

Good Practices:
**Social Marketing
for Climate Action**

2025



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UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

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This paper was prepared by Dana Peebles, Colin Rankin and (🌿) Sri Mastuti for FINCAPES Project.

About FINCAPES

The Flood Impacts, Carbon Pricing, and Ecosystem Sustainability (FINCAPES) project is a collaborative, gender-responsive initiative funded by Global Affairs Canada. Over a 5.5-year period, jointly undertaken by the University of Waterloo's Faculty of Mathematics and Faculty of Environment, the project supports Indonesia in adapting to climate change, mitigating its impacts, and conserving biodiversity in a socially and economically sustainable manner. Aligned with Indonesia's priorities, FINCAPES enhances the nation's capacity in key areas: forecasting and mitigating financial impacts of climate-change-induced floods, promoting Nature-based Solutions for peatland and mangrove restoration, and strengthening climate finance policy frameworks with a focus on carbon financing mechanisms.

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Table of Contents

List of Acronyms.....	vi
List of Figures.....	v
List of Images.....	v
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. What is Social Marketing?	1
2. The Call for Climate Action	3
2.1. Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation	3
2.2. Communications and Climate Action	4
2.3. Climate Justice as a Frame for Climate Action	6
3. Why Integrate GESEI into Social Marketing Campaigns for Climate Action?	6
4. Social Marketing for Climate Action – Principles and Foundations.....	9
4.1. Inclusive Communication Principles.....	9
4.2. Foundations: Consider Intersectionality	10
5. The Gender at Work Framework	12
6. Examples of Empowerment through Social Marketing.....	13
6.1. Empowering Arctic and Small Island Communities.....	13
6.2. Empowering Youth.....	14
6.3. Voice and Role of Indigenous Peoples	15
6.4. Empowering School Children through School Programs	17
7. Climate Justice and Social Marketing.....	17
7.1. Bridging and Drawing on Social Movements – Civil Rights, Feminism, Poverty and Diverse Minority Groups	17
7.2. Coalitions and Shared Campaigns to Influence Global Climate Negotiations	18
8. Social Marketing Campaigns Targeting Government Policy & Action	19
8.1. Mail and Email Tools.....	19
8.2. Legal Actions and Social Marketing	19
9. Social Marketing Campaigns Targeting Corporations or Sectors.....	21
9.1. Divestment of Fossil Fuel Investments by Target Entities	21
9.2. Targeted International Initiatives – Coal Sector	22

10. Supporting Women’s Leadership in Climate Action.....	23
11. Commercial Advertising and Marketing Approaches	24
11.1. Public Figure and Celebrity Activism, Influence or Endorsement.....	24
11.2. Partnerships with Commercial Entities – Hazards and Perceptions of “Greenwashing”	25
11.3. Learning from Public Health Campaigns.....	26
12. Advice from Practitioners.....	27
12.1. Lessons Learned	27
12.2. Building Social Engagement.....	27
13. Conclusion.....	28
References.....	29
Websites Referenced	30

List of Figures

Figure 1: Social Marketing Approach.....	2
Figure 2: Climate Change-Behaviour Change.....	5
Figure 3: Gender at Work Framework.....	12

List of Images

Image 1: Inclusive marketing: Why modern buyers demand to see themselves in your brand. Image Source: Ramona Sukhraj, 2021. (Source: https://www.impactplus.com/blog/what-is-inclusive-marketing).....	10
Image 2: Many Strong Voices Campaign Image.....	14
Image 3: Connect4Climate https://www.connect4climate.org/content/young-people	15
Image 4: ICA blog posting. (Source: https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/programs/indigenous-divestment)	15
Image 5: Indigenous Women Climate Action Leaders	15
Image 6: Source https://thesolutionsproject.org/what-we-do/grantee-support/build-media-capacity/	18
Image 7: Seniors for Climate Action Now COP 29 campaign form letter	19
Image 8: KlimaSeniorinnen members.	20
Image 9: Youth Legal Challenge to Provincial Climate Change Strategy	21
Image 10: Examples of social marketing resources from gofossilfree.org	22
Image 11: Example of social marketing resources provided by Move Beyond Coal	22
Image 12: Source - WomenleadingonClimate.org	23
Image 13: Source - projectdandelion.org	24
Image 14: Mark Ruffalo (pictured, center in blue shirt) founded The Solutions Project and actively endorses the organization.....	25
Image 15: Doctors for the Environment Australia - Public Health Campaign	26
Image 16: Climate advocates at Japan Energy Summit in Tokyo June 2024.....	26

List of Acronyms

COP29	Conference of Parties (UNFCCC) meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan, November 2024
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DCJ	Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice
FINCAPES	Flood Impacts, Carbon Pricing and Ecosystem Sustainability (project)
GESEI	Gender Equality and Socio-Economic Inclusion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
ICA	Indigenous Climate Action (NGO)
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IT	Information Technology
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (the + represents other sexual identities, such as pansexual and Two-Spirit)
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
SAR	Sixth Assessment Report (IPCC)
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Good Practices in Social Marketing for Climate Action

1. Introduction

Moving individuals from awareness, to understanding, to effective action is a fundamental challenge in communicating information about global climate change. A particular challenge involves empowering and supporting vulnerable groups, who are often most exposed to climate risks. Social marketing approaches and tools can be useful resources in campaigns to address these challenges. This report provides a background summary of the related communications challenge, describes some frameworks and principles to consider for fostering action among target groups, and provides examples of innovative social marketing approaches and practices. The frameworks and examples described are based on social change and communication theory and practice and integrate a Gender Equality and Socio-Economic Inclusion (GESEI) perspective.

The social marketing approaches and examples we present in this report focus on fostering behaviour changes among individuals, communities, the private sector and organizations, and institutions that support climate action – to reach carbon net zero commitments and/or support adaption and community resilience in response to climate change. We also present diverse examples that focus on environmental and GESEI issues in keeping with the theme of this paper.

1.1. What is Social Marketing?

The International Social Marketing Association provides the following definition:

Social marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviour that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good. Social marketing practice is guided by ethical principles. It seeks to integrate research, best practices, theory, audience and partnership insight – to inform the delivery of competition-sensitive and segmented social change programmes that are effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable.¹

This definition recognizes that a “one size fits all” approach to communications may exclude or alienate certain segments of the population, and may reinforce or perpetuate stereotypes or biases.² To avoid this, social marketing focuses on inclusive communication approaches. Inclusive communication considers accessibility issues such as literacy levels, internet access, visual or hearing abilities, message medium delivery preferences and how to ensure message content can reach multiple demographic groups (e.g., diverse age and gender groups, ethnic groups).

¹ International Social Marketing Association. 2014. Global Consensus on Principles, Concepts and Techniques. www.isocialmarketing.org/assets/social_marketing_definition.pdf.

² Catherine Gason, N.D. “What is Inclusive Marketing?”, <https://gason-marketing.com/what-is-inclusive-marketing>.

Overall, social marketing aims to:

- Educate the public, policymakers and for-profit companies;
- Promote voluntary behavioral changes to improve societal or personal welfare;
- Use positive messaging to promote a pro-cause mentality;
- Use creativity and emotion to capture the target audience's attention; and
- Use provoking, strategy-driven methods based on successful commercial approaches.³

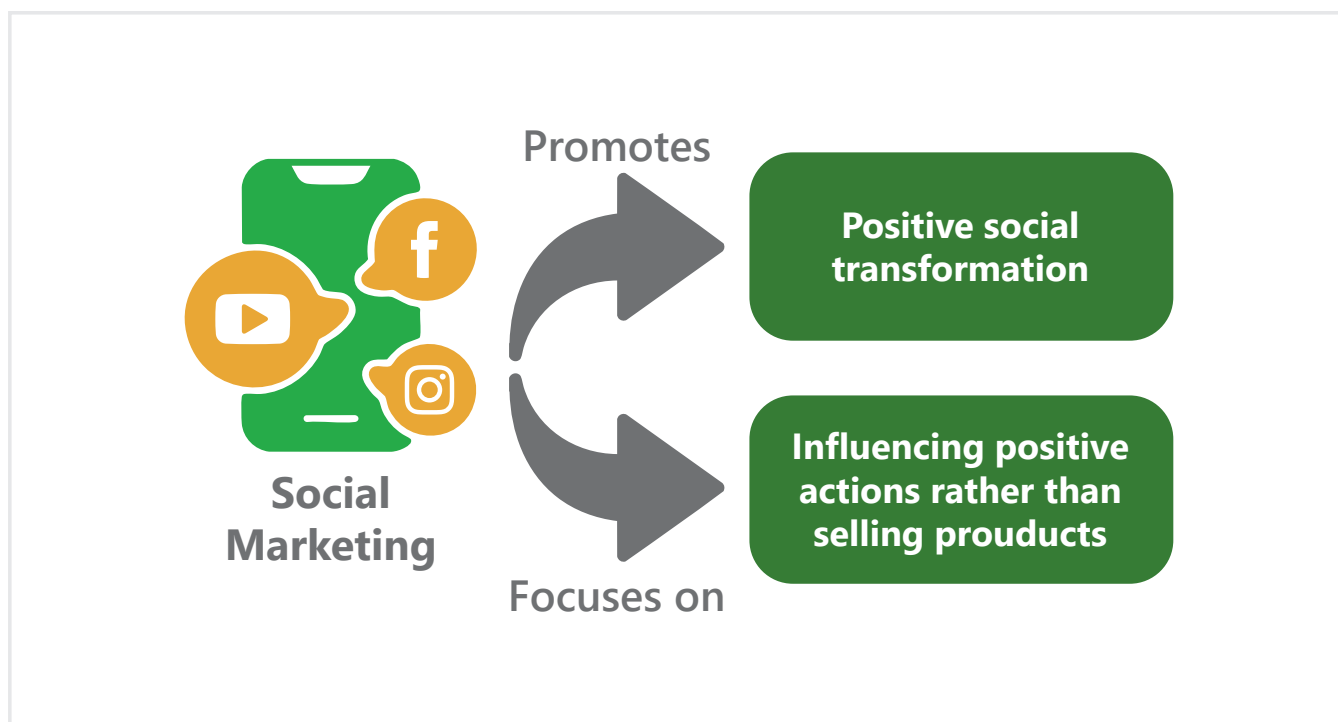


Figure 1: Social Marketing Approach⁴

³ Indeed Editorial Team, Feb. 3, 2023, "Social Marketing Examples (With Definitions and Uses", <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/social-marketing-examples>

⁴ Wall Street Mojo, Aug. 21, 2024, "Social Marketing".

Benefits of Inclusive Social Marketing and Communications

When you apply inclusive communication principles to social marketing, it leads to more effective communications and ultimately greater success in achieving the transformation objectives desired. Specifically, it:

- Enhances/increases audience reach by ensuring key messages developed are tailored to reach diverse demographic groups and do not follow a standard one size fits all approach.
- Ensures the social marketing messages are culturally sensitive to resonate with multiple groups and avoid misunderstandings or giving offense. This, in turn, mitigates risk.
- Improves engagement and connection by tailoring content so that the audience sees itself as belonging and is cared about by the organization delivering the message
- Creates social impact by challenging stereotypes, promoting diversity and fostering a more inclusive society
- Increases “brand” loyalty by making the target audience feel valued and represented by the organization. This is particularly important for diverse levels of governments as it can help build a sense of trust in the messages being delivered and help motivate people to make the behaviour changes desired.⁵

Source: Excerpt adapted from: Catherine Gason, N.D. “What is Inclusive Marketing?”, <https://gason-marketing.com/what-is-inclusive-marketing>

2. The Call for Climate Action

2.1. Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

In its most recent (Sixth) Assessment Report (SAR) the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlighted that **“human activities are estimated to have caused approximately 1.0°C of global warming.”**⁶ It also includes a special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, noting that,

“Adaptation implementation faces several barriers including lack of up-to-date and locally relevant information, lack of finance and technology, *social values and attitudes*, and institutional constraints... [and that] adaptation is more likely to contribute to sustainable development when policies align with mitigation and poverty eradication goals [*italics added*].”⁷

The SAR identifies and documents potential “climate-resilient development pathways, which aim to meet the goals of sustainable development, including climate adaptation and mitigation, poverty eradication and reducing inequalities.”⁸ The IPCC in the Sixth Assessment Report further,

⁵ Gason, op. cit.

⁶ IPCC 2022, 2022, Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 Degrees Celsius <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

⁷ IPCC 2022, mop. Cit.

⁸ Ibid.

“Recognizes the interdependence of climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, and human societies; the value of diverse forms of knowledge; and the close linkages between climate change adaptation, mitigation, ecosystem health, human well-being and sustainable development, and reflects the increasing diversity of actors involved in climate action.”⁹

Thus, an important component of effecting climate action is addressing social values and attitudes, as well as the interdependencies involved in climate mitigation and adaptation. However, “although scientists and policy makers [understand] that education and messaging have a role to play in creating sustainable consumption and a carbon-neutral world, communication alone does not result in people changing their behaviour, individually or collectively.”¹⁰ Economics often plays an important role as do other factors such as core social values and the political context.

2.2. Communications and Climate Action

Within the context of climate change and adaptation, diverse stakeholders have invested considerable resources into promoting behaviour change at individual, community and macro levels. However, although “climate concern is on the rise in many countries and recent research finds that lifestyle- and behaviour-change could advance climate action individuals struggle to move their climate concern into action.”¹¹ Social marketing approaches provide an opportunity to recognize the social dimensions of climate action and empower communities and in individuals in all their diversity, including women, vulnerable and impoverished populations.

To better elucidate the challenges of communicating about the links between human activity, climate change and its effects, and identify potential solutions, Hennegan et al. (2024)¹² developed systems map of the factors and processes involved based on systems mapping sessions with climate change and communication experts. The map revealed 27 communication challenges including:

- Limited information on how individual actions contribute to collective human activity;
- Limited information on how present activity leads to long-term effects; and
- Difficulty in representing and communicating complex relationships.¹³

The systems map also revealed several themes among the identified challenges that exist in communicating about climate change. These included a lack of available data and integrated databases, climate change disciplines working in silos, a need for a lexicon that is easily understood by the public, and that the new communication strategies needed can take time to manifest.¹⁴ To be effective these processes also need to take intersectional GESEI factors into consideration.

9 IPCC 2023. Synthesis Report Summary for Policy Makers (SPM). <https://www.ipcc.ch/synthesis-report/>

10 Domegan 2021. Social marketing and behavioural change in a systems setting. Current Opinion in Environmental Science and Health. Vol 23: 100275. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.coesh.2021.100275>

11 Gail Hochachka, 2024. “When concern is not enough: Overcoming the climate awareness-action gap.” *Ambio* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-024-01999-5> (open access: <https://rdcu.be/dG8FC>)

12 J. Heneghan, , John, D. C., Bartsch, S. M., Piltch-Loeb, R., Gilbert, C., Kass, D., ... Lee, B. Y. (2024). A Systems Map of the Challenges of Climate Communication. *Journal of Health Communication*, 29(sup1), 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2024.2361842>

13 Heneghan et al, op. cit.

14 Heneghan et al, op. cit.

Social marketing approaches that recognize the interface of human and natural systems and their interconnected dynamic forces can be a powerful means of influencing individual and collective behaviours for the betterment of individuals, communities, society and the planet. Further, “working ‘with’ people, not ‘for’ or ‘on’ [their] behalf, to make sustainable behaviour changes requires a nuanced understanding of the social, cultural, behavioural and structural dynamics at work to influence consumption and production decision-making.”¹⁵

The implications of this are that “behaviour change can no longer be confined to one single intervention at one single level at one point in time. Instead, change becomes a dynamic process over time across the individual, community and macro levels.”¹⁶

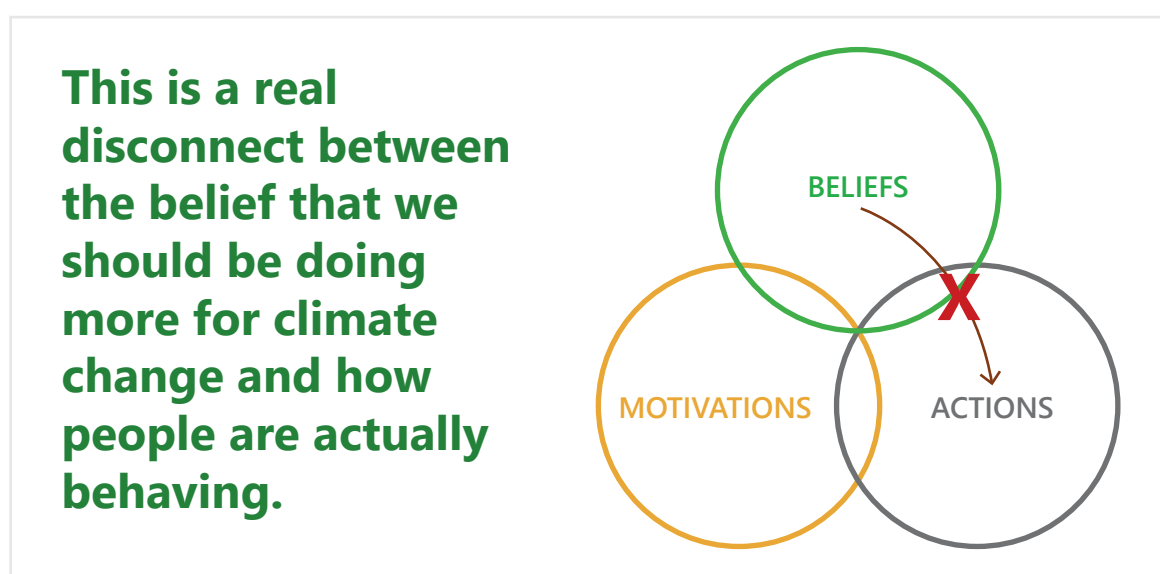


Figure 2: Climate Change-Behaviour Change¹⁷

¹⁵ Christine Domegan, 2021, Social marketing and behavioural change in a systems setting, Science Direct.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Government of New Zealand, Climate Change and Behavior Change, ND., <https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-11/climate-change-behaviour-change.pdf>

2.3. Climate Justice as a Frame for Climate Action

Climate justice focuses on the unequal impacts of climate change on marginalized or otherwise vulnerable populations. As a frame for climate action, it seeks to achieve an equitable distribution of both the burdens of climate change and the efforts to mitigate climate change. Concepts such as equality, human rights, collective rights, justice, and historical responsibilities for climate change are encompassed within the climate justice frame.

The objectives of climate justice can be described as: “to encompasses a set of rights and obligations, which corporations, individuals and governments have towards those vulnerable people who will be in a way significantly disproportionately affected by climate change.”¹⁸

The Triple Injustice of Climate Change

“Climate justice recognises that those who have benefited most from industrialisation bear a disproportionate responsibility for the accumulation of carbon dioxide in earth’s atmosphere, and thus for climate change. Meanwhile, there is growing consensus that people in regions the least responsible for climate change as well as the world’s poorest and most marginalised communities often tend to suffer the greatest consequences. Depending on the country and context, this may include people with low-incomes, indigenous communities or communities of color. They might also be further disadvantaged by responses to climate change which might exacerbate existing inequalities around race, gender, sexuality and disability. When those affected the most by climate change despite having contributed the least to causing it are also negatively affected by responses to climate change, this is known as the ‘triple injustice’ of climate change.”

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_justice

3. Why Integrate GESEI into Social Marketing Campaigns for Climate Action?

At the core of any social marketing approach and/or campaign is the objective of encouraging individuals to change the actions they take regarding the issues in question, or impelling other parties (i.e., government or private sector entities) to take action. Social marketing related to GESEI also focuses on normative change – i.e., working to change the attitudes and values that underpin women’s and men’s beliefs about what are acceptable roles and behaviours for each gender. In most societies people have internalized these beliefs and values to the extent that they may not even be aware of their influence on their own actions, decisions and behaviours.

The effectiveness of social marketing designed to effect climate action is strengthened by well informed intersectional gender analyses. These analyses should assess both: what the core gender norms influencing desired (or “climate and gender positive”) climate actions are; and the underlying causes of individual and collective beliefs/values and related behaviours. Analysis should also consider how gender values and norms affect the comparative situation/status and actions of women and men within their specific social and environmental (climate change adaptation) context.

¹⁸ Rosa Manzo, (19 March 2021). “Climate Equity or Climate Justice? More than a question of terminology”. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Social marketing in the context of GESEI-integrated climate change adaptation needs to be based on the following premises:

1. Climate change and biodiversity loss often have a disproportionately negative impact on diverse groups of women.
2. Women and men are affected differently by climate change and biodiversity due to the gender division of labour, differing levels and types of assets and underlying gender values and norms.
3. The situation of both men and of women needs to be addressed in social marketing messaging when determining most effective content for diverse target groups.
4. Including the perspectives, needs and knowledge of diverse groups of women and men in the development and implementation of climate change adaptation leads to strengthened and more equitable results, more sustainable natural resource management and more resilient communities.
5. Women have proven to be active contributors and agents of positive change in climate change adaptation.

These underlying assumptions need to form part of the key messaging in social marketing related to climate action. The intersectional gender analysis conducted to support the design of the Nature-based Solutions (NbS) component of the FINCAPES project identified the following gender equality and socio-economic inclusion issues that you could use at a more general level to inform content development in social marketing approaches and campaigns related to climate action.

Disproportionate Impact of Climate Change: Social marketing messaging needs to both: create awareness of differential impacts of climate change; and increase the visibility and voice of women and marginalized groups of men within this context.

Economic Issues: Social marketing messaging related to climate change adaptation needs to explicitly target all adult household members, regardless of gender. Depending upon the initiative, target audiences may also need to include girls and boys and/or female/male youth, as well as different accessibility issues (income, literacy, time poverty, etc.).

Health Impacts: Social marketing messaging related to climate change adaptation or climate action should include specific messages and information about how climate change adaptation initiatives can lead to improved health for diverse groups of women and men (i.e., co-benefits), as well as preventative measures each gender can take to address the gender-specific health risks they face.

Gender Based Violence (GBV): Social marketing approaches related to climate change adaptation need to consider how to include messaging related to GBV prevention and services. This is because it has been proven that a pervasive negative impact of climate change has been an increase in GBV related to economic stress.¹⁹

¹⁹ Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence, 2022, Gender Based Violence and its Intersection with Climate Change <https://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ICGBV-Policy-Paper-Climate-Change-and-GBV.pdf>

Women as Part of the Solution

Women4Biodiversity has collected emerging evidence which shows that **women are powerful agents of biodiversity protection**. This is because of their unique roles and possession of knowledge on natural resources within rural and indigenous communities. They also found that when women hold secure rights to land, efforts to protect biodiversity and build climate resilience are more successful.²⁰ This is, in part, as the different gender roles of women and men hold in diverse contexts means that each gender has different knowledge about plants and animals, their uses and management.²¹ Both sets of knowledge and perspectives are needed to inform effective natural resource management practice and policy. However, due to prevailing and pervasive gender values across many cultures and societies and a global pattern of most women holding more responsibility for family and household care than men, **“women are radically under-represented in decision-making spaces related to conservation, climate action, land governance, and land administration at all levels”²²** in many countries.

Social marketing messaging related to climate change adaptation needs to ensure public appeals for people to take actions to make their households and communities more resilient to climate change explicitly include outreach strategies and approaches that will reach women as well as men. These should not assume that a “one size fits all” campaign or types of messages will reach both women and men equally. Even within specific gender groups there is considerable diversity and there may be a need to develop different messages for diverse groups of women and men.

Communications Styles and Accessibility: Social marketing messaging related to climate change adaptation needs to take the different communication styles and priorities of diverse genders into account in the decisions regarding which key messages stakeholders will promote and how these will be delivered. For example, a comic book format may appeal to male youth in some contexts, in others, there may be more success with radio or television messages made by high profile female or male role models. To be effective the messages themselves may also need to focus on different priorities based on gender preferences/needs, education levels, age group, etc.

²⁰ Women 4 Biodiversity Organization, 2021, Advancing Women’s Rights, Gender Equality and the Future of Biodiversity in the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

4. Social Marketing for Climate Action – Principles and Foundations

4.1. Inclusive Communication Principles

We propose eleven guiding principles to consider in the development of inclusive communication, specifically adapted to fit a social marketing and climate action context:

1. Inclusive communications are accurate, respectful and inclusive of all.
2. The communities with which you are working are made up of people with a diverse range of backgrounds and lived experiences. Community members in all their diversity should have the opportunity to see themselves reflected in social marketing messages. This means ensuring any demographic groups in these communities, especially those that tend to be marginalized or are often overlooked are at the center of their own stories. Social marketing messaging should, therefore, be based on the **“Nothing About Us Without Us”** principle.
3. Before featuring anyone in any social marketing messages you need to have their consent to do so and share the proposed content with participants before publishing to ensure they are comfortable with how they are being depicted and are involved share freely, with no obligation or pressure to disclose specific information.
4. Ensure that you consult with subject matter experts during both content and design development, e.g., climate change and gender specialists.
5. Consider how the overall layout and composition work together to create meaning and if any of the content, photographs or graphics may reinforce biases or stereotypes or convey an unintended message. Ensure that you also use visuals that reflect your target audiences.
6. When dealing with diverse groups, it is best to ask how individuals and the groups as a whole identify themselves and how they would like to be referred to.
7. Avoid the use of terms that demean people based on characteristics, e.g., certain terms have been used to belittle, oppress or erase the contributions of marginalized groups of diverse genders, people with disabilities, different ages, ethnicities.
8. Be mindful of unconscious bias. It can influence and negatively impact social marketing messages. Having others with diverse backgrounds review your work can be helpful in eliminating biases and gaps.
9. Consider whether anyone or any group is being tokenized (i.e., selecting individuals who are marginalized or who belong to a typically excluded group in a symbolic effort to appear diverse. Ensure that you understand the difference being tokenism and genuine inclusivity.
10. Invest in developing strong, authentic and reciprocal relationships with demographic groups that are typically marginalized or excluded to ensure your social marketing messages promote their empowerment as well as the shared knowledge, cultural and physical safety and long-term reciprocity of and with these groups.²³
11. Focus on universal stories, points and experiences that anyone adopting the behaviours you are seeking to encourage would have regardless of their background and avoid stereotypes.²⁴

²³ University of Waterloo, N.D. “Guiding principles for inclusive communication”, <https://uwaterloo.ca/university-relations/resources/inclusive-communications-guide/guiding-principles-inclusive-communication>

²⁴ Ramona Sukhraj, 2021, Inclusive marketing: Why modern buyers demand to see themselves in your brand, <https://www.impactplus.com/blog/what-is-inclusive-marketing>

4.2. Foundations: Consider Intersectionality

Intersectional factors you need to take account in your background research and the establishment of relationships with diverse target audiences and communities include:

- Gender in all its diversity
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Poverty levels and Income
- Climate change risk levels
- Language
- Education
- Mental and/or physical ability
- Beliefs/Faith
- Rural/urban location, etc.



Image 1: Inclusive marketing: Why modern buyers demand to see themselves in your brand.

Image Source: Ramona Sukhraj, 2021.

<https://www.impactplus.com/blog/what-is-inclusive-marketing>

For example, if a government is promoting consumer carbon pricing it will need to consult with small business owners to determine what the financial impact might be for them and what would be the best means of reaching this group to gain acceptance of this tax. Small business owners are quite diverse, not only working in multiple sectors, but are also divided into formal and informal sector businesses, family-owned businesses that use only family labour, others that employ other people, small businesses owned by women and by men, etc. Informal sector businesses may be particularly resistant to adopting new carbon tax policies since they are not formally registered and tend to have low profit margins and capitalization levels. They are also predominantly owned by women, often working from a home base. These businesses will need completely different social marketing messages and approaches for the messaging to be successful.

There are many lessons to be learned from commercial marketing but the adoption of an inclusive social marketing approach stands out in terms of overall effectiveness. For example:

“In 2019, Google found 69% of Black consumers were more likely to purchase from a brand that is positively reflecting their race/ ethnicity in advertising. Similarly, 71% of LGBTQ+ consumers were more likely to interact with an online ad that authentically represented their sexual orientation.”²⁵

In addition, they took some sort of action after seeing an ad they considered to be diverse or inclusive.²⁶ This applies equally to social marketing advertisements. Additional lessons include that for online social marketing you need to make use of Hreflang html tags²⁷ to ensure search engines serve the appropriate language and regional version of your digital content. This will also enhance online user content for diverse audiences.²⁸ This is particularly important for national level campaigns in countries where there are multiple ethnic groups, languages, and religions. There is also a need to focus on localization and adapt digital content, design, and functionality to cater to the linguistic and cultural preferences of specific target audiences to resonate with diverse online communities.²⁹

There is also a need to work with your communications and IT teams to make sure any web-based social marketing sites are accessible for target audience members with hearing or vision impairments, and that your user experience keeps different demographics in mind.³⁰ For example, different age groups generally engage and interact in very different ways with online materials and social media.

It also helps if you can diversify the team that is developing the social marketing messages. If this is not possible, it becomes doubly important to ensure you consult with members of your target audience and experts in the areas of behaviour you are seeking to change (e.g., climate change and gender experts).

Who Benefits?

Any social marketing message focused on encouraging changes in behaviour needs to consider and include messaging explicitly related to how the change in question will directly benefit the members of the target audiences. Climate change adaptation campaigns have tended to focus on how making these changes will benefit society and the environment as a whole and have not gained a lot of traction with behavioural change. People also need to see that what they are being asked to do can make a difference. Too often climate change-related social marketing has focused on a global scale. A part of seeing themselves reflected in a social marketing message is seeing that what they are being asked to do is possible and will benefit the more immediate world around them (their families, themselves, their communities).

²⁵ Sukhraj, op. cit.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ The hreflang attribute shows search engines what the relationship is between web pages in alternate languages. See: <https://backlinko.com/hreflang-tag>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gason, op. cit.

³⁰ Sukhraj, op. cit.

5. The Gender at Work Framework

The Gender at Work Framework focuses on understanding and fostering changes related to gender equality. Since it is based on an understanding of both individual and systemic norms change, it can also be readily applied to a social marketing context designed to change norms and behaviours linked to climate action. The Gender at Work framework highlights key societal characteristics along two axes – individual to systemic, and informal to formal. The framework sets out differences in capacity and social norms in four quadrants (see Figure 3).

The framework asks people to assess both informal and formal “rules” which influence people’s beliefs and behaviours related to gender, as well as interventions intended to influence or change behaviour at the individual and/or systemic levels.³¹ For example, legally women may be allowed to work at night, but custom dictates that they only apply for day shifts. These informal views of what is appropriate for women and men form part of the individual consciousness and may affect men and women’s respective capabilities if the underlying gender values influence women and men to select to work in male or female-dominated sectors.

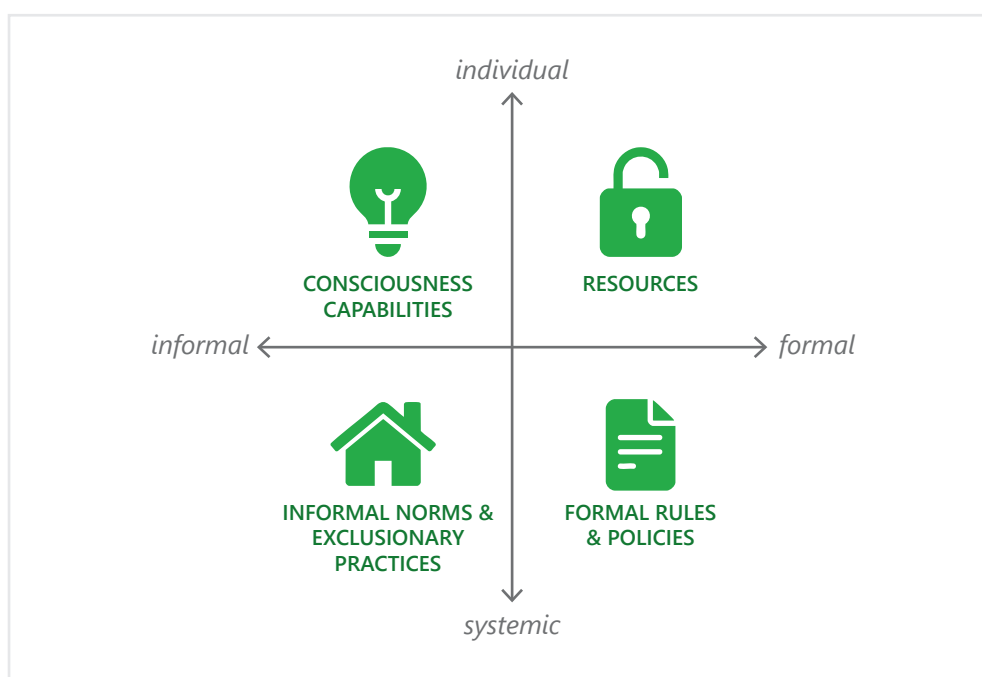


Figure 3: Gender at Work Framework³²

In mangrove restoration work in Purworejo Village in Lampung Province, Indonesia, for example, men are paid more compared with women for planting mangroves even though they are doing the same work. This is as the men work in locations where the terrain is difficult, and the work is physically harder. Women plant seedlings in areas where the work is physically easier. This difference in pay is not perceived locally to be discriminatory since it is based on payment for different levels of difficulty in the work. However, which

³¹ Sukhraj, op. cit.

³² Figure source: Gender at Work, N.D., <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

gender is hired to plant mangroves in which locations is based on an underlying gender discrimination. The perception or values that lead to the assumption that women are not capable of doing the harder, physical labour leads to women earning less than men and means they have fewer economic resources. The women themselves may also elect to only apply for what they perceive to be more appropriate work for them. In this instance, the formal rules (laws) state that this work is equally open to women and men. The informal rules mean that it is not. These informal rules contribute to structural barriers to systemic change related to gender equality.

In some cases, it is the legal frameworks which are also discriminatory and restrict some types of work solely to men, e.g., underground mining or night shift work. In both instances, organizations can use social messaging to try and influence a change in consciousness or understanding that will create more economic opportunities for women. In many cases, changes in the workplace which lead to greater equality for women can also lead to benefits for men (e.g., the introduction of flex time in the workplace to accommodate women's family responsibilities also applies to men and provides them with access to a more flexible work schedule).

In developing social marketing and messaging it is critical therefore, to clearly identify at which level and which type of change the messages are targeted. If the objective is individual change related to women and men's consciousness about gender equality, then the messaging will need to show how these changes will benefit each person as well as create greater awareness of what are the costs of gender discrimination at the individual level and to the environment. If targeting change at the formal level, a different type of social marketing is called for and may be initiated by civil society organizations or through internal staff training designed to create greater awareness of gender equality issues related to climate change.

6. Examples of Empowerment through Social Marketing

Social marketing for climate action can target different audiences and for different purposes. These purposes can include influencing individual behaviour, government and private sector policy and empowerment of specific demographic groups in taking action for climate justice, divestment and/or policy actions. The following sections of this report outline examples of social marketing approaches and campaigns, as well as diverse ways of delivering social marketing messages, starting with examples of empowerment approaches with differing targets for change actions.

6.1. Empowering Arctic and Small Island Communities

Many Strong Voices "connects the peoples and places of the Arctic and Small Island Developing States to promote their well-being, living, and thriving through art, science, and exchange. The emphasis is on addressing human-caused climate change within wider sustainability action."³³ The organization works to bring together organisations from these two regions to take collaborative and strategic actions on climate change mitigation and adaptation at the local, regional and international level.

³³ <https://www.manystrongvoices.org/>



Image 2: Many Strong Voices Campaign Image³⁴

Examples of campaigns relevant to social marketing and empowerment of target groups include the “Portraits of Resilience” project that trained children in regions most affected by climate change how to use photography and other digital media to help bring personal stories and faces to the attention of the general public and decision-makers at international climate change negotiations.³⁵

6.2. Empowering Youth

Connect4Climate³⁶ is a global partnership program dedicated to promoting communication around climate change and empowering action worldwide. The program website includes content to support engagement of organizations, as well as opportunities and resources targeted to youth. Connect4Climate “prides itself on its commitment to communicating climate positivity and concrete solutions through the creative arts... enlist[ing] the help of creatives of every stripe in relating compelling, actionable narratives to our audience.” Connect4Climate frequently uses competitions to raise awareness about climate solutions and “harness the creativity of the young generation to tell climate stories in new and engaging ways... around filmmaking, photography, virtual reality [and] advertising campaigns [such as]: Africacompetition, Voices4Climate, iChange, Action4Climate, Film4Climate Global Video Competition, Uniting4Climate VR Pitch Competition, New Blood Awards, and the All4theGreen Special Blue Prize.³⁷

³⁴ Image source: <https://www.manystrongvoices.org/>

³⁵ For project stories and images, see: <https://www.grida.no/resources/15244> and <https://www.manystrongvoices.org/portraits-of-resilience.html#background>

³⁶ <https://www.connect4climate.org/>

³⁷ <https://www.connect4climate.org/content/creative-climate-hub>



Image 3: Connect4Climate <https://www.connect4climate.org/content/young-people>

6.3. Voice and Role of Indigenous Peoples

A growing number of organizations and initiatives focus on the links between Indigenous justice/reconciliation and climate action. Indigenous Climate Action (ICA),³⁸ for example, works on connecting and supporting Indigenous communities to reinforce their place as leaders driving climate change solutions for today and tomorrow. The organization hopes to “inspire a new generation of Indigenous climate leaders building solutions centered around our inherent rights and cultures.”³⁹ The “pathways” used by ICA include: gatherings; amplifying voices; sovereignty and justice; and resources and training.⁴⁰ The ICA “divestment campaign” includes an example of social marketing involving a variety of tools (e.g., webinars, open letters, media releases, public events) aimed at changing the policies and actions of specific parties (in this case a publicly traded national bank) (see Image 4).

38 <https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/>

39 Ibid.

40 <https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/pathways>



Image 4: ICA blog posting. (Source: <https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/programs/indigenous-divestment>)

As a part of this there is a growing recognition of the need to listen to and empower the voices of Indigenous Elders. This both recognizes their important leadership and teaching role among First Nations communities and for general society. There is also an increased understanding that Indigenous women, in particular, are keepers of much traditional knowledge that is needed to effectively inform climate action, particularly for nature-based solutions. The World Bank, for example, is highlighting the role Indigenous women play in leading climate change action and the value of Indigenous women's knowledge. The Bank uses its website as a platform to raise the visibility of the work and role of indigenous women as climate action leaders and to tell their stories, sharing them with a wide audience of diverse stakeholders that would not otherwise be exposed to these stories and experiences.



Image 5: Indigenous Women Climate Action Leaders⁴¹
From left to right: Joan Carling, Agene Leina and Myrna Cunningham

⁴¹ World Bank Group, 2022, Indigenous Women Leaders Persevere Amid a Changing Climate, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/08/08/indigenous-women-leaders-persevere-amid-a-changing-climate>

6.4. Empowering School Children through School Programs

EcoSchools Canada⁴² offers a certification program for elementary through secondary schools intended to nurture environmental learning and climate action. The certification program “helps to incentivize, track and reward environmental actions that reduce energy and waste, raise awareness and incorporate environmental learning into curriculum.”⁴³ The organization also initiated “Project 2050: *Climate-friendly habits to change the world!*” to “provide an easy and fun way for youth and their families to contribute to the fight against climate change by adopting small but impactful climate-friendly habits.”⁴⁴ The social marketing strategy behind Project 2050 involves providing resources and incentives (through certificates for completing a series of defined actions, using support materials provided by the organization).

7. Climate Justice and Social Marketing

7.1. Bridging and Drawing on Social Movements – Civil Rights, Feminism, Poverty and Diverse Minority Groups

Climate justice advocates and organizations have drawn on the experiences of historic social justice movements to establish principles, organize and advocate for change. Social marketing tools have been a foundation of many associated campaigns – from hand-distributed pamphlets and posters calling for specific actions, to petitions, marches and media events. Increasingly, organizations interested in action on climate change have recognized and found common cause with social justice – as an integral element of climate justice.

The Solutions Project, for example, The Solutions Project provides targeted grants, media training and support and organizes social marketing campaigns and events – all with an underpinning principle of justice and equity. It “aims to protect disadvantaged communities... we work to create an equitable society for women, Black people, Indigenous communities, and other communities of color. As a result, society as a whole is more prepared for climate change.”⁴⁵ The organization has “made it their mission to support the [Black, Brown, Indigenous and other immigrant] communities of climate changemakers, innovators and “solutionaries” who have been doing the grassroots work.”⁴⁶

⁴² <https://ecoschools.ca/>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ <https://ecoschools.ca/project2050/>

⁴⁵ <https://thesolutionsproject.org/who-we-are/>

⁴⁶ <https://thesolutionsproject.org/what-we-do/inspiring-action/campaigns-events/>



Image 6: Source <https://thesolutionsproject.org/what-we-do/grantee-support/build-media-capacity/>

7.2. Coalitions and Shared Campaigns to Influence Global Climate Negotiations

Climate negotiations and agreements under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have been a focus and locus for climate justice advocacy.

The Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice (DCJ), for example, focuses on bringing groups and organizations together rather than unaffiliated individuals. DCJ is a network of over 200 climate and human rights organizations working at international, regional and local level on issues of climate justice and just transition. The organization has established itself as the convener of climate justice groups in the UNFCCC, where DCJ makes up one half of the Environmental NGO Constituency alongside Climate Action Network. DCJ often undertakes joint advocacy initiatives around climate negotiations with the Climate Action Network and networks such as Publish What You Pay (a group with over 1000 of civil society organisations in more than 50 countries that advocates for financial transparency in the extractive industry through tracking and reporting of contracts and related environmental impacts and mitigation measures).⁴⁷ The “People’s Demands for Climate Justice” campaign led by DCJ, for example, has collected more than 295,000 signatories from 130 countries and more than 700 organizations. The people’s demands include: keeping fossil fuels in the ground; honoring climate finance obligations to developing countries; and advancing solutions [to the climate crisis] that are just, feasible and essential.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See, for example, The joint COP 29 media brief, November 10, 2024: <https://climatenetwork.org/resource/climate-talks-and-the-chilling-effect-repression-on-the-rise/>.

⁴⁸ <https://www.peoplesdemands.org/>

8. Social Marketing Campaigns Targeting Government Policy & Action

8.1. Mail and Email Tools

Seniors for Climate Action Now⁴⁹ is an organization based in Canada with an intention to “inform, and mobilize seniors in an effort to prevent more climate catastrophes.” Several of this organization’s campaigns use social marketing tools to encourage engagement and actions to influence policies or actions of government or other parties. For example, over 1,700 oil and gas representatives were registered as delegates for COP29 held in Baku Azerbaijan in November 2024, outnumbering almost every country delegation.⁵⁰ Seniors for Climate Action Now undertook a postcard campaign to highlight their concerns, with responses directed to the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

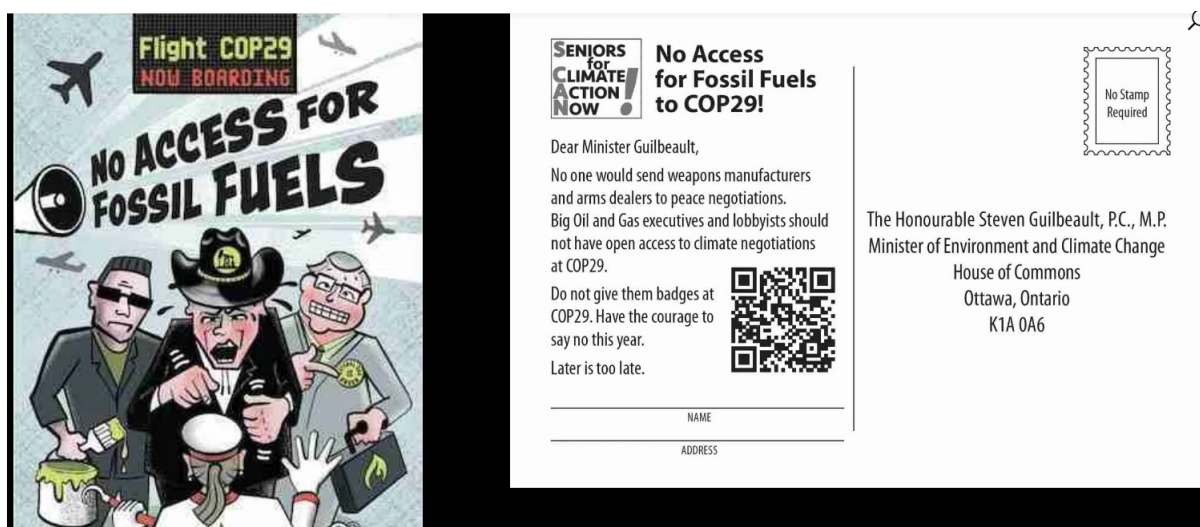


Image 7: Seniors for Climate Action Now COP 29 campaign form letter

8.2. Legal Actions and Social Marketing

Increasingly diverse groups of people are using the courts as a means of advocating for climate. While not strictly social marketing, the related media attention means that this legally focussed approach increases public awareness of related issues and serves to hold governments to account for their climate related policies. The CSOs undertaking legal challenges concurrently use social media and social marketing to increase awareness of the issues being brought to the courts, and to generate public support for addressing these issues.

The 2023 *Global Climate Litigation Report* prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Sabin Center for Climate Change at Columbia Law School documented a stark increase in climate change litigation worldwide. Between July 2020 and December 2022, 630 climate change lawsuits were filed across the world, with Canada having the sixth highest number of climate-related actions filed during this period.⁵¹ These actions comprise a range of claims against a variety of corporate issuers, as well as several cases against governments.

⁴⁹ <https://seniorsforclimateactionnow.org/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/press-releases/fossil-fuel-lobbyists-eclipse-delegations-most-climate-vulnerable-nations-cop29-climate-talks/>

⁵¹ <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-climate-litigation-report-2023-status-review>

For example, a group of Swiss women, known as Klima-Seniorinnen and all aged over 64, challenged the Swiss government in a legal action filed with the European Court of Human Rights.⁵² The group said their government's climate inaction put them at risk of dying during heatwaves. They argued that their age and gender made them particularly vulnerable to such climate change impacts. The court ruled in April 2024 that the Swiss government had violated the human rights of its citizens by failing to do enough to combat climate change, in a decision that will set a precedent for future climate lawsuits. The ruling, in favour of the more than 2,000 Swiss women who brought the case, is expected to resonate in court decisions across Europe and beyond, and to embolden more communities to bring climate cases against governments.



Image 8: KlimaSeniorinnen members.

Image source <https://www.nchr.gr/en/news/1781-klimaseniorinnen-the-climate-activists-from-switzerland-are-coming-to-greece.html>

In another example, in October 2024, the Court of Appeal of Ontario ruled in favour of seven young people who brought a lawsuit against the Ontario government in which they alleged that Ontario's climate plan was failing to protect them and future generations.⁵³ The lawsuit was initiated in 2019 and went through a series of court hearings and appeals over five years before the final ruling by the highest Ontario provincial court. The youth were represented through the process by a Canadian legal NGO (Ecojustice). Ecojustice has noted that this decision broke new ground in charter climate litigation in Canada and has set precedence for the fact that cases of this type are justiciable and are an appropriate question on which courts can and should weigh in.⁵⁴ The increased media coverage of the court case and related issues also helped both the plaintiffs and Ecojustice organization to increase public awareness of government accountability for meeting global warming targets.

52 See: <https://time.com/6972924/climate-change-legislation-switzerland/>

53 <https://coadecisions.ontariocourts.ca/coa/coa/en/item/22746/index.do>

54 <https://coadecisions.ontariocourts.ca/coa/coa/en/item/22746/index.do>



Image 9: Youth Legal Challenge to Provincial Climate Change Strategy

9. Social Marketing Campaigns Targeting Corporations or Sectors

Social marketing campaigns most commonly target the fossil fuel sector in general, or the actions of specific companies (e.g., those engaged in offshore drilling or operations in sensitive ecosystems such as tropical rainforest) or sub-sectors (such as coal-fired power plants). NGOs have utilized a variety of social marketing tools and approaches to this end.

9.1. Divestment of Fossil Fuel Investments by Target Entities

Fossil fuel divestment aims to reduce carbon emissions by accelerating the adoption of the renewable energy transition through the stigmatization of fossil fuel companies. This includes putting public pressure on companies that are currently involved in fossil fuel extraction to invest in renewable energy. This approach is modeled on successful divestment campaigns against apartheid in South Africa.

The fossil fuel divestment movement began as an initiative of 350.org (a US-based NGO) that targets students to petition their schools and universities for action. “Since its inception in 2012, 350 institutions and local governments alongside thousands of individuals, representing over \$1.5 trillion in assets have pledged to divest from fossil fuels. There are now active campaigns underway at over 450 universities and hundreds more cities, foundations, churches and other institutions around the world.”⁵⁵ Allied NGOs such as gofossilfree.org have used a suite of social marketing tools to promote divestment. Go Fossil Free, for example, has generated over 1000 petitions, supported by more than 350,000 signatures from around the world.

⁵⁵ <https://350.org/350-campaign-update-divestment/> High-profile pledges to divest include Norway’s Sovereign Wealth Fund, the Episcopal church, the Church of England, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, World Council of Churches, the California Academy of Sciences, and the British Medical Association.

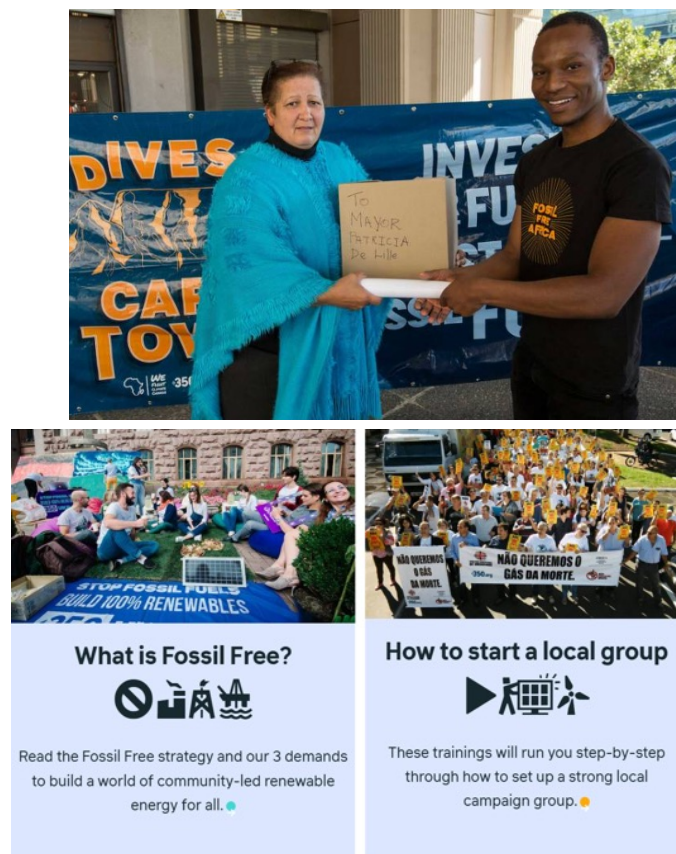


Image 10: Examples of social marketing resources from gofossilfree.org

9.2. Targeted International Initiatives – Coal Sector

The “Move Beyond Coal” campaign in Australia is an example of an organization with a strong social marketing strategy, aimed at empowering and providing resources for individuals and community-scale groups to end the use of coal for power generation. These resources included: a campaign film with guide to hosting screenings of the film; a “conversation guide” for community conversations; membership sign up sheets and market stall resources; a “Facebook support network”; and a “brand kit”.



Image 11: Example of social marketing resources provided by Move Beyond Coal

10. Supporting Women's Leadership in Climate Action

"Women leaders play major roles in emergency responses to disaster, developing gender-responsive climate solutions and building alternatives for just transitions. They are leading adaptation interventions, responding to natural disasters and building long-term capacity to face climate shocks and enhance community resilience and sustainability. Women are also at the forefront of mitigation efforts, through their leadership and participation in the just energy transition, championing community-driven, decentralized, and renewable energy solutions to address the triple threat of gender inequality, climate change and energy poverty."⁵⁶

Many of the examples in this report highlight the central role that women play in many social marketing climate action campaigns. This underscores the need for social marketing campaigns, etc. to ensure that they address diverse audiences and do the necessary research, analysis and consultations, particularly with women, to make sure their campaigns are both inclusive and support the strong leadership role women have been taking in climate change advocacy and action.

Women are the powerhouses of climate action.

Join the #WomenLeadingOnClimate social media campaign on November 11

Let's flood COP29 by sharing and amplifying how women and girls are taking climate action and by demanding urgent and more ambitious climate policies from global leaders.

Image 12: Source - WomenleadingonClimate.org

There are also initiatives that support capacity development and empowerment of women in climate action. For example, *Accelerating African Women's Leadership in Climate Action* is a career development fellowship that aims to increase both the number of African women leading climate action and the development of climate solutions designed to address the needs of women and men smallholders.⁵⁷ Other groups, such as Women Leading on Climate, provide structured resources and organization social marketing campaigns that focus on engaging women. Project Dandelion, led by Mary Robinson, former Chair of The Elders and UN Commission on Human Rights, links gender and climate issues in a central campaign.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Climate Champions, March 7, 2024. Source: <https://climatechampions.unfccc.int/celebrating-womens-leadership-in-climate-action-on-international-womens-day/>

⁵⁷ Climate Adaptation and Resilience Programme (CLARE) 2024. <https://clareprogramme.org/update/new-project-aims-to-promote-african-womens-leadership-in-climate-action/>

⁵⁸ See: <https://theelders.org/news/when-we-recognise-women-climate-leaders-we-support-safer-world-all>



Image 13: Source - projectdandelion.org

11. Commercial Advertising and Marketing Approaches

Private sector companies use advertising and social marketing to increase sales and build positive brand images by appealing to individual consumers. Civil society organizations have learned from commercial and public health advertising to develop images and communications campaigns for climate action.

11.1. Public Figure and Celebrity Activism, Influence or Endorsement

Companies contract public figures and organizations to promote or endorse their product or service. Celebrities, public figures and social influencers can also use their profile and followers to provide publicity, endorse or financially support social causes, including climate action. There are many examples: Robert Redford is considered a pioneer in celebrity environmentalism; Greta Thunberg has become a celebrity through her activism; Jane Fonda has been “on the front lines” of climate activism (as well as other social causes) with organizations such as Greenpeace for more than half a century; and Leonardo DiCaprio has made donations to charities fighting climate change (including five million USD to the Earth Alliance).⁵⁹ They all have been called upon to use their fame to help convince the general public of the need for significant climate action.

⁵⁹ <https://www.leafscore.com/blog/eco-friendly-celebrities-battling-climate-change/>



Image 14: Mark Ruffalo (pictured, center in blue shirt) founded The Solutions Project and actively endorses the organization

11.2. Partnerships with Commercial Entities – Hazards and Perceptions of “Greenwashing”

A 2023 survey of sustainability perceptions involving 32,000 interviews across 42 sectors in 33 countries found that on average, across sectors, 52% of people globally say they have seen, or heard, false or misleading information about sustainable actions taken by brands.⁶⁰ In further consideration of actions in relation to claims, a 2022 peer reviewed study of major oil and gas company advertising and reporting found that the transition to clean energy business models is not occurring, since the magnitude of investments and actions does not match their discourse. The study concluded that “until actions and investment behavior are brought into alignment with discourse, accusations of greenwashing appear well-founded.”⁶¹

There are, however, examples of social marketing involving partnerships that include commercial entities that have been considered effective. Epson, for example, in a 2022 campaign partnered with National Geographic explorer Dr. Isla Myers-Smith to increase publicity about the “greening of the Arctic.”⁶² The campaign promoted the heat-free low power-use technology used in its printers. The campaign linked this to Dr. Myers-Smith’s research which showed that even small personal changes can have an influence in reducing the impacts of climate change in the Arctic, underscoring Epson’s printer technology as being more sustainable than laser printers and other inkjet printers.⁶³

A partnership between the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Lacoste clothing company involved a four-year campaign to raise awareness and funds for endangered species conservation.⁶⁴ Lacoste replaced its iconic crocodile logo on limited-edition polo shirts with images of ten endangered species. Each polo represented a specific species and the number of remaining animals in the wild, emphasising the urgency of protecting these creatures.

60 <https://www.kantar.com/campaigns/sustainability-sector-index>

61 Li M, Trencher G, Asuka J 2022. The clean energy claims of BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil and Shell: A mismatch between discourse, actions and investments. PLoS ONE 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263596>

62 Influencer Marketing Hub, op. cit.

63 Ibid.

64 <https://iucnsos.org/initiative/lacoste-x-iucn-sos/>

11.3. Learning from Public Health Campaigns

Social marketing approaches and tools have been a mainstay of public health agencies and organizations advocating for healthy behaviours, such as exercise, or changes in public policy, such as restrictions on the sale of tobacco and alcohol.⁶⁵ Groups advocating climate action have adopted or adapted related social messaging, for example, pointing to the health impacts of lowered air quality from burning fossil fuels on vulnerable populations, such as women and children living in poverty in traffic congested urban areas. Doctors for the Environment Australia, is an example of an organization explicitly linking their association with health care to a need for action to address climate change with their message “climate care is health care.”

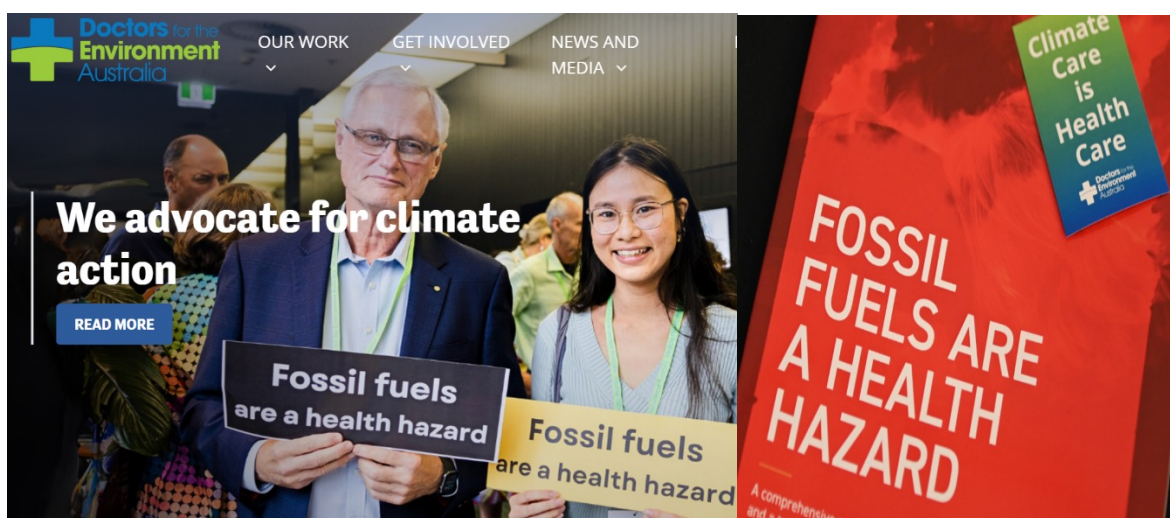


Image 15: Doctors for the Environment Australia - Public Health Campaign

In another example, the Asian People’s Movement on Debt and Development⁶⁶ used campaign signage that mirrors public health warnings, redirected to climate related “risks” or potential consequences to draw attention to their concerns.



Image 16: Climate advocates at Japan Energy Summit in Tokyo June 2024

⁶⁵ See, for example, W Douglas Evans, “How Social Marketing Works in Health Care” BMJ 2006; 332:1207, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.332.7551.1207-a>

⁶⁶ Asian People’s Movement on Debt and Development, June 3, 2024. Source: <https://apmdd.org/climate-advocates-urge-japan-to-stop-supporting-fossil-fuels-and-promoting-false-solutions/>

12. Advice from Practitioners

12.1. Lessons Learned

These points of advice are gleaned from the examples of social marketing for climate action practices reviewed in this report.

1. **Be specific about your target audience.** Identify your audience and the segments within that audience that you are targeting. Confirm your assumptions about their situation, needs and motivations – before determining what social marketing approach and tools are appropriate. “Youth”, “women” or “the general public” are too generic to usefully inform an effective social marketing campaign, as there are many differences within these demographic groups. You cannot assume homogeneous characteristics across a group.
2. **Be specific about actions** – what steps or responses that your target audience members need to take.
3. **Empower your target audience to take action** – show them how they CAN make a difference!
4. Consider the **capacity, opportunity and motivation** of the people you are trying to reach.
5. **Encourage a sense of inclusion** – through shared activities, providing information and resources, and sharing the stories or experiences of others.
6. **Report back** to the individuals and groups that you have been engaging (or “marketing”) with the results of their involvement – progress, small (or big) successes, progress and continued effort or upcoming actions. This both helps build trust and show them that your organization cares about them and their experiences.
7. Don’t rely on a single social marketing tool – **build a campaign**.
8. **Use existing social infrastructure to support social marketing education messaging and campaigns**, e.g., traditional community social gatherings such as women’s arisan lending groups, religious events, working with both formal and informal local leaders, etc.

12.2. Building Social Engagement

Building social engagement and target audience interaction are important tools used in commercial marketing to improve brand recognition, trust and loyalty. Engagement and interaction is also critically important in social marketing approaches. The Indeed Editorial Team,⁶⁷ for example, identifies several ways an organization can increase its social engagement with its target audiences:

1. **Analyze the current levels of engagement the organization has**, note that many social media platforms have built-in tools to measure engagement analytics. You should also test the quality of the interactions with the public and with specific target audiences as well as overall. Who is commenting on your posts and how often? Also ask what is your organization’s reputation? Does the public trust and believe in your messaging? If not, what do you need to change this reputation? What is the risk of not doing so?
2. **Set a specific goal for your social engagement** to help motivate your organization and ensure all team members understand your vision for social engagement and to track the of your social engagement initiative effectiveness using analytics and data management.
3. **Create a posting schedule** for your organization’s social media accounts to ensure you are putting out content regularly. Provide plenty of opportunities for interaction.
4. **Set tone and content relative to your target audience** – don’t “talk down” or “talk at” your audience – be cautious in how humour is used as perceptions and sensitivities differ.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Indeed Editorial Team, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Indeed Editorial Team, *op. cit.*

13. Conclusion

Effective social marketing increases awareness and builds support for climate action advocacy, with an overarching aim of influencing government policies and societal change.

A consistent message found in the different examples and approaches presented in the paper is that social marketing is most effective when inclusive engagement and communications strategies and models are adopted. Within the context of the FINCAPES project, this means ensuring that any social marketing strategies and campaigns developed by project stakeholders and the project itself should be informed by an intersectional gender and communications analysis. This helps in identifying the diversity within target audiences, as well as effective ways to address this diversity – reaching all intended audiences, both female and male, as well as diverse types of stakeholders, at individual, organizational and institutional scales.

There are a multitude of creative approaches and tools that can be used to promote changes in behaviour and norms related to climate adaptation and mitigation – with a foundational premise of promulgating a just and climate positive global society. Underlying societal values related to gender and other social values can either constrain or act as a catalyst for effective climate action. Effective social marketing can foster positive change in behaviour, as well as the social and economic norms that drive behaviours, while promoting climate action, gender equality and socio-economic inclusion.



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