe doesn't talk about the difficult side of that, or very much, is there an example which highlights where that kind of coalition and engagement was built to a point where they really shifted a campaign into a winning kind of position?

Kenzie Harris

So I think it was about half that mentioned using coalition building. I would argue still, even if a group didn't mention using it, they probably still did to some extent, because if you want to engage more people and create more power, at some point you have to engage other groups. So I think they probably still used it.

But just to draw from one example where I think this is illustrated really well, definitely there are challenges, like I said, that come from bringing different diverse perspectives together. But if you can converge around one common goal, having that diversity of perspectives is your strength, it can actually grow your reach, and it can increase the people power that you have, because it speaks to people's different interests and priorities. So it's a challenge, and it's also the thing that can really steer things in the right direction.

So there was a Lubicon Cree land defender, their name is Melina Laboucan-Massimo, who's part of the Athabascan tar sands resistance here in so-called Canada, who described this really well, and they said, "When working in coalitions, the environmental movement, First Nations and the labor movement,

there's such a convergence of different voices, we're really starting to see growing public accountability and public opposition being seen and taken seriously." So they illustrated exactly what I was just describing, and that campaign developed a coalition. It included Indigenous groups, NGOs, labor groups, religious groups, and in that case, the coalition brought the issue beyond local communities and made the dispute an international issue, which raised public awareness, of course, and it increased pressure on Shell. That campaign was successful in canceling one of Shell's major projects, and the reason they gave was due to market forces and public opposition.

And also, another point that I want to emphasize, since I am working with a lot of groups that are in really moving towards authoritarian regions, or they are in that place, is that this kind of coalition building where you're working around one common goal, and you're not rejecting certain groups because they have a different theory of change or what have you, recognizing that you don't have to work together once you've achieved your campaign goals, is how success is achieved. That's obviously not going to negate the challenges that the grassroots in particular is facing in these coalitions.

But as we've seen from the examples in this report, these coalitions can effectively be grassroots led, and in many cases, this is what takes a local issue to become national and sometimes international, and then that is what leads to your win.

Iain McIntyre

Is there another example from the report in terms of how a coalition was sort of successfully undertaken and maintained?

Kenzie Harris

Another example that I really like is STAND-L.A. They were a huge coalition. And to clarify, because I know some folks are based in Turtle Island, in North America, they're not part of Stand.earth. STAND-L.A. is separate from that. So they were formed as what they described as concerned residents, good neighbors, communities of faith, environmental justice champions, researchers, nurses, students, mothers and fathers, and their purpose was halting oil drilling in residential areas in Los Angeles. So their first campaign targeted a drilling site that was polluting a low income minority community, and they started by just knocking on doors and documenting for themselves the symptoms that they were experiencing as residents, so they could create their own community-led health report.

This is kind of what happens when systems like health reporting systems fail. It's often up to marginalized communities to step in and create their own responses to that. So this was huge, this initial sort of community building aspect was huge for this campaign, because this data could then be used to describe the health and environmental injustice that was faced by community members who are also often marginalized on other social issues like disability, race and class.

So this campaign, which brought together so many different folks with so many different professions and so many different interests, all sort of rallied around this fact that they were all facing this health injustice. Most people had not attributed their health symptoms that they were experiencing to that local drilling site. And so this really gave community members an opportunity to chat with one another, community members who maybe had not talked to one another, and that created enough buy-in to create a community call in campaign. They engaged the media in a press conference and that whole community of different folks, they were able to speak to their different professions and their different interests in this press conference, that got the attention of the federal head for the environmental committee. They then followed up with an environmental investigation and shut down the drilling site.

So STAND-L.A. then formalized their coalition. They continue to see success. They saw another huge success after that, and they're continuing to do the work that they're doing. So actually, that's a really great example of a campaign that despite their different interests and priorities, has continued to campaign. And I suppose it's just that common thread, which is, we want to take care of one another and we want to be healthy together as community.

Iain McIntyre

Yes, common thread and common threat. The use of direct action, as you mentioned earlier, is a really key theme in the report, in terms of successes of campaigns. And over time, direct action has meant very different things for different people. It's defined in the report, in this case, as, quote, "disrupting business as usual through direct physical action." So it's very much that kind of getting in the way, obstructive kind of sense.

Can you talk about what kind of challenges were people trying to overcome through the use of direct action tactics, and what did they achieve?

Kenzie Harris

Direct action was used by all of the campaigns that are included, all 14 of them included in the report. So it was used as both a main tactic by impacted communities against their challenge of injustice, but it was also used in response to many of the challenges that emerged in the campaign. For example, if a government responded to impacted communities' direct actions in opposition, what would often happen is that larger public demonstrations involving allies in other communities across the country were organized in response.

Something that governments love to say is that the opinions of land defenders are fringe opinions, something along those lines. So if you have a mass of people who can come together and counter that, which you can then document for mass consumption in articles and on social media, that's a really effective response to that challenge. And another challenge, obviously since many of these campaigns

were led by Indigenous, Black and Brown communities, was police repression and violence. In this case, direct action was used both as a counter to repression and also led to additional repression, unsurprisingly. Campaigns that are faced with police repression do often result in increased project costs and delays to construction, which is favorable to campaigns.

But I don't want to understate that this violence has had really significant impacts on the people impacted. It continues to. And again, this is usually often marginalized communities. So again, this is a really key opportunity for allies to step in and organize direct actions to support that. Because the violence that they're facing is also detrimental to the success of movements, and it's a really difficult challenge to overcome.

Iain McIntyre

Direct action has often been used as a method of last resort, typically turned to when everything else has failed. So it's not always very strategically used, or there's a history of it not being strategically used. What do you think the report and your own observations, do they suggest this remains the case, or has direct action kind of become, I guess, more broadly used and integrated from early on within campaigns?

Kenzie Harris

Yeah, that's a great question. And when I was trying to think of how to respond to this, I think contextually, there's some kind of important things to set the answer to this. So this report looked at successful climate justice campaigns from the last 20 years across Turtle Island. Most climate justice campaigns that have had this sort of transformative, bigger, larger scale wins in the last 20 years here across Turtle Island have been both initiated and led by impacted Indigenous communities.

Of course, we know that not only were our current systems here in so-called Canada and the so-called United States built off of the genocide of Indigenous communities, and to this day, it continues to marginalize them, but also direct action in the form of land defense is often the first tactic deployed by these communities, because it's what they have been doing since time immemorial, which is taking care of the land and defending it. It's what they know, and it's what they're going to continue to do.

And so you know, even just for interest's sake, to look at the non-Indigenous led campaigns that are included in this report. The Right to Breathe campaign was in Philly, and it was led by marginalized community members as well. Then we have Stop Cop City, where supporters, they did at first take part in Atlanta city council public feedback forum when the project was first introduced, but pretty quickly they began occupying the forest. So I think what this really demonstrated for me, and I think this is probably no surprise, the Cop City is built around predominantly black surrounding neighborhoods. So these are

communities that know these systems were designed to oppress them. They experience that every single day.

So I think after decades of trying and failing and being harmed through these institutions, I think it makes a lot of sense, from that perspective, why the direct action would be used earlier on in campaigns. You know, foregoing those systems entirely and just taking things into the hands of communities makes a lot of sense, especially for marginalized communities.

And I think more and more these days, even people who do have very privileged identities are starting to feel this as well, that these systems are designed by design to be doing this and to not be working in our favour. So I would say we should still engage these channels. We still do benefit from their success. But I think, again, I think this is where groups like NGOs can really meaningfully step in, is covering the lobbying, covering the legal action, that kind of thing. Because what I think we've really seen, and where the shift for a lot of campaigns happened is when the grassroots really takes on challenging our existing systems. That is where the power really comes from, and usually that comes from direct action.

Iain McIntyre

There has been ebbs and flows in the use of direct action. There's also been ebbs and flows in how much it's repressed. Can you share your thoughts about how communities and activists successfully navigated repression in these cases, if not caused it to backfire?

Kenzie Harris

I mean, it's definitely a difficult question. I definitely think that it has backfired in a lot of ways. And I do think that this is also a measure of success, that our movements have to be repressed, they've gained so much power. I do think that, in general, more broadly, international solidarity and pressure can make a really big impact, because governments do rely on their international relationships, their image. But what you're mentioning, which is the criminalization of activists and giving more power to police, is happening everywhere. I think we'd be really, really hard pressed to find a part of the world, even in what we would consider the most progressive countries, that is not having this as a major issue that's facing activists right now.

And I do think that it's also important to keep in mind that world politics is also continuing to shift more to the right. Again, I do think that that's telling of our movements. I think some of that is a response to the success, to the growth of people power. But I also do think that it is a reflection of where we're going wrong and the things that we need to be doing.

To answer this question best I think I would draw mostly from regions that are either shifting towards repressive environments or are dealing with that right now, because I think they offer a lot of lessons.

And the main thing that I've learned from discussing this topic with them is that you get creative because you have to. And really you just create your own spaces and your own systems. That's what they do. They create their own spaces to meet, to amplify, to care, and they continue to also assess how much risk they're willing to take on for what they need to gain. Obviously, if your movement is facing a lot of violence, that is a threat to your movement as well, to be taking that on.

So I think one aspect of navigating this is just figuring out how you're going to sustain yourself and being creative about what those new strategies might look like. I think relevant to this is a lot of them end up creating their own channels to share information. I think this is actually increasingly relevant to a lot of us who are seeing more repression on our mass media. So instead of relying on that to craft the narrative to the public, often they create their own channel. Some of them use YouTube, if that hasn't been restricted, and in some cases, their channels actually end up being more popular than the mass media, which is incredible. And a lot of them do continue to engage in direct actions, even when they're facing this violence. They sometimes determine their limit, so when they're going to retreat ahead of time.

But it's a really difficult question to answer, and I think it's a question that we'll have to keep asking and keep brainstorming on, because I think everyone is facing this to some extent, some larger, some smaller, right now. And I'm glad it's a question that we're asking, and I think we just have to continue to be creative about how we approach it.

Iain McIntyre

Yeah. And I think a key thing I'd draw up from what you've just said, is also to have that discussion beforehand as much as you can, while it's happening, and not just be reactive or fragment. Because there are all these dilemmas, talking and strategizing together is really key. The Global Grassroots Support Network is one of the ways that people can do that. Could you tell us a bit about what's coming up with the Network?

Kenzie Harris

So I mean, like I said, a lot of our activities are behind the scenes. Because we are a secure network. We take security very, very seriously. So some of what we produce you will not see unless you join us. So if you'd like to join us, to benefit from the exchange, if you want to participate in the exchange, you can visit our website at blueprintsfc.org, and we have an application form on there. It's a secure form as well, so you can fill that out and we'll contact you.

One thing that you won't see is we are continuing to improve access, as I said earlier, to more direct support for grassroots groups where our regional coordinators are based. So we're excited to continue doing that, but unfortunately, you won't get to see much of that.

And we're also focusing more on partnerships. So I'm just raising that because if there are related networks that are doing similar work, we'd love to partner with you. So yeah, please, please reach out to us. We'd love to, you know, hold events or team up our support, because we know we're more powerful together.

As for what is accessible publicly, you can expect to see more resources continue to be uploaded to The Commons Library. They include the knowledge that's exchanged during our events that can be shared publicly, and also knowledge responding to members' questions. And also, if a resource is shared that a group has offered to share on there, we'll continue to upload it. We do have a few upcoming that folks might be interested in, so one of those resources is on decolonizing climate action, so that will respond to probably a lot of the questions that people have about working with Indigenous communities. So we're really grateful that that group has offered to share that very soon, so it should be available when the recording goes live. And also, we have a roundup coming from our upcoming event on collaborative synergy between social movements and NGOs, which is going to look at some successful case studies and some discussion will follow that to explore the dynamics, the challenges and opportunities of working together, and also to ensure that partnerships remain grassroots led.