

# Art & Climate Justice

## Voices for Just Climate Action

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## About this report

This report has been commissioned by Hivos to inform its Voices for Climate Action programme. The Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) Programme intends to foster an expanded civic space where civil society voices, particularly those of vulnerable people, are heard on climate action. The VCA Programme is a lobby and advocacy initiative by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Netherlands, SouthSouthNorth (SSN), Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), Slum Dwellers International (SDI), Fundación Avina, and Hivos with the support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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*"The climate summits with high level participants don't involve the farmer who is facing the effects of climate change. Art helps people to understand the topic, based on their own realities. It simplifies the message through music, community dialogues, poetry, etc. It brings the message home."*

Boniface Mwalii, African Crossroads

**Art** is a medium that enables anyone, regardless of the language they speak, their age, gender, nationality, or social-economic background, to express, explore and participate in the climate justice conversation. This allows these communities to share their indigenous knowledge and traditions, a crucial part of fighting climate change.

**Art** can serve as a form of recognition and representation of history, lack of justice and impact, especially in the case of art created by and for marginalised communities who are denied space in the public sphere.

## The power of art in climate justice

*"The artist has a free spirit, more than other people, and would assumably be more open to the concerns of the communities."*

Claudia Feltrup-Azaf, AAO/BirdLife  
Tunisia

*"Artists have a better way of communicating than all of us who are climate change experts, advocates, and activists. Artists approach issues in a very unique way."*

Simon Mwamba, Zambia Climate Change Network

**Art** is a vital tool in mobilising and strengthening movements worldwide as it enables people to communicate innovative ideas and issues quickly and powerfully for positive change.

## Summary

In the past decade, recognition is growing for what communities in the Global South had been flagging for years: the climate is changing drastically by human-induced greenhouse gas emissions coupled with accelerating destruction of the natural environment, such as deforestation, contamination of soil and water, and pollution. Climate change has a devastating effect on human life and human rights. It exacerbates existing inequalities between the global North and South, rich and poor, sexes, generations, ethnic groups, and communities. It undermines democracy and threatens social coexistence. Likewise, the greatest burden falls on those already in poverty and on marginalised groups such as Indigenous peoples and traditional communities, the rural and urban poor, women, non-heteronormative identities, and youth. However, they are the least responsible for climate change.

These climate justice struggles are also actively reflected in the arts from the Global South, and climate justice activists are increasingly using art as an advocacy tool to lobby for policy change and communicate key messages within the civic space. Yet, while climate change is a thoroughly studied subject, there has been limited research into the sharing of climate change information and communication, despite advocacy's central role in pushing social change and modifying human behaviours that are largely responsible for the crisis we are facing.

Art as political expression, art as protest, and art as a catalyst for social change are far from new phenomena and traces of art fulfilling social purposes can be found throughout contemporary and ancient human history. Still, the role of art in the climate justice movement remains underexplored, although art as a tool is increasingly adopted by activist communities around the globe. There are multiple ways in which art can function as a medium to advocate for climate justice. Engaging with climate justice can be done *in*, *with* and *through* art, in which art facilitates a different role:

- Engagement in art: art as a platform for introducing the issue.
- Engagement with art: art as a medium to facilitate dialogue and express learning.
- Engagement through art: art as a means of transformation.

To learn how the climate justice movement can engage in, with and through art, this report aims to learn from existing climate justice advocacy work that integrates art. The outcomes of this mapping exercise are used to understand how art campaigns impact climate justice advocacy and learn how art can mobilise and strengthen the movement through inclusivity, creativity, and innovation.

This mapping exercise was conducted through an online search and scoping exercise, combined with 16 interviews with artists, artist collectives and civil society organisations using art to advocate climate justice, and 3 donors. We identified 131 changemakers using art as a medium for climate justice advocacy. The types of initiatives, campaigns, platforms, or organisations include galleries and curated content, campaigns and pledges, programmes, and platforms or collaborations. The different initiatives have adopted a wide range of art forms, including visual arts such as paintings or photography, performance arts such as dance and music, and literary arts such as poetry and storytelling.

To learn more from these initiatives around the world about the power of art in climate justice advocacy, we selected ten case studies that integrate art as a tool to advocate for climate justice through inclusive, participatory and accessible approaches, led by people, artists and/or communities in or from the Global South. The ten cases were studied through semi-structured informant interviews with leaders from each initiative, complemented by a desktop review of project documentation, such as the initiative's artworks, social media, website, campaign materials, news articles and funding applications. Together, the outcomes of the case studies are used to understand how artists, communities and movements can harness the power of art to advocate for climate justice advocacy, understand the challenges that these initiatives face in their use of art advocacy, and learn how art can mobilise and strengthen the climate justice movement.

- Engagement *in* art
  - Art Shapers – several countries, Latin America
  - The Agam Agenda – The Philippines and the Global South
  - Ecoton – Indonesia
- Engagement *with* art
  - African Crossroads – Africa
  - Zambia Climate Change Network: Climate Change, Environment and Agroecology Art Exhibition – Zambia
  - HAWAPI - Peru
  - Eco'logic - Tunisia
- Engagement *through* art
  - Climate Justice in Sejoumi - Tunisia
  - Sensible Territories – Brazil
  - Estudio Nuboso – Panama

Based on the detailed case studies, further complemented by in total 16 interviews with other art initiatives and donors, this study aimed to learn how art impacts climate justice advocacy and how art can mobilise and strengthen the movement through inclusivity, creativity and innovation.

Opportunities of climate activism:

- Building bridges
- Overcoming language barriers
- Giving visibility to climate change
- Amplifying art with digital tools
- Out of the box solutions to the climate crisis
- Wider reach through diverse art forms

Challenges associated with climate activism:

- Limited funding for art initiatives
- Decolonising art
- Protecting the safety of artists
- Limited capacity to meaningfully engage with marginalised communities
- Insufficient knowledge to grasp the complexity of climate change and climate justice

Based on these learnings, we have formulated key recommendations for civil society actors and donors supporting climate justice art initiatives, campaigns, and platforms in the Global South:

- Ensure that initiatives reserve enough budget to pay artists for their work
- Time activities with empathy



- Foster collaborations between artists, scientists, and civil society
- Invest in long-term relationships, built on trust
- Enlist dedicated staff to engage with vulnerable and marginalised communities
- Harness the benefits of technology to reach a wide audience
- Support partners (and other initiatives) in measuring impact

## Introduction

*“There is no global social justice without global cognitive justice. The epistemologies of the South do not question, in principle, the validity of modern science. They only refuse its claim to be the only valid knowledge, as well as the arbitrary split between sciences and arts. Social struggles rely, in general, on a variety of different knowledges already available, scientific knowledge included, and generate new knowledges as they proceed. As they combine and articulate different kinds of knowledges, they compile ecologies of knowledges. The epistemologies of the South aim at recovering and valorising such knowledges and the articulations among them.”*

Boaventura de Sousa Santos – Epistemologies of the South

In his book *Epistemologies of the South*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Professor at the School of Economics at the University of Coimbra, shows why global social justice is not possible without global cognitive justice.<sup>1</sup> This calls for new aesthetics, and for art as an expression of struggle, experience, and corporeality to find freedom from oppression and actively promote possibilities for a new society, a cooperative, loving world, free of oppression and limited only by the imagination.

One of the biggest threats to achieving social justice in our time is climate change. Climate change has a devastating effect on human life and human rights. It exacerbates existing inequalities between the global North and South, rich and poor, sexes, generations, ethnic groups, and communities. It undermines democracy and threatens social coexistence. Likewise, the greatest burden falls on those already in poverty and on marginalised groups such as Indigenous peoples and traditional communities, the rural and urban poor, women, non-heteronormative identities, and youth. However, they are the least responsible for climate change.

Climate justice struggles are also actively reflected in the arts from the Global South, and climate justice activists are increasingly using art as an advocacy tool to lobby for policy change and communicate key messages within the civic space. Art can serve as a form of recognition and representation of history, lack of justice and impact, especially in the case of art created by and for marginalised communities who are denied space in the public sphere. Art is a medium that enables anyone, regardless of the language they speak, their age, gender, nationality, or social-economic background, to express, explore and participate in the climate justice conversation. This allows these communities to share their indigenous knowledge and traditions, a crucial part of fighting climate change. Art is a vital tool in mobilising and strengthening movements worldwide as it enables people to communicate innovative ideas and issues quickly and powerfully for positive change. Various mediums, including visual art, music, film, poetry, and sculpture, strongly appeal to different people, enabling further advocacy efforts.

Through a climate justice approach, the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) Programme intends to foster an expanded civic space where civil society voices, particularly those of vulnerable people, are heard on climate action. The VCA Programme is a lobby and advocacy initiative by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Netherlands, SouthSouthNorth (SSN), Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), Slum Dwellers International (SDI), Fundación Avina, and Hivos with the support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

To learn from the power of art to impact the climate justice movement, this report aims to compile lessons learned from existing climate justice advocacy work that integrates art. The outcomes of this mapping exercise are used to understand how art campaigns impact climate justice advocacy and learn how art can mobilise and strengthen the movement through inclusivity, creativity, and innovation.

# 1

## Art for climate justice

**In this chapter, we explore the meaning of art in the climate justice movement. Particularly, we question why art is of such importance to communicate about and engage with the climate crisis and the need to understand how creative expression can contribute to climate justice.**

### 1.1 The power of art

In the past decade, recognition is growing for what communities in the Global South had been flagging for years: the climate is changing drastically by human-induced greenhouse gas emissions coupled with devastating destruction of the natural environment, such as deforestation, contamination of soil and water, and pollution. Being increasingly recognised as the largest challenge of this and the coming eras, communicating about climate change, its causes and impacts, and the need for a just transition to a post-carbon society remains imperative.

Yet, while climate change is a thoroughly studied subject, there has been limited research into the sharing of climate change information and communication, despite advocacy's central role in pushing social change and modifying human behaviours that are largely responsible for the crisis we are facing. The deep complexity of the climate crisis and its many facets underpin the need to better understand how we communicate about climate change and its impacts.

This complexity lies not only in the scientific and technical language surrounding the issue, but also in the links between climate and the environment, the different impacts on diverse communities and ecosystems, the social and economic implications, complicated power relationships, and various solutions offered by different actors.<sup>2</sup>

**The cultural understanding of the climate crisis cannot only be communicated through science, but requires cultural interactions, facilitated through that what makes cultures visible, audible, and tangible: art.**

For decades, climate change communication has been concerned with the perceived chasm between those who are conversant in the language of the natural sciences and those who are not.<sup>3</sup> While complicated graphs, technical analyses and scientific articles have been crucial in communicating the climate emergency, sole reliance on sciences has also proved grossly insufficient to drive change. Because climate change is not only a scientific phenomenon. Climate change is cultural, in its causes and its impacts. Responding to climate change requires a cultural change in our relation to the natural world, our joint responsibility for ourselves and others on our planet, and the way we live our lives. This cultural understanding of the climate crisis cannot only be communicated through science, but requires cultural interactions, facilitated through that what makes cultures visible, audible, and tangible: art. Art is the tool to communicate that which science cannot, addressing both human cognition and emotion through imaginative ways in its ability to link localised, cultured, and gendered human experiences to natural realities and abstract concepts.

## 1.2 Climate justice: engagement in, with, and through art

Art as political expression, art as protest, and art as a catalyst for social change are far from new phenomena and traces of art fulfilling social purposes can be found throughout contemporary and ancient human history. Still, the role of art in the climate justice movement remains underexplored, though art as a tool is increasingly adopted by activist communities around the globe.

There are multiple ways in which art can function as a medium to advocate for climate justice. Engaging with climate justice can be done *in*, *with* and *through* art, in which art facilitates a different role:<sup>4</sup>

- **Engagement in art: art as a platform for introducing the issue.**

Climate engagement *in* art is an approach in which art functions as the platform through which climate change and justice issues are introduced and communicated. In this role, art fulfils an activist purpose by presenting the information in a more attractive, potentially less serious and more understandable way without shaping or questioning fundamental methodological approaches or systemic givens. A common approach of many artworks has been to focus on or document the problems, risks, and impacts of environmental problems; they communicate climate change, as a topic in the arts.<sup>5</sup>

- **Engagement with art: Art as a medium to facilitate dialogue and express learning.**

Climate engagement *with* art that invites people to actively participate in a creative process, helping them to overcome perceived psychological distance and develop critical thinking. These types of projects are often participatory, experiential, community engaging, and process as well as goal-oriented. Examples include art & science labs and participatory art that tap into the creative potential of all participants and reduce hierarchies of ways of knowing and have the potential to build community, which might be an important prerequisite for social transformation.<sup>6</sup>

- **Engagement through art: Art as a means of transformation.**

Climate engagement *through* art is a process that engages people with climate change on a deep, emotional, and personal level. It has been argued that at its best, art can be emotionally and politically evocative, captivating, aesthetically powerful, and moving. Using art as a tool that guides us through a meaning-making and embodied experience is arguably a transformative process that can enable us to see and act differently on climate change. Examples include using art as a process to discover meanings of climate change and to deepen and embody experiences such as through dance, storytelling, or independently creating an artwork prompted by an open-ended and personally relevant climate-related question.<sup>7</sup>

This three-fold framework helps us to understand how art can be used to engage individuals and communities on climate justice through learning. Whether the art serves to introduce and explain the topic, invite dialogue and participation, or captivate transformation, it all seeks to engage audiences on climate justice. This engagement may increase climate awareness, spur critical articulation, and a sense of empowerment for climate agency and trauma healing.<sup>8</sup>

Although some art forms may be better suited for specific engagement purposes – for example, cartoons can be useful to convey factual information creatively, while dance can provoke the deep emotional learning towards transformation – all art forms could potentially fulfil different purposes or even multiple at the same time. In all its different forms, engagement with climate justice through art includes the use of narrative and metaphors to help visualize climate change. They support reflection and deeper meaning-making and seek to include the emotional aspects of climate change. They seek to create creative spaces where people can connect socio-ecological change to the everyday and their own experiences and shaping not only individual but also shared desires for potential futures.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3 A critical regard on art and climate activism

Both the sources consulted for this study as well as the informants interviewed stressed the need to deconstruct the notion of art and activism. Specifically, a question was asked along the lines of: If “art” is to play a role in the communication of a climate emergency (and more widely of global environmental change, including biodiversity loss), then should we not come to reckoning with the living legacy of colonialism in art? This question emerged in relation to organisations and campaigns in countries of the Global North, and especially of Europe that have been contesting the long-term hold of big oil over public institutions such as museums, art schools, and universities. But as laudable as those initiatives are, the sponsorship of big oil of museums and art schools is only one of the many forms of colonialism in art and the culture sector. Other notably questionable initiatives that remain uncontested were mapped in this exercise, including funding schemes that only fund Global South art projects as long as there is significant involvement of Global North artists. Another example are Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) used for “resource mobilisation and climate empowerment.” NFTs, just like cryptocurrencies, are receiving a lot of criticism for their intensive use of energy and they are also being promoted by global actors such as UNHABITAT.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, the written sources that have been reviewed during the inception phase of this project (i.e., academic articles and non-academic books and reports) on art and climate activism were produced by Anglo-Saxon authors and from a Euro-centric perspective. This situation, contrasted with the smaller number of initiatives we mapped (compared to the number of initiatives from the Global North) gives the impression that any Global South efforts were erased or assumed as non-existing and suggests a narrative that it is European artists pushing the boundaries in climate activism. These assumptions are of course erroneous, especially when projected against the definition of activism as a form of political activism and the practice of dissent to bring excluded views and voices into public debates.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the report, reflections are made about the low visibility of Global South climate activism initiatives.

# 2

## Climate activism initiatives worldwide

**This section provides an overview of the art and climate advocacy landscape based on a mapping exercise.**

### 2.1 Mapping of climate activism initiatives

To learn about the power of art to impact the climate justice movement, a mapping exercise was conducted to identify existing climate justice advocacy work around the world that integrates art. This mapping exercise was conducted through an online search and scoping exercise, combined with 16 interviews with artists, artist collectives and civil society organisations using art to advocate climate justice, and 3 donors. We identified 131 changemakers using art as a medium for climate justice advocacy. These initiatives were logged in a datasheet that captured their geographical reach, the art form used, and a short description of the project, or campaign. This mapping exercise did not capture individual artists, but it did log initiatives and organisations from the VCA programme countries despite not (yet) having a climate justice project. The reason for this was that these initiatives or organisations' work focus could be placed on the wider environmental and/or social justice movement and that there were no other initiatives or organisations found that focus on climate justice specifically. Profundo believes that the work of these actors using art to spur environmental and/or social justice action can also deliver important lessons for the VCA programme as well as provide context on the state of activism locally.

It needs to be noted that the approach to the mapping exercise, which relied heavily on internet-based searches, has strong limitations. This means that initiatives that do not have a website, social media profiles or other forms of internet presence, were automatically excluded from the mapping. This also means that grassroots projects, particularly those in the Global South, were less likely to be captured. For these reasons, this report does not aim to give an exhaustive overview of climate activism around the world, but rather to present the different examples that could be found within the scope of this study and amplify and learn from those initiatives.

#### 2.1.1 Geographic distribution of initiatives

Out of the 131 initiatives, 43 take place exclusively in countries of the Global North, 16 are centrally managed in a Global North country but have a global orientation, 4 are centrally managed in a Global South country but have a global or regional orientation, 40 take place in a Global South country or are set up to serve communities in the Global South, and 28 have a global orientation and do not appear to be steered from any particular geography. Ten separate entries correspond to funds and/or sponsors in arts and climate advocacy.

#### 2.1.2 Types of initiatives

The types of initiatives, campaigns, platforms, or organisations mapped to date can generally be classified as follows:

- **Galleries and curated content:** We found a number of venues holding thematic exhibitions (including but mostly not exclusively on climate change) or offering residencies and events aiming at the exchange of ideas across disciplines. Other initiatives included curated content in the form of books or catalogues, often part of an existing or past art collection or exhibition.



- **Campaigns and pledges:** We identified three types of campaigns, and these were conducted mostly by artists collectives, research centres, (environmental) NGOs (e.g., Greenpeace, 350.org, Friends of the Earth, WWF), and even major players in the music industry. The first type was the kind of campaign that called for the decarbonisation of art and culture events (such as concerts and festivals, for example, the Music Climate Pact). The second type involved awareness-raising of climate change issues (e.g., through a poster or visual content contest or a touring play). The third involved art education or art co-creation between artists and communities on climate change issues.
- **Programmes:** The programmes we found are mostly conducted by consortia of art and civil society organisations (including NGOs) and, unlike campaigns, include a diverse set of actions that address intersecting problems related to climate change.
- **Platforms and collaborations:** We found several online platforms that serve as forums for artists and activists to exchange ideas, resources, and opinions on the climate emergency. Some of these platforms (for example, Artists and Climate Change) served as registries of climate activist initiatives, while others publish stories from authors and artists that reflect on the climate emergency (for example, Our Climate Voices, Laboratory for Environmental Narrative Strategies, and The Agam Agenda).

### 2.1.3 Art forms

The 131 mapped campaigns, platforms, or organisations were also categorised based on the art forms used for advocacy. Most initiatives use several art forms, with no clear focus on one art form over the other. These initiatives were often either art collectives or networks, bringing together artists from different practices around a common social and political concerns like climate justice, or organisations working specifically on climate justice that had reached out to various artists to support their work. In total, 87 of the mapped initiatives combined multiple artforms into one initiative, including visual arts, performance arts, and literary arts.

The other group of initiatives focused on a specific artform to conduct climate justice advocacy. These types of initiatives often have the specific artform at the core of their work, where climate justice advocacy is often a clear objective of the work, but not its sole purpose. This includes:

- Twenty initiatives that relied exclusively on specific visual arts, such as paintings, plastic art, murals, and sculptures.
- Eleven projects that used music, often combined with dance.
- Ten initiatives focused on performance arts, including dance, theatre, and puppetry.
- Nine initiatives using storytelling, including literature, poetry, spoken word and narration.
- Seven projects focused on cinema, photography, and filmmaking.

### 2.1.4 Donors of climate activism

In addition to the different climate activism initiatives, campaigns and platforms, this study also aimed to get an understanding of the different funds available to these initiatives. Again, this mapping was by no means exhaustive but was intended to identify a list of donors that could be approached for interviews to gain more insights into the climate activism landscape.

In total, four donors provided insights into their support programmes for climate activism. Two of these interviews were conducted via video call and the other two through email correspondence.

## 2.2 Case studies

To learn more about the power of art in climate justice advocacy from these initiatives around the world, we selected ten case studies. The case studies were chosen based on the following criteria:

- The initiative integrates art as a tool to advocate for climate justice.

- The initiative is inclusive, participatory, and accessible to those most affected by climate change.
- The initiative is led by people, artists and/or communities in or from the Global South.

In addition, special consideration was given to having a broad variety of types of art forms used, including visual arts, performance, music, storytelling, digital art and protest art. Lastly, the final selection was made based on geographical spread, to ensure that initiatives from different regions in the Global South were included.

The ten cases were studied through semi-structured informant interviews with leaders from each initiative, complemented by a desktop review of project documentation, such as the initiative's artworks, social media, website, campaign materials, news articles and funding applications. The guiding questions used for the interviews are provided in Appendix 1. Together, the outcomes of the case studies are used to understand how artists, communities and movements can harness the power of art to advocate for climate justice advocacy, understand the challenges that these initiatives face in their use of art advocacy, and learn how art can mobilise and strengthen the climate justice movement.

A photograph of an industrial facility, likely a refinery or chemical plant, with several tall smokestacks. One stack in the foreground is emitting a very thick, dark plume of smoke that rises into the sky. The sky is hazy and has a warm, orange-brown tint, suggesting either sunrise or sunset. The overall scene conveys a sense of industrial activity and environmental impact.

# 3

## Case studies

To illustrate how *in, through* and *with* art, local and global movements can advocate for climate justice, this section outlines ten case studies of activism initiatives in the Global South.

## Engaging in art

### 3.1 Art Shapers (Several countries, Latin America)

How can you use art to make a tangible impact on communities and ecosystems impacted by climate change and its related processes of deforestation and environmental degradation? This is a question that drives the activities of Art Shapers, a non-for-profit association that, as the name suggests, seeks to shape the world through art.

Art Shapers was brought into life by founder Lucía Dalenz Larieto in 2018, who has now formed a small team of five volunteers, all from Latin America, to promote sustainable futures through artistic creation. In its initial phase, Art Shapers focused on connecting emerging artists around the world to connect to international markets, particularly focusing on women and marginalised groups.<sup>12</sup> But the work of Art Shapers became radically disrupted by the pandemic unleashed by COVID-19 in 2020. Taking into account that the pandemic is the product of the bad relationship that human beings have with nature and coupled with the centrality that culture and art have acquired in the current scenario, the Art Shapers team decided to launch fully into contributing solutions to the climate crisis.<sup>13</sup>

Senior project manager Juan Diego Martínez Descans, who has been working together with founder Lucía since 2020, describes how the Art Shapers team felt compelled to renew their focus:

*"We decided that we wanted to use the huge power of art to give a twist on the climate change debate. Because one of the things that we were deeply concerned about is that there are a lot of people who have been speaking about this and have had very loud arguments for very long decades. So we knew the speech was not the problem. The problem was the action, and action, first of all, that creates opportunities."*

*"We knew the speech was not the problem. The problem was the action, and action, first of all, creates opportunities."*

Juan Diego Martínez Descans, Project Manager Art Shapers



José Luis Cote Joven Jiw sobre grabado colonial. Digital Giclée printing on cotton paper, as published in Art Shapers: The green behind us: Disrupting through art eBook.

### 3.1.1 Disrupting through art

To create these opportunities, Art Shapers decided to take an innovative approach, unlike any of the work they had done previously. Working together with communities, artists and cultural centres across Latin America, Art Shapers asked artists to submit their work and tell their stories. But instead of asking for a specific type of topic or angle, Lucía and Juan decided to turn the editorial process upside down and let artists decide what message they wanted to send about the climate crisis. The only requirements were that all participants should be a national of a Latin American country and relate their work to an event, story or denunciation related to climate change in Latin America. In addition to photos or visual materials of the artworks, Art Shapers asked artists to give an account of the meaning of the image and the artist's intention in creating it.<sup>14</sup>

Despite limited resources, the response was overwhelming: Art Shapers received 75 submissions by 49 artists from 13 countries in Latin America. In the end, 45 artworks of 30 artists were selected, including a wide range of visual arts from sculptures, photography, paintings, recycled art, and digital art, to pictures of performance art. These different works are compiled into an (e)book called 'The green behind us: Disrupting through art', which portrays the loss of natural wealth and beauty due to climate change.

*"With art, you don't need to learn how to get affected by it. This way of communication is much more powerful than writing, because you can have all the perceptions and senses. You don't learn how to do that. It's already incorporated in you."*

Juan Diego Martínez Descans, Project Manager Art Shapers

But this book is not only intended to send a message but to put that message into action. For this reason, Art Shapers is commercialising the book to generate income, which will be invested in environmental defence initiatives in the Colombian Amazon. The focus on defending the Amazon was made not only because its collapse can fundamentally disturb the earth's climate due to global climate change, but also because of the meaning of the Amazonian natural space for those communities most impacted by climate change. Project manager Juan describes this as a two-fold objective: to give space to the different narratives from communities across Latin America on a global platform and to work with those same local communities to help realise these new dynamics to have tangible impacts on the natural environment.

### 3.1.2 The power of art for climate justice

Art Shapers seeks to approach climate change from a social justice angle, which Juan describes in simple terms: *"Climate justice means that the ones who have more responsibility on what is happening, address those responsibilities, and the ones who are more vulnerable, get protection from what is happening. And that we understand that we are just one more species in the arrow of time."*

The choice to use artworks to send this message and generate funds for actions on the ground is not incidental but strongly driven by the fundamental belief in the power of art. One of these unique strengths of art is to overcome the limitations of speech, particularly in the climate change debate that is entangled with difficult words, language barriers and the need to understand complex natural processes. But, according to Juan, *"with art, you don't need to learn how to get affected by it. This way of communication is much more powerful than writing because you can have all the perceptions and senses. You don't learn how to do that. It's already incorporated in you."*

Overcoming these barriers of written or spoken language, images that move away from the science-fiction type narratives that we have become accustomed to seeing in mainstream media can also open our panorama to new solutions. In this, Art Shapers sees arts like shippers, sailing us into new ports by making holes in the horizon that we see.





Art Shapers: The green behind us: Disrupting through art (image for reference)

### 3.1.3 Overcoming challenges

Art Shapers has been driven by love for the planet and love for art. But this is also by necessity, as the lack of access to funding continues to pose a major hurdle. Art Shapers fully runs on the volunteer work of the small team, and neither team members nor the artists are paid for their contributions due to the severe financial constraints. Because Art Shapers is purpose-driven, lack of funding is not stopping them, but it does place limitations. According to Juan, the major problem with a lack of funding is that it significantly slows down the process. Everyone in the team still needs to work full-time aside from Art Shapers to get by, which also limits the time they can dedicate to the project. It also meant that they could not offer compensation or prize to the participating artists.

Another challenge for Art Shapers was the need to rely on technology to collect artworks for the book. Because of travel restrictions caused by COVID-19 and the limitations in financial and human resources to visit communities in person, the call for submissions was coordinated online with the support of local art centres, universities, schools, and (social) media. But this also means that the most marginalised voices were probably not reached.

At the same time, participating in activism is also a dangerous feat for these marginalised communities. Art Shapers does not underestimate the real risks that activists face in Latin America, where protecting the environment can cost lives. This understanding is particularly important for the Amazon defence projects that Art Shapers seeks to support with the proceeds of the book. This is also the reason why Art Shapers will initially focus on the Colombian Amazon, where Juan was born and raised and understands the political context. In addition, Art Shapers focuses on working with local partners as well as getting support from the 'big fish' in the region and globally. While this does not guarantee safety directly, Juan recognises that these connections can help the project gain support on security, while also providing visibility if something were to happen.

While these limitations are significant, Art Shapers does not see this as completely debilitating. Juan strongly emphasises the need for creativity and resourcefulness. With all its limitations, the ability to do an online call for submissions and to release the book as an eBook also has the positive impact of limiting its ecological footprint while reaching a wide audience. Art Shapers recognises these compromises as inevitable and emphasise that rather than an ideal but unfeasible project, they believe in pursuing an imperfect but doable project that allows for a real impact and the continuation of Art Shapers' work.





José Luis Cote: Sabedor Botánico/ Paye Tucano Oriental. Oil over Carl Linnée's drawings, as published in Art Shapers: The green behind us: Disrupting through art eBook.

### 3.1.4 The way forward

For Art Shapers, publishing the eBook is just a first step. The association seeks to build connections not only within Latin America but also between the region and the international community. Juan recognises that there is a lot to be done. In describing Art Shapers' vision for the future, he emphasises the need to create space for a plurality of realities.

*"Our vision of the future is a future where different worlds can exist. The most common way of seeing the future is one world that we all fit into. But it means that there is only one world, yet there are plenty of worlds in this reality, and how you face that reality. What we are hoping to find through art is different visions of the future and the possible futures we can build. [...] If you change that panorama, you will see things differently."*

This vision of plurality, where there is space for different narratives and solutions from the Global South based on other visions of the future, is at the very core of Art Shapers' beliefs. This is an understanding that Art Shapers also aims to share with other organisations, artists, policy makers and communities. When asked what advice Art Shapers would offer to other initiatives, it is to start local: *"Globally, there is so much going on, but at the local level we can actually achieve something. Think local and grow global."*

### 3.2 The Agam Agenda (The Philippines and the Global South)

*When will the winter feel like itself again?* asks Prateebha Tuladhar, a journalist, teacher, and communication worker based in Kathmandu. Her poem is displayed alongside the works of others on *When is Now*, a creative collaboration of poets, scientists, visual artists, and emerging leaders, calling for stronger climate action. This initiative is mobilised by the Agam Agenda, together with Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), and the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities. *When is Now* is the most recent initiative supported by the Agam Agenda.

#### 3.2.1 Imagery and art instead of jargon and statistics

The Agam Agenda is a project by the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities (ICSC), a Manila-based low-carbon policy think tank and NGO that believes that the climate crisis cannot be tackled through policy and science alone. ICSC thinks that art and humanities are vital in reimagining the conversations on climate, consciousness, and ideas of development. “Agam is a Filipino or Tagalog word used to refer to the ability to think and it also stands for memory,” says Padma Perez, Agam Agenda’s chief strategist, “but in its current usage, Filipinos usually say agam-agam to reflect a sense of foreboding in the face of uncertainty.”

The Agam Agenda evolved over the years from a photography exhibition called *Visage*, organised by ICSC in 2012. *Visage* was opened in the halls of the Philippine Senate and consisted of portraits of survivors of climate change around the archipelago. Choosing the Senate halls for this exhibition was no innocent decision, but a successful attempt to move senators to pass and enact the first national climate finance mechanism dedicated to supporting local climate adaptation plans in the Philippines and South-East Asia, the People’s Survival Fund.

The idea behind *Visage* was to bolster the power of imagery and art to compel action where jargon and statistics usually add to what decision-makers consider unsentimental sidenotes to the congressional debates. And to test the power of imagery, some of the photographs used for the exhibition were sent out to poets, journalists, artists, novelists, scientists, and anthropologists in the Philippines. The recipients of these photographs were asked to write a response to the images for inclusion in a book on climate change. They were also asked not to use a number of words in their response, including ‘climate change’ and ‘global warming’. This resulted in a 2014 anthology of 26 images paired with 24 narratives in verse and prose called *Agam: Filipino Narratives on Uncertainty and Climate Change*.

*It is already late, you said, Pasa*

*But it rained so hard last night,*

*I could almost see the wind—*

*A sheet flailing down in October to remind us of the monsoon.*

*It’s too late for the monsoon, you said, Pasa.*

*But the rain drove sink holes deep, behind the house.*

*And when the sun finally came out,*

*it burnt our skin, razing the months all the way back to May.*

*It’s too hot for winter, you said, Pasa.*

*And you said aloud: When will winter feel like itself again?*

*We sat by the banks of Hijya, watching the cattails wilt.*

Prateebha Tuladhar

### 3.2.2 A climate agenda

*Agam: Filipino Narratives* was a milestone for an incipient Agam Agenda. According to Maria Faciolince, Agam Agenda's Fellow for Culture and Latin America & the Caribbean, *"it was that book, 'Agam: Filipino Narratives' that really solidified our group, the value of stories, and the arts in climate advocacy, we've carried that name through just for us to be able to hold on to where it all started, and, and where we're rooted."*

But it wasn't until 2019 that the Agam Agenda adopted its name. That year, ICSC launched a collaboration with 350.org Philippines and the Contastino Foundation called *Alas ng Bayan*. This project aimed at introducing history and feminism to the climate conversation, especially amongst youth. *Alas ng Bayan* is an exhibit composed of five paintings of remarkable Filipinas who resisted national oppression, social justice, and false gender normatives at different junctures of Philippine history: Gregoria "Oriang" de Jesus, Apolonia Catra, Remedios "Kunmander Liwayway" Gomez-Paraiso, Lorena Barros, and Gloria Capitan. Apart from the body of information, lectures, and other activities organised in the context of *Alas ng Bayan*, the initiative was designed to reach out to and mobilise sectors not normally active in the climate debate.<sup>15</sup>

The success was such that after *Alas ng Bayan*, Agam *"grew into an agenda when in the course of our planning different activities and different projects, we found ourselves seeing more and more that our agenda is to bring the humanities into climate discourse to bring the arts into climate discourse. And we just found ourselves speaking about it more and more as an agenda that we had or that we wanted to assert. So that's where it was, I think late 2019 or early 2020, that we finally articulated it as, yes, this is the Agam Agenda"*, says Maria Faciolince.

#### Box 1. Agam's agenda

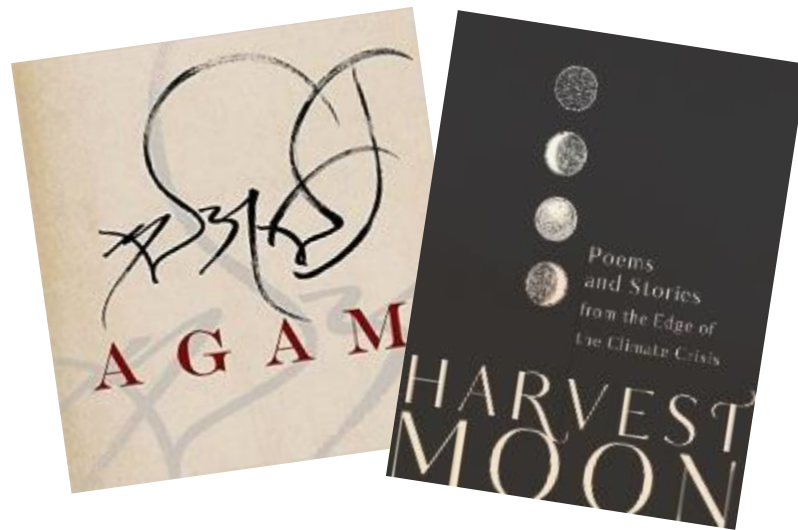
1. **Widen the story-telling circle around the climate crisis** and make room for more voices and forms of expression in climate discourse.
2. **Create and share stories** that will have an impact on how uncertainty and the climate crisis are understood, discussed, and attended to as part of the daily experience of diverse communities.
3. **Produce engaging content and materials** that teachers, students, and campaigners can wield as tools for discussion and debate in various settings.
4. **Reduce and reject dependence on jargon** as a vehicle for communicating climate change and its impacts.
5. **Enable a more robust sense of agency and citizenship** in the humanities and in scientific communities by exploring and testing the integration of other disciplines into the climate debate, covering for instance the interface between national history and the geologic, biological and carbon past.
6. **Harness the regenerative power** of the humanities, art, and imagination as we dream up and work towards kinder, equitable futures.

Source: Agam Agenda (n.d.), "Our Agenda", online: <https://agamagenda.com/agam-agenda-who-we-are/>, viewed in April 2022.

### 3.2.3 An octopus named Octavia

If well, the Agam Agenda is an established project, it is still an ongoing process of growth where its members figure out how they want to approach things and especially explore the question of whose voice to amplify. This question is reflected in a manifesto that is represented by an octopus named Octavia. According to Maria: *"the idea is that there are several tentacles, always. And these tentacles cross. And they help each other and they amplify each other. So it's always like, thinking of our work as a multi-tentacled being."*

These tentacles are reflected in Agam's multi-pronged activities which currently include a podcast about gender and the climate crisis, called *Agam the Climate Podcast*, launched in 2021, and *Harvest Moon*, an anthology similar to *Agam: Filipino Narratives*, but covering the entire globe. *Harvest Moon* is composed of more than 30 images and over 30 poems, stories, and essays about the climate crisis from writers, photographers, and artists from 24 countries and 11 languages.<sup>16</sup>



*Agam: Filipino Narratives on Uncertainty and Climate Change* (2014) and *Harvest Moon* (2022)

The Agam Agenda also regularly organises convergences, which are online conversations tackling issues that are the cause or effect of the climate crisis. One of those such convergences was on extractivism. *"We tackled extractivism by inviting an artist who made map inversions and demonstrated through their work in a really poetic way, how we can reverse the view and place mining maps over Paris or London, for example. These were maps that mining companies actually use to overlay grids over spaces that are identified for mining and juxtapose those over the maps of London or Paris"*, says Padma. *"We also brought to the conversation, an artist here in the Philippines, an indigenous artist called Keegan, who took different weighing scales and using GPS and all that technology, he took soil samples from rice terraces that were going to be torn down and replaced by a road in his hometown. So, he installed them in an exhibit as a sort of statement on how we weigh the value of soil."*





Mural created by Tamarra with collaborator Bodhi IA at Kidrosono Stadium, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Lines used in the mural are from native nostalgia, a prelude to the now by Malebo Sephodi from South Africa. Photo: When is Now

### 3.2.4 Reaching out across borders

According to Padma, *“the convergences have underscored the need to get people to collaborate after they've learned from each other and exchanged views and ideas.”* To enact this realisation, the Agam Agenda has begun to bring experts together from different walks of life to share their perspectives and engage in a conversation. *“For an in-person convergence we had on eco-literacy, we invited two teachers and conservation workers to come together and share poetry to talk about what it means to be eco-literate. This we did as part of the Philippine bird festival. So, it was a gathering of really serious and also just beginning bird watchers and we invited a writer Marie Linda Bobby who's a poet and a novelist, and she talked about how other non-human species are often missing from the stories that we tell and the stories that we write. So in that convergence, the conversation was about shifting our ways of telling stories to include other species and in that instance, it was on birds.”* These convergences are not only occasions for people to talk across their disciplines, or *“reach out across borders”*, as Padma says, but also collaborations emerge from those conversations.

And that kind of reaching out across borders, whether it is borders of place, nation, or disciplinary borders, is very much what the Agam Agenda is doing right now with *When is Now*, an initiative in which poets and storytellers around the world respond to each other's words with questions and verse. These linked poems and an accompanying series of murals reflect on people's lived experiences of the climate crisis and national and regional demands for more ambitious, urgent climate action.<sup>17</sup>

Padma says that *“everyone who's commissioned [a piece of work] is being compensated.”* And Agam Agenda has allocated a budget for each of the poems, or seeds, as they call them. *“We also have a budget for the murals, for all the materials and for everything.”* And people who are just browsing Agam's Instagram account and feel like they want to respond to one of the poems there can do so freely. *“We see people showing their will to participate and to be counted. And, to be part.”*

### 3.2.5 The difficulty of trying to include marginalised voices

One of the main challenges faced by the Agam Agenda, especially in the context of *When is Now*, is to make sure to include marginalised voices. According to Padma: *"we have been able to invite collaborators who are facing quite difficult challenges and situations to participate through commissioned poetry or commissioned art."* This is not always an easy feat, but the Agam Agenda team is working on making sure that the effort to include marginalised communities and to amplify their voices is constant and does not get lost. Another challenge is to fight the notion that art is something to put in galleries or that it is something produced by artists exclusively, who get to show their work in galleries. *"So we're also treading carefully that very thin line between you know, being exclusive or about what is art or what is poetry. And making it something that can really galvanise action and make people feel included and heard. So it's a constant process of checking ourselves and reaching out and making sure we're actively doing that, reaching out."*

**A challenge is to fight the notion that art is something to put in galleries or produced by artists exclusively, and to make it "something that can really galvanise action and make people feel included and heard."**

*Padma Perez, Agam Agenda's chief strategist*

The Agam Agenda's baseline is working with climate-vulnerable countries. *"Like the Marshall Islands,"* says María, *"that is our baseline, we're not reaching out to people in, for example, maybe in the Global North, and in Europe and North America. That's not where our networks are, either, which is also very difficult."* While Agam Agenda acknowledges the difficulty for visibility of not having an audience in the Global North, they lay a lot of value on their focus on climate-vulnerable countries and frontline communities. *"But of course, artists within that space can hold different levels of power, too. So being aware of that, we are also trying to include voices that are, let's say bigger, or have more global resonance, people that have an audience that have a profile, and next to people who don't like local community members, who are also poets. We want to stand side by side. So almost like strategically, also having a mixture of big voices and less known voices in the same space."*





A family posed at the plastic museum. Source: Ecoton

### 3.3 Ecoton (Indonesia)

Life in Indonesia is already tough enough. Messages about climate change should be delivered with happiness and art plays a major role in that. That is the clear message of Prigi Arisandi, one of the founders and director of Ecoton, Ecological Observation and Wetlands Conservation, in East Java, Indonesia. *"In developing countries, life is difficult. Our life is about survival, but also about happiness. Art is to make people to happy and to entertain them. We want to deliver our message with happiness."*

Ecoton was established in 1996 as a Biology Study Program Wetland Conservation Group, as both Arisandi and his wife Daru Setyorini are trained biologists. They started with a project to study how well-protected mangroves can protect river communities. Out of huge concern about environmental problems in East Java, especially river pollution, they expanded their work to industrial pollution.

The two largest rivers on the island are the Solo and the Brantas, both a source for irrigation and food, for the millions of people living around the rivers, but also for the countless paper mills. Both water sources have been greatly affected by, amongst others, domestic and industrial waste, including plastics. Plastic pollution is not only endangering the rivers, but also the oceans, as Indonesia is one of the top countries leaking waste into the ocean. This is partly due to a lack of a waste collection system.

Ecoton aims to contribute to sustainable biodiversity conservation by promoting equitable and participatory river ecosystem and wetlands management. They engage communities and use the courts for better waste regulation. *"And we do this through a combination of science and art,"* explains Arisandi.

Evidence-based educational programs are set up to educate a wider audience about the dangers of polluted rivers in Indonesia. Ecoton specifically targets young people and schools and wants them to be part of environmental solutions. But they also mobilise farmers, women, students and *"pollution victims."* The organisation also encourages policy changes for better management of river ecosystems. They started several lawsuits against the government, among which the East-Java governor, and plastic producers and factories. The organisation employs eleven staff and several interns.

### 3.3.1 The plastic museum

With the support of the Actie Fonds, Ecoton is beginning to use art for their campaigning, in particular installations and documentaries. They have been organising different manifestations. One of the eye-catchers is the Plastic Museum, a ten-meter-long hallway filled with thousands of used plastic bottles, which were hung in nets.

The museum was supposed to educate the public on how rivers are polluted with plastic, and about the dangers of plastic waste, single-use plastic, and microplastics. At the end of the tour, people were asked to write down their hope for the future. The museum targeted the public, motivating people to stop using single-use plastics. But it also attracted local government officials and the media. One of the impacts was, according to Arisandi, that the government made a regulation about plastic. In the same area, a dead tree, found by volunteers during a river clean up, was wrapped in plastic waste.

Ecoton also organises 'theatrical actions' during demonstrations. One of those actions was organised in April 2021, when several residents from the Gerakan Peduli Lingkungan (GPL), Nguter sub-district, Sukoharjo complained about alleged river pollution by a company (PT. Rayon Utama Makmur, or PT.RUM)) that channelled liquid waste directly into the Bengawan Solo River.

The theatre play accompanied an action at the Balai Besar Wilayah Sungai (BBWS) Bengawan Solo, a government entity, responsible for the management of water sources. It was carried out during ten action periods. Photos of rivers and rocks affected by PT RUM's liquid waste were shown, as well as samples of water and land affected by PT RUM's liquid waste. The theatrical action was carried out as a form of community annoyance over PT RUM's liquid waste polluting and emptying the small river around the community's residence. It called for the BBWS to take responsibility to maintain the river, and to not be silent on the pollution by the company.

Ecoton also organises so-called expeditions. *"We go around Indonesia and do research in and around the rivers. We take samples and measure levels of and airing the message on YouTube. Take samples at a few points of the rivers, measure for example acidity levels. We bring these samples to our own laboratory in our office. We have a PhD to support us with this."*

The organisation mobilises people to join these expeditions, to help collect these samples. It's a form of participatory research and a backbone of the organisation's work. *"We want to help the people to become a hero, from the position of a victim, by informing and engaging them."*

Ecoton uses these sources for their campaigns. These organise demonstrations, send letters to the relevant government and use social media to air their messages, for example YouTube or documentaries. *"Many people have a handphone now and they are googling on the internet. Our works also attract journalists, as we believe in media as an important pillar of democracy."*





Prigi Arisandi featuring in the documentary REVOLUSI POPOK - Ekspedisi 3 Sungai #01. Online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8yxaou55Uo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8yxaou55Uo)

### 3.3.2 From a victim to a hero

Ecoton mobilises the people in its campaigns, to join them in these expeditions. But people have also been engaged in several court cases. They involved for example around forty women in one lawsuit. Ecoton trained this “river defender women’s group” in understanding the laws that are supposed to protect people against pollution but also trained them to speak out in public. They organised a sailing trip on the river to identify and count dump sites.

*“The first thing is to entertain people, to joke and make them smile”, says Arisandi. “And art is a very effective medium,” says Arisandi. “Art is translating the message to a broader audience, as these topics are difficult to understand. We try to translate it to the grassroots. Our language is more acceptable.”*

*“I believe the visuals, the images, can make people more aware about environmental issues and climate justice and let them take care. Art is attractive and has more effect than a seminar or focus group discussions. People are not familiar with that and find it difficult to understand, even the title of a seminar is already hard for them. We don’t want to break hearts, that’s why we do our work with happiness. We refuse complex theories, that would be difficult for the people.”*



Still from the documentary REVOLUSI POPOK - Ekspedisi 3 Sungai #01. Online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_8yxaou55Uo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8yxaou55Uo)

### 3.3.3 Seek the momentum

The momentum is key for these messages, says Arisandi. *"You must know the culture, but also know the right time and period is most feasible for, for example, women to take part, but also for government officials to tell your message. Don't speak about human rights when we are in the dry season, when people have no money."*

### 3.3.4 A tiny stone

Ecoton encounters a few challenges in its work. Whereas the work is growing, the organisation is still small, *"compared to the producer campaigns and advertisements promoting single-use plastics"*, says Arisandi in an interview. It is difficult to find people to enjoy working on this topic. Ecoton lacks the funds and people to do the work. And art is expensive as well.

That is why he does not want to talk about impact. *"We are not talking about the impact. Environmental change needs a long time, and our program is always limited. It is never enough. We cannot solve it, as the problem is big, and we are only a tiny stone. But small is beautiful."*

At the same time, they have a high number of views of their documentaries. And their actions attract not only people but also the media and have resulted in some government initiatives including river clean-up actions.

*"Art is attractive and has more effect than a seminar or focus group discussions."*

Prigi Arisandi, Director Ecoton

## Engagement with art

### 3.4 African Crossroads (Pan African)

*“Art advocacy speaks to everyone, stays longer, and engages people. Artists wake up society.”*

Samantha Nengomasha, Project Manager of Hivos Resource of Open Minds Project, and former Community Manager for African Crossroads, is very clear and enthusiastic about the power of art. *“We want to fuel the conversation, we want people to discuss, to speak about how to bring change, to attract their attention. If I just tell you not to throw away food, because people are going hungry, this is not so strong as when you see or listen to the story of somebody really affected by it. If you see an issue dramatised, and how people are affected by that, that stays with you.”*

African Crossroads, created with the intention to become a ‘flagship community’ within Hivos by the Resource of Open Minds and Green Works projects, is a continental program that aims to contribute to a new narrative and public debate, that results in dissent. *“African Crossroads was meant to be an annual gathering, for people to convene together, discuss and innovate, capitalising on technology and the digital revolution.”* But also to capacitate the partners, to grow and reach wider audiences, she adds. Nengomasha joined African Crossroads during the pandemic when the organisation was discussing how to construct a critical narrative from a distance.

African Crossroads brings together *“innovative thinkers, makers, content creators, creatives, and entrepreneurs who want to create and share that knowledge.”*

*“The objective is to create awareness by breaking down what is climate justice, identifying who are the actors involved, and what role everyone can play in fighting climate change and reducing the impact”,* adds Boniface Mwalii, who led the coordination of the community and program last year. Mwalii has a background in media and arts. *“The larger global community has a lack of understanding about the topic. African Crossroads tried to break it down with practical references, what it means to the African context.”*

#### 3.4.1 High-level participants

Mwalii: *“Art is a universal language which helps people to understand the topic, based on their own realities. Most climate summits with high-level participants don’t involve the average person, like the farmer who is facing the effects of climate change. He has no understanding of the discussion and does not know how to adapt. Art simplifies that message through illustrations, music, theatre, film, poetry, etc. It brings the message home.”*

The African Crossroads network also links artists, academics, technologists, and entrepreneurs which creates a dynamic pool for the exchange of knowledge and expertise, adds Mwalii. *“This facilitates the transfer of ideas and experiences to generate practical solutions drawing from a broad understanding of the subject.”*

When considering artists to participate, the organisation employs a few criteria: the nature of the message, the mode of dissemination and available resources, as well as the artists' existing body of work and previous experience.

Marginalised communities, including women and children, are integrated into the process, Mwalii says. *“We invite for example women, to share how they have understood climate justice, and what it means to them. These people can be brought into the process of creating arts, enabling them to contribute. They are not outside this problem.”*

Some productions are targeting children, hoping to engage them. *“Producers from Togo and Tunisia made a video production about the ocean, with a simplified message, shot underwater. It was played in a room where the children were playing with materials. The video inspired them to make crafts. The content thus becomes a learning aid”,* says Mwalii.

*“Climate summits with high level participants don’t involve the average person, for example the farmer who is facing the effects of climate change. He has no understanding of the discussion, does not know how to adapt. Art simplifies that message. It brings the message home.”*

Boniface Mwalii, Program Coordinator African Crossroads

Another video was produced by a group of LGBTers. *“It not only empowers them to have a voice. Because they are part of the process, the message will be shared in their communities too.”*

The art forms experimented with among the African Crossroads community are many and cater for these different groups targeted. Nengomasha: *“We produce podcasts, documentary stories, feature films, platform discussions, music, contemporary dance, and online installations among other things.”* There is no preferred form of art, she says. *“Different people listen to different things. But in terms of production, some are more costly.”*

The wide variety of art forms provides many opportunities to reach out to and engage different people. In some cultures, music is forbidden, says Mwalii, *“but poetry is not.”*

African Crossroads organised its community into different councils on, for example, communication, inclusivity, opportunities, and technology, bringing together individuals with specific practical knowledge. Mwalii: *“Participants worked closely with hub spaces in their respective localities which enabled them to identify and develop projects and solutions that were relevant to their local needs and understanding.”* The organisation also wrote a manifesto, *“to gather the views into a policy, which can be adopted by the community and shared with other stakeholders in the climate justice space.”* This was built on the declarations arrived at in previous African Crossroads gatherings. The manifesto was shared with HIVOS representatives for presentation at the COP26 summit, giving a voice to African artists, scholars, and entrepreneurs.

### 3.4.2 Visible and accessible

Art is a very accessible tool, Nengomasha says. *“Think of social media platforms. On socials it can reach people who are not looking for it. You can start very simple and end up like the Black Lives Matter movement. Arts are more visible. On the other hand, people easily participate because they have the means. You can ask people to go and stand outside, take a picture of their garden or something like that. This is different from bringing them into a conference.”*

*“With art, there is less censorship, compared to other media”,* she notes. *“As an artist, you can retain your ownership right; nobody will run with your idea. You are more independent.”*

Art brings imagination into reality, says Mwalii. *“We try to integrate indigenous knowledge, which is important in climate change and climate justice conservation.”* Some old practices, for example, how people used to preserve trees, how they used to build environmentally friendly houses or performed rain dances as was performed by Dawit Seto during an African Crossroads event, have been forgotten, but can contribute to the thinking of new solutions. *“Equally, art provides a sensory understanding of emerging challenges as demonstrated through the ‘Cookie Calls’ session which broke down the impact of digital cookies through an immersive culinary presentation”,* says Mwalii.



As no pictures exist, art can become a new tool to bring these practices to life. With cartoons or other forms of animations. Or also with video productions. *"In many parts of Africa, people all use their phones to get information. We can produce audio-visual productions, documentaries, and animations. We can also make hybrid productions, mixing animation with video interviews. These tools help to speak about subjects. It is stimulating, engaging, very fast and therefore powerful."*

In Tanzania, artists collected waste metals and welded these into new sculptures.

Others collected flip-flops from the beach and made something from them. *"All beautiful art pieces"*, says Mwalii. *"By reusing waste to make something purposeful, that can have a profound message. The piece makes a statement."*

*These materials naturally lend themselves as advocacy resources for the vital goal of*

*creating awareness and inspiring action among communities, mass media and decision-makers to contain and reverse the effects of climate change.*

*"Sometimes we have to deal with too much content, then we spent many hours and resources to watch the materials. We are then risking missing out on critical information."*

Samantha Nengomasha, Coordinator African Crossroads

### 3.4.3 Too much content

*"There is no better way to communicate climate justice than through art"*, Nengomasha says. But there are challenges as well. *"Sometimes we have to deal with too much content, then we spent many hours and resources to watch the materials. We are then risking missing out on critical information. But we have a lot of human resources to deal with this job."*

Another challenge is how to put all productions together and disseminate them to other platforms, she adds.

The use of technology as the primary means of engagement for the African Crossroads community amidst the Covid-19 pandemic also presented challenges, says Mwalii. *"While it serves as a useful avenue for community engagement and a vital resource for content creators, it calls for participants to have a degree of technical knowledge as well as access to technical resources like smartphones, computers and internet connectivity which inevitably works in favour of some over others. Development of alternative channels, such as the proposed African Crossroads radio program and integration of physical activities through the cross-continental hub network could potentially address such gaps."*

Mwalii noted that some art forms consume a lot of time and effort. *"For example, theatre is generally embraced in both rural and urban communities. People love storytelling. They are creating and watching content on their smartphones, so art has a lot of potential in these societies. But good productions take a lot of time, effort, logistics and planning. It is all very demanding."*



Wangari Maathai mural which was made from flip flops collected from the ocean and provided by Ocean Sole.  
The mural was done by the Mfalme Productions team, at Karen Village in Nairobi, Kenya.



### 3.5 Zambia Climate Change Network: Climate Change, Environment, and Agroecology Art Exhibition (Zambia)

Children's drawings that impact policymakers. It may sound unrealistic, but the Zambia Climate Change Network (ZCCN) shows that art, whether made by professional artists or children in schools, can bring about much-needed changes in governments' to respond to climate change.

ZCCN is a membership-based organisation that aims to mobilise civil society organizations and individuals advancing similar agendas on climate change-related issues to create a platform for affirmative action. It does so by coordinating stakeholder engagement on climate change and supporting members' advocacy, lobbying, and campaigning efforts to promote sustainable measures for addressing climate change impacts in Zambia, Africa, and globally through increased environmental stewardship and green development.<sup>18</sup>

For several years, ZCCN has started using art as a tool for advocacy, inclusion, and information dissemination. One of ZCCN's art initiatives is the Climate Change, Environment, and Agroecology Art Exhibition, which was hosted in December 2021 in partnership with WWF, AFSA and Maluwa Foundation under the Voices for Climate Action project. The exhibition was held at the Government Complex in Lusaka and was meant to sensitise and tell stories of the impacts that climate change has had on food systems in the farming communities and the general public. Involved in the exhibition were school-going children, who presented drawings and paintings that called on the public to take a lead in the fight against the impacts of climate change.



Source: ZCCN (2022, January 19), "Facebook Page: Zambia Climate Change Network", online: <https://www.facebook.com/zccnzambia.org/photos/pcb.1099884097464467/1099879307464946/>, viewed in March 2022.

### 3.5.1 Art to sustain conversations

Simon Mwamba, Lead-Partnership and Advocacy Program Officer at ZCCN, explained that the importance of art in communication is deeply rooted in African culture, and ZCCN understood art is a means of spreading climate change awareness and advocating for climate justice. Whether this art is in the form of music, poetry, paintings, cartoons or performance, art can tell different stories that otherwise are not included in the debates.

This includes children, who have too often been left out of the conversation even though they will be impacted the longest by climate change. This is also important for the sustainability of the movement since children are the future and will need to bear this responsibility in the years to come. Simon explains this by the analogy of a tree, where the older generation may not feel as impacted: *"If I taught someone to plant a tree today, I can be challenged because the person will tell me: 'By the time the tree is bearing fruits, I will not be there anymore.'"* This is different for children and young people, who will see the tree grow and eat its fruits.

In this context, art is the bridge to facilitate conversations between generations. In the Climate Change, Environment, and Agroecology Art Exhibition, the children who made the artworks were not guided in what they should make. Instead, discussions were facilitated to teach children about climate change, and afterwards, they were asked to create a drawing. At the exhibition, they asked all artists to be present and explain the vision behind their work. *"We had to make sure that those that produced the artworks were the ones that were interacting with the audience that came to the exhibition because they understood their own message better than we did as technocrats."*

Art is the bridge to facilitate conversations between generations, that are differently impacted by climate change.

The idea of letting children present their vision was also a strategy to start conversations. According to Simon, *"with using arts, then the children would be able to engage not only at school but also engage with their parents, as well as engage with the communities. [...] It's about doing artworks that start the conversation at different levels."*

### 3.5.2 Engaging policymakers

Influencing policy through advocacy and lobbying is one of the most important pillars of the work of ZCCN and its members. ZCCN believes that art is one of the ways through which the public can connect to policymakers. This is the reason why the artworks made by artists and children on climate change and agroecology were brought to the Government Complex in Lusaka. In this way, parliamentarians were able to see the artworks and engage with the artists as they entered the parliament building.

The response of policymakers has been mostly positive and has even helped to start conversations with parliamentarians that were not active on climate change, but who came to the art exhibition. This ranges from parliamentarians working on natural resources, which can use the artwork to express the necessity of their work, to the Ministry of Education needing to develop climate change curricula for schools by integrating artworks into learning materials or the Ministry of Tourism seeing the potential of climate change art in promoting responsible travel while protecting ecosystems. But also policymakers in the arts and culture sector have been impacted, who are starting to realise the potential for arts to play a bigger role in climate change policymaking.

According to Simon, art has the unique potential to catch the attention of policymakers, *"because artists have a better way of communicating than all of us who are climate change experts, advocates, and activists. Artists approach issues in a very unique way."*



Source: ZCCN (2022, January 19), "Facebook Page: Zambia Climate Change Network", online: <https://www.facebook.com/zccnzambia.org/photos/pcb.1099884097464467/1099879307464946/>, viewed in March 2022.

### 3.5.3 Overcoming challenges

The use of art by ZCCN does not come without challenges. A major constraint identified by Simon includes financial limitations. It is often not possible for the network to pay artists, and instead, they have to look for people who want to participate out of passion and personal conviction. This has been a major learning curve for ZCCN, which had to learn how to identify those champions without direct financial rewards, while finding ways to support their livelihoods, for example by supporting their access to the international market for their work. This is also crucial for the long-term sustainability of these initiatives.

The lack of funding also means that the relationship between climate justice organisations and artists needs to be strongly built on trust. According to ZCCN, building trust and confidence is a process that takes time and must rely on a mutual understanding of the issues at hand. But building this trust is challenging, particularly at the start of a new initiative, where people may not believe in the concept yet. Finding those first champions that trust your idea even if there is no proof of concept yet, but relying on trust, is a major challenge. *"It's when people see some positive strides have been scored, that people would say 'Oh, so this can work'. So it's about that challenge of having the opportunity to implement your new initiative."*

Another challenge lies in the capacity building of artists, children, and participants in ZCCN's art projects, without imposing ideas or telling them what to make. At least a basic understanding of climate change and related terminology is important, but ZCCN had to learn to step back to not influence the messages that artists and children put into their work. Simon explains: *"One of the key things that we did was to hold a small meeting for artists and tell them what climate change was, what agroecology was, what social accountability means for climate justice so that they have the basics. And then you leave it up to them to use their art skills, to bring out the message in a different form. I think there is that challenge of us becoming facilitators, and not imposing our ideas on them. We had to learn that and to ensure that, for instance, in terms of what needs to be done, you leave it out to them to think through."*

#### 3.5.4 Keep the conversation going

For ZCCN, these challenges are simply hurdles to overcome, but do not lessen the strength of art to start and sustain conversations. Through these conversations, art can bridge divides between generations, but also between urban and rural communities, between the public and policymakers, and between scientists and artists. In these conversations between people from opposing backgrounds and understandings, art forms the bridge to overcome divides and reach different people. Simon sees this as a crucial strategy to reach new audiences, *“because, frankly, speaking, there are times when I feel we have spoken to ourselves as activists, for so long calling for meetings where we speak among ourselves. Sometimes we go to communities, but it’s a one-off, we’re calling a community meeting and you leave. So how do you sustain the conversation?”* Art can be shared, whether it is a song on the radio, a painting posted on social media, a poem on a billboard or a travelling performance. This can keep the conversation going, while also making it fun, engaging, and interesting. This power of art to bridge divides and sustain conversations is what makes art a crucial piece of the puzzle for ZCCN to continue advocating for climate justice.

Art can be shared, whether it is a song on the radio, a painting posted on social media, or a poem on a billboard or a travelling performance. This can keep the conversation going, while also making it fun, engaging, and interesting.





Summit – Installation by Teresa Borasino for HAWAPI 2014 in Pariacaca. Photo: Eduardo Valdez

### 3.6 HAWAPI (Peru)

Pariacaca is a glaciated mountain range situated in Peru's central Andes, almost 600 km away from the country's capital, Lima. Despite its considerable distance from the Pariacaca mountain range, life in Lima is highly dependent on the glacier runoff that satisfies the freshwater needs of a population of over 9.5 million in what is the world's second-largest desert city.<sup>19</sup> In 2014, the highest peak in the mountain range (also called Pariacaca) became the backdrop of the third edition of HAWAPI, an outdoors art residency.

#### 3.6.1 Taking it outside

HAWAPI, which in the Quechuan language means "outside" is the name of an independent arts organisation based in Lima that each year takes interdisciplinary artists to demanding and unexpected locations to conduct research and produce interventions in public space. According to Susi Quillinan, HAWAPI's curator, these locations are chosen with the idea in mind to encourage participants to engage with communities in sites that are *"impacted by, and representative of, particular social, political, economic and environmental tensions."*<sup>20</sup>

Global warming has accelerated the retreat of glaciers worldwide. According to Peru's National Water Authority, the Pariacaca mountain range is amongst the most vulnerable to glacial retreat.<sup>21</sup> Given the fact that Lima was hosting the 20<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP20), and that the city's water source is in peril, it only made sense to hold the 2014 edition of HAWAPI in Pariacaca.

Over ten days, 24 artists from Peru, the USA, Germany, and Mexico stayed in a camp at more than 4,400 meters above sea level. There, they created performances, installations, even a petroglyph and a visual archive – all inspired by and in response to the harsh yet fragile mountainscape. As with all *encuentros*, the 2014 HAWAPI edition was followed by an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, in Lima and a limited edition print publication.

### 3.6.2 Spurring conversations about society, politics, and the environment

Since 2012, HAWAPI has been taking artists outside of the established art circuits into territories that are at the centre of a larger political, social or environmental issue. These locations also tend to be difficult to access, both for participants and the general public. *“Peru is a very centralised country and most of the economic and political power and, above all, cultural production, are found in Lima”,* says Maxim Holland, HAWAPI’s founder. *“By immersing a group of people who are critical thinkers and who are open to questioning their own beliefs (both things that artists tend to be) in complex contexts with problems that are very local but have global relevance, conversations are generated that are unlikely to arise in more conventional art spaces.”*

While only the 2014 edition of HAWAPI focussed specifically on the climate crisis, climate change is a cross-cutting issue of every *encuentro*. According to Maxim: *“due to the kind of subject matter it is, climate change always comes into play [...] it is part of every conversation.”* Time and again, HAWAPI has witnessed how, through these conversations, individuals within the communities that host the *encuentros* have been influenced and how this spreads ripples within those communities. As an example, Maxim cites an edition of HAWAPI that took place in a community living right next to the Cerro de Pasco mine. *“Cerro de Pasco has been mined for over 400 years, and the communities there have a very complex relationship with mining. On the one hand, most of the inhabitants earn their livelihoods from working in the mine. On the other hand, mining activities account for the severe pollution of air, soil, water and bodies. Many of the participating artists were confronted, for the first time in their lives, with the crushing realities of mining communities, which made them question global consumption patterns.”*

### 3.6.3 Turning hurdles into opportunities

Asked how locations are selected, Maxim immediately reflects on the challenges that come with conducting this project. *“In setting the residency, we visit the host community four or five times. This allows to meet and establish rapport with the locals. In fact, we’ve met some of our most important contacts by pure coincidence, and therefore we always try to engage in conversations with as many people as possible. Every person we meet is a potential HAWAPI ambassador [...] For us, one of the most difficult things is to find a location for the encuentro. We have concluded that we always end up in places that are difficult to reach, and by this, I mean that accessing these locations is not only physically difficult, but also socially, economically, and to engage with in a dialogue.”*



And an important part of engaging in dialogue with communities is communicating with them in a way they feel comfortable with. Maxim recalls the 2016 edition of HAWAPI, which took place in Huepetuhe, a mining community in the Peruvian jungle. *"There is a lot of illegal, informal mining going on there and for that reason, locals are very wary of outsiders. To gain their trust, we decided not to take any pictures that year. That decision weighed heavily on one of that year's participants, whose chosen medium had always been photography. Not being able to take pictures, he spent more time speaking with the locals and while doing that he bonded with the local baker [...] he and the baker devised a project that ended up involving the whole community. They baked a huge cake that represented a map of the territory in which they lived – the verdant rainforest, the barren mine, and the town. Community members were invited to eat cake and they were encouraged to choose any part of the territory [...] in the end, the community had eaten the entire rainforest, while the mine remained [...] this spurred all kinds of conversations amongst the locals, including interesting reflections about their relation to the territory and the role of the rainforest in their lives."*

### 3.6.4 Creating meaningful impact

If well, the *encuentro* and the local impacts of the art interventions developed there are the central focus of HAWAPI, for Maxim and Susi it is very important that the results reach a larger audience and feed back into the contemporary art scene in Lima and beyond. This has been one of the most challenging aspects of the format they designed and while the publication is an important element of this, the exhibition and other events such as artist talks and symposia are key in involving the public in a continued conversation about the issues the project is set out to highlight. In this context, online tools such as a webpage and a vimeo channel are very useful, but they are still limited. *"Throughout the years we have amassed a body of texts, images, video and audio, but most of it has not been distributed and it remains a challenge to disseminate this more widely."* This is particularly important because the various approaches that HAWAPI participants (both artists and host communities) have come up with while exploring the issues they are confronted with during the *encuentros*, offer an alternative interpretation to the mainstream narrative of the media. *"I think it is at this intersection between what is happening in the world and the way issues are understood that art can have the most meaningful impact."*<sup>22</sup>

*Profound dreams* - mural by Eliot Tupac for HAWAPI 2012 in Cerro de Pasco. Photo: Eduardo Valdez



### 3.7 Eco'logic (Tunisia)

The creative perspective was leading, but the question was how to get the people involved. *"In a playful and interactive way,"* explains Dhafer Ben Khalifa, lecturer of applied arts and design at State University, Tunis. Ben Khalifa is one of the founders and president of Collectif Créatif, a collective of artists, established in 2016, engaging youth and other groups in creative activities in the old Arab Medina of Tunis.

Collectif Creatif has been organising many projects, from the development of a formal curriculum for environmental clubs in colleges to workshops on for example urban gardening, upcycling activities, games about trash and waste sorting, as well as the development of rooftop gardens. Exhibitions were organised, and local guides to these exhibitions were trained.

Environmental awareness has always been important, says Ben Khalifa, *"as the Tunisian citizen generally does not care much about the environment. The objective is to bring people to think about waste as a resource, and not as trash. We have to deal with waste, and we wanted to get people involved in waste management. Citizens tend to criticise the government and rely on the municipality to manage waste, but citizens have a role and a contribution as well."*

#### 3.7.1 Playful and interactive involvement

To further increase the participation of people, the Eco'logic project was born in 2019. *"Eco'logic aimed to promote sustainable design solutions for ecological resilience,"* explains Ben Khalifa. *"We have fourteen design schools where students develop many – environmental – projects. But we almost never see these projects come to real life. They stop at university. Students have no chance to develop their ideas, as they must work with industries, and they need to be entrepreneurs to commercialise their products. Experimental ideas are not easily implemented, and they tend to forget the environment because they will mostly work with classic industries, like the plastic industry, instead of finding sustainable materials."*

After an open call for creatives, brainstorming was organised and around twenty ideas were selected. The students were aided in the prototyping, provided with microgrants and linked to a network of artisans and manufacturers. *"We also realised exhibitions to show their designs, that varied from a handmade paper of local fibres, and clean architecture to ceramic water filters. Experiences were exchanged and audiovisual content was created."*

To get these projects implemented in many places and raise awareness around these prototypes, a so-called Designers Green Talk was organised, inspired by the Heinrich Boll Foundation (HBF), *"but then with creative designers."* The project realised to connect designers to stakeholders. A project called *"Earth pavilion"*, which explores green architecture at a basic level, and easy to implement, was adopted by the municipality, and there are plans to organise awareness-raising events with a building site.

#### 3.7.2 The complexity of the climate justice discourse

*"The issue with all the climate justice approaches is to get normal people, with no advocacy background, involved,"* stresses Ben Khalifa. *"And this does not work with a very theoretical approach and long-term thinking. Then people get lost. They feel a distance."*

The *"talking"* and *"strategic thinking"* has always been the trickiest part of the projects. *"It is difficult for them to come up with strategies and ideas. They relate this to government speeches, that are generally full of talking about strategies, but without result or follow-up."*

*"People are more involved, if they can connect the activity to their everyday life, meaning hands-on and concrete things. Even when they are not interested in waste management, still came there to participate."* Therefore, the follow-up project needs to go further in getting communities, marginalised or not, more involved, says Ben Khalifa.

Ben Khalifa noted several challenges. *"The climate topic is quite sophisticated. There is a great need for knowledge and information, to be integrated by the young creatives, for them to become climate advocates. It is a challenge for them to grasp the complexity of the climate justice discourse, and to translate this into storytelling."*

It is important to be grounded in the local communities and their issues. *"We try to get the people, the concerned communities, onboard, from the beginning of the process. It is as simple as that. We start to talk and listen to them, carefully, without assuming we know their issues. This is expertise,"* says Ben Khalifa. *"How to get the feedback from the communities, to understand what they mean, without assuming or changing their thoughts."*

*"It requires empathic skills, to try to understand communities' perspective and involve them",* he explains. *"Those communities generally feel they are not empowered to change the situation. So we do exercises, asking them: if you would have magical power, what would you do. This is a way to get them detached from reality. But it is not easy."*

### 3.7.3 Social workers

Another "everyday challenge" is to have the continuous participation of local youth, says Ben Khalifa. *"We try to understand their visions and we realised their realities sometimes go beyond our capacity to solve. Even if they are interested, sooner or later we find them dealing with issues such as being dropped out of school, being jobless, or having family issues. That makes the long-term involvement difficult."*

*"The climate topic is quite sophisticated. It's a challenge for young creatives to grasp the complexity of the climate justice discourse, and to translate this into storytelling."*

Dhafer Ben Khalifa, President Collectif Créatif

But the participation of youth is very important, as Tunisia's society is largely composed of young inhabitants. *"We are still experimenting. We want to open our space, where they can come from time to time when they are available."* But there are limits. *"Though we are quite successful in being inclusive, we are not social workers. We succeed in those young people engaged at the start, but the problem is to get them steadily involved. So, we consider engaging professionals."*

*"At the same time, there are still groups we are not reaching, notably the most marginalised. People who are jobless or must work every day, not having time to attend an event."*

The gender balance is a challenge as well. *"In our NGOs and among creatives and designers there are way more girls than boys. But we want this balance to be present in the communities as well, where we see more boys involved. We want to get girls involved in all activities, even when these are considered as men's activities. And we want them to collaborate."*

### 3.7.4 Instinctive energies

*"We never tackle these issues directly. We try to get this conversation going through creative, hands-on, and playful activities."* Art is a key tool in this. *"Art appeals to most instinctive energies within people, to the child within us. Through art, you can onboard anyone. It is a natural way of getting people involved."* But, he adds, *"it is a challenge to bring them from that playful level to a more reflecting level, where they feel safe and involved, to start the conversation."*

*"We also need to work together",* says Ben Khalifa. *"Artists are very individualistic and tend to work on their own,"* says Ben Khalifa, *"but they need to collaborate if they want to bring change and raise awareness. They must find partners and should not wait for the state to bring them together. They need to be proactive. But I do share the thought that more is to be done for the creatives."*



*"I believe creative thinking needs to be implanted further in the public service. Tunisia has many Design and Arts schools. Students are challenged to be creative and to think out of the box, but once graduated, they cannot relate to the public institutions. Including designers as bold thinkers will allow for a more human-centred approach within public service."*

Other issues have to do with knowledge and expertise. *"For example, we are not an expert on climate and climate action. Many other NGOs do a wonderful job on this, and we have a lot to learn from them. Vice versa they can learn from us how to involve communities."* So more collaboration is needed.

*"We want to establish an advocacy network, to cluster NGOs and actors. We need to involve communities through art and creative work, try to find a proper approach, and as such help find other actors, who are experts on climate action. They would help us with the proper content."*

But this linking and collaboration are not automatically realised. *"We often think someone should do the linking work and organise meetings. Otherwise, nothing will happen. But we are the ones to start, we should not wait for others."*

### 3.7.5 Wider level

The government has a major role to play in art and climate justice activities. *"Civil society is a space for experimenting and creative thinking, but when comes to implementation at a wider level, you cannot rely on NGOs."* Corporates can also be on board, he adds. *"They can finance these activities through their social responsibility programs. It also provides them with an opportunity to share and integrate their industrial or other knowledge."*

*"Artists are very individualistic and tend to work on their own, but they need to collaborate if they want to bring change and raise awareness."*

Dhafer Ben Khalifa, Président Collectif Créatif

The organisation collaborates with the municipality of Tunis. *"They are learning how to reach out to communities. They are criticised a lot, and they have to understand the importance of working with NGOs, but they are learning."*

Has Collectif Créatif ever been confronted with aggression? *"We encountered only a few issues. We are trying to be cautious while being in the medina, which is quite a popular neighbourhood. We don't want to be those creatives, promoting the culture of gentrification. We want to create inclusive spaces, trying to respect inhabitants."*

But the public space is quite new in Tunisia, he adds. *"Before 2011 it was not common. We see some people being annoyed for instance by noise or something else."* Talking helps a lot, he says. *"We go to the inhabitants, get them involved. This also facilitated as many of our participants are already living there."*

Eco'logic needs further development, Ben Khalifa says. *"The previous sessions were only focused on the climate change concepts. Future sessions will involve the communities even more. "For instance, an artwork advocating against Fast Fashion and textile waste should be exhibited within the second-hand shops in the Medina or a similar space related to the topic."*





A tent made by used plastic bottles is one example of the sustainable design ideas ECO'LOGIC aims to support. Photo: Le Collectif Créatif

## Engagement through art

### 3.8 Climate justice in Sejoumi (Tunisia)

Sebkhet Sejoumi is a wetland of great ecological value in the middle of an urban area, the Southwestern suburb of Tunis. It's important for particularly migratory waterbirds, being the fourth most important wintering site in North Africa. But the wetlands also protect humans living at the lakeside from floods and the water body regulates the city temperature. People use it for grazing, fodder collection and recreation. The preservation of this vulnerable wetland ecosystem, gradually degrading due to urban expansion and pollution, is therefore of high priority for Tunisia.

The Association Les Amis des Oiseaux has been working for years in the wetlands, but intensified its activities in 2015, after the development of a new proposal which would destroy its natural features, explains director Claudia Feltrup-Azafzaf. *"We have been working mainly to raise awareness about the ecosystem services and the risk of this new plan. We also made the link to climate change as this is so much linked with the biodiversity crisis."*

*"Our organisation is based on science, so our first approach was to communicate with data, about conservation status and threats and whatever. But while it may be easy to reach out with figures to decision-makers, NGOs, and research institutes - who are actually familiar with this way of communication – we concluded it's not the right way to work with local communities."*

#### 3.8.1 A new language

It's important to talk to communities, not only about the effects of such a plan, but also to understand their needs. So, when the organisation was invited to receive a group of young artists and communicators who were working on a series of podcasts here in Tunisia, they presented the site and explained the problem. *"After a few exchanges and meetings with one of the artists, who was Khaled Zaghdoud, we sorted out that maybe we need other forms of expression to communicate with people. Also for them to express their own concerns, feelings, and to know their demands."*

A wide range of types of art, including photography, graffiti, painting, and sculptural art, was experimented with. *"The idea was to really to develop a new language, a new way to communicate on climate. Not only about how the climate is impacted but also about climate justice. Because apart from the ecosystem, also the rights of the people living around and with and from this wetland, are impacted."* As such, the Climate Justice in Sejoumi was born in January 2022. A local communication platform has been put in place and together with the artists, the idea was further developed. Activities to involve local people are currently being set up, including graffiti workshops with pupils of public schools. Another activity is the setup of an installation, made of trash found around the wetlands, *"to express the concern of the people of the biodiversity destruction and also of the looming climate disaster."* This will be done by the artists together with the communities. While the organisation used to work a lot with institutions, local authorities and other NGOs, the idea is to reach out more to youth and local communities. A committee, representing local NGOs, the forest department, the municipality, and other institutions, as a local site management committee. It needs to be accessible to a broader public, so the organisation invites people to be part. The project is already attracting a lot of interest, especially from young people. And new requests from the local community are coming in.

#### 3.8.2 Free spirit

Whereas the project just started, some observations and lessons learnt can already be shared:

*"The way of working of an artist is different from ours", says Feltrup-Azafzaf. "We noticed first of all that the artist has more liberty to undertake activities, whereas as an NGO you are bound by legal,*

administrative and financial management framework. The artist speaks more for himself as an artist, as a citizen, focused on art, representing his work. While we talk as an institution. Khaled can also have a more emotional approach in his exchange with local people. We generally need to maintain more distance to stay professional."

As a consequence, a different kind of relationship can be developed with the people. "The people have a different view on us. Khaled might be seen as an artist with no money, and they won't request anything from him, apart from his attention. Our position is different, as we will be more seen as a source of funds."

*"Working with artists opens up people, giving access to them. They are more willing to share their own experience."*

Claudia Feltrup-Azafzaf, Director  
AAO/BirdLife Tunisia

All in all, it is very useful to work together, says Feltrup-Azafzaf. "Because his access to the people is different from ours. It gives us access to different information, so we can sometimes also decide to revise our view. That makes it a very interesting process." Communities sometimes need their own platforms to express their needs, to get their ideas clear, before going to negotiate with the authorities or even with the NGOs. And because Khaled will work in those communities, he will have another connection with those people. "And I hope that will allow us also to better understand their needs and their motivation."

*"The artist has a free spirit, more than other people, and would assumably be more open to the concerns of the communities."*

Claudia Feltrup-Azafzaf, Director AAO/BirdLife Tunisia

"I think the fact that he is an artist, plays a role in this. It would not be the same if he would have been an ecologist, who would be focused on nature conservation and climate. The artist has a free spirit, more than other people, and would assumably be more open to the concerns of the communities."

### 3.8.3 Artistic manager

While the organisation used to work with artists, it is the first time an artist became a partner in a project with a well-identified role like Khaled also being the artistic manager of the project. "Most collaborations have been subcontracts for producing specific artwork, photographers providing materials for communication and applications. We also work with artists in our environmental education programs, because we were looking to other ways of transmitting concepts of nature conservation. Because the presentation of figures cannot bring over the message." Apart from Khaled, the project has an administrative manager and a technical manager.

Activities Khaled will be engaged in include work with women, often spouses of farmers in the area. They are often engaged in artisanal activities, to provide extra income in the household, as people can hardly live from farming. While women, and some men, already do pottery, the project will help them develop other handicrafts, based on materials they could get from nature. There is a lot of metal, glass, stone and even concrete, that could be recycled into artwork or handicrafts.

"The extra benefit is that because of the atmosphere from these crafting workshops, the participants really start to talk about the difficulties, how the degeneration of the environment affects their economic situation," explains Feltrup-Azafzaf.

"Youth is another important target group as they are often encountering high unemployment after school, spiralling them into criminality and leaving them without any perspective. Many of them just

want to leave. I hope we can engage these groups for them to realise there's a lot of potential around this wetland, including tourism and other opportunities."

#### 3.8.4 Frustrations

*"The groups we are working with are very frustrated because there have been lots of initiatives and programs and projects already going on in the area without bringing any change. The government is also not paying any attention to their needs. While they were told the new development plan would create job opportunities and better conditions, it became clear that they didn't know what would happen to the land gained and that there would be investments for high standing housing and office space. And as such, the local community wouldn't benefit from it. So, we had to gain the trust and build our credibility."*

It is also not easy to adapt to, especially with regard to the women, their availability in terms of time and family agreements.

*"Challenges concerning art is their understanding of art. The feedback is: what will I do with art? So that's why we actually tried to connect it to other activities like handicrafts, or ecotourism. So, they would not just do art just to express themselves. We can use it in these socio-economic activities that are of interest to them. Because most of them are looking for an economic opportunity."*

*"Their understanding of art is sometimes not really wide. Photography is a form of art, but for the women that was an eye-opener. So we also have to communicate how we understand art, and what it can be so that they can develop their own vision and, and ideas on it. This also accounts for the (local) authorities, as they don't easily see how art can contribute to conservation. It will come with time because people often need to see, to really understand what we are talking about."*

*"In sum, working with artists opens up people, giving access to them. They are more willing to share their own experience. And imagine, if we invite journalists, visitors, and people that will be amazed by the work, it will give them more strength. And we are hoping that the art encourages them not to keep quiet. And to think, that, okay, we could not communicate with words about our difficulties or fears I have for the future, but through my arts. But we don't have that experience yet."*

#### 3.8.5 No rush, take time

Feltrup-Azafzaf has some advice for others aiming to work with artists. *"First of all, you need to give the process more time. We had been somehow in a rush, though we had the advantage that Khaled was already used to this kind of work. But it still requires a lot of communication between us and the artist. To get our ideas right and to understand each other."*

It is also important to reflect on the administrative setup of the project. *"As Khaled is paid a salary, he will have some social security, so he can concentrate on his role as artistic manager."*

Because of the lack of time to develop the project, the organisation did not reach out to the people from the beginning of the project. *"You need to organise workshops with stakeholders to inform everybody, even before submitting the project. Because the idea to use art in this field of climate change and biodiversity conservation is new. People need some time to really get the idea, to understand how they can benefit and participate. Because for them it's much about what it can bring to them [...] Because you are reaching out to people who are already in unstable situations, there is a need for somebody to help them. We as conservationists and artists may not have the baggage to work with youth and these marginalised communities. We might engage people with a social or perhaps psychological background. But this requires funds."*



Including art provides a very good incentive to work on topics like biodiversity conservation and climate change. *"Because you need to look at the whole problem in an integrated way. And sometimes it's not about figures. It's about the feeling of the people and it's easier to explain that through artwork. Figures are not always convincing to the people. And finally, unlike with scientific work, art cannot be judged as being right or wrong."*

### **Box 2. Khaled Zaghdoud: "It is easy to impress with art"**

Artist Khaled Zaghdoud uses sculpture, painting, and theatre amongst other art forms. He integrates the topic of environment and biodiversity in his works. He is convinced that people will be more attracted through a piece of art rather than a long speech. *"Art has an effect on human eyes, and it then reaches the heart. It is easy to impress with art. When you speak to the people you need first to interact with all their body parts. You have to attract their eyes and ears, you need to refresh their minds, and to open their hearts. Art can access the people's imagination, that part where people's behaviour could be changed."*

Artists have their own way of communication and knowledge generation, he says. *"While science is interested more in physics and nature, art has its own logic to understand human society. Art studies indigenous forms of knowledge and ways of living that could inspire us today's alternative models of climate justice in the world. Artists dive into mythologies to extract knowledge."*

To him, art can bring more balance into society and culture, by "discovering the female power" in a society and culture that is "based on masculine thinking". *"Bringing art back to society will change our thinking system to a more balanced, peaceful and famine thinking."*

It has however not been easy for him to work in Tunisia, where art is not considered an official profession and is forbidden in some communities and contexts. *"Modern society neglects art."* During the Covid pandemic, he was deprived of any income, and he had to beg his friends for support. *"Artists don't have a lot of means and they don't enjoy the needed support. Artists need to be empowered."*

As he used to work alone, Zaghdoud sometimes feels vulnerable. He saw his studio vandalised several times. When IS tried to establish a stronghold in his hometown Ben Gardan, in 2016, his studio became a target for extremists. The artist saw 72 pieces destroyed but managed to restore fourteen of them. *"I felt my life was in danger, as I was facing terrorism. But the police were indifferent about my situation, as they don't recognise the artist as an official profession."*

*"We have an infrastructure of social organisations, but the collaboration between art and social organisations is not fluent. It is difficult to find a good partner."* Zaghdoud currently works as an artistic manager in the Climate justice in Sejoumi project.

### 3.9 Sensitive Territories (Brazil)

Colônia Z-10 and Paquetá share a few things in common. They are both located in the Guanabara Bay, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. They also share a history of fishing and resistance. Colônia Z-10 was one of the first registered fishing colonies of Brazil. And while Paquetá is more famous for its paradisiac beaches than for its fishing, both communities have for long grappled with the heavy pollution caused by Rio's economic activity. Both communities have since 2019 become *Territórios Sensíveis*, or Sensitive Territories.

#### 3.9.1 Between embodiment and placement

Sensitive Territories is a project born in 2014 in response to the climate crisis, but also to the colonial and extractivist context in which Brazil is embedded. Sensitive Territories establishes collaborations amongst artist-researchers, scientists, environmentalists, and local communities across the South American country. It focuses *"on the impacts of climate change and contemporary ways of living, and the collaborations it propels propose different modes of co-existence and co-creation between humans and non-human agents, thereby strengthening ethical-political and participatory ways of making art."*<sup>23</sup>

Preoccupied with the problems pollution creates for the inhabitants in the Guanabara Bay (including serious health issues), Sensible Territories gathered a group of twelve artists and ten collaborators in four artistic laboratories. The laboratories were anchored in the methodology of Performance as Research (PAR), which explores approaches to articulating and disseminating new knowledge within the vast fields of theatre and performance, gathered and obtained through creative (performance) practices.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, the artistic laboratories consisted of performative actions, somatic practices, workshops, performances and discussions.

The artistic laboratories set up in Colônia Z-10 and Paquetá aimed to produce a form of embodied and situated knowledge, as well as providing a framework to explore concepts such as territory, embodiment, and placement. *"When we arrived at Colônia Z-10, people had no idea what a mangrove was – although the area is surrounded by mangroves... mangroves fully covered in domestic waste,"* says Walmeri Ribeiro, Sensitive Territories' founder. Faithful to Sensitive Territories' focus on the process and the engagement with the local communities, Walmeri did some exercises with the community, first with children aged 6-10.

#### 3.9.2 Resisting the anthropocene

The activities Sensitive Territories conducted in Colônia Z-10 and Paquetá explored the question: What can we learn from the mangroves to survive in the Anthropocene? *"Despite being covered in sewage and full with trash, the mangroves are still there, resisting,"* says Walmeri. Noticing the mangroves through an immersive experience, participants in the art laboratories learned that mangroves are not only there, resisting, but they give a lot of services to the community such as filtering water, protecting from floods, and housing crabs, birds, and fish. *"Now, whenever I visit, I always find people collecting the trash from the mangroves."*





"Sounds. Odours. Movements" learning to survive the Anthropocene through the mangroves. Photo: Territorios Sensíveis.

According to Walmeri, after the laboratories, there has been a lot of discussion about the impacts of the petrochemical industry on the communities. Colonia Z-10 is located in close vicinity of two oil storage units – one of them belonging to Shell. *"Through these discussions, the macro politics of the fossil industry have taken a micro-political meaning."* Moreover, revaluing the mangroves has not only spurred people to keep this

ecosystem litter-free, but it has become an opportunity for income generation. *"People are recycling the trash and getting some money for paper and plastic. It is not a lot of money, but it can buy you something at the supermarket."*

Walmeri's activity with the children of Colônia Z-10 was not the only activity conducted in the context of the art laboratories. Other artists worked with the fishermen. One group of artists conducted a body-environment workshop that was open to the public, in which participants grounded their presence in the sprawling mangroves. The workshop was followed by a community member sharing his experience being a fisherman in that territory and concluded with the collective creation of a "mystical serpent" made from plastic bottles and fishing nets. *"We arrived by boat, in the middle of the mangrove, along with other residents. All entangled in the serpent-net, and then we went on a performance walk through the colony chanting warnings about the mangrove's situation."*

### 3.9.3 Fostering continuity

Although the art laboratories in Colônia Z-10 and Paquetá took place in a few days, it has been important for Sensitive Territories' not to lose contact with those communities. *"It's really interesting because during the pandemic, I couldn't work there and I was afraid that the connection would be lost and all the progress we had made. But I started to reach out to the people there to know about their conditions and to hear their needs. After that, I created this new plan: to talk with the people there every day. And there is one person with whom I speak most often, his name is Tiago and he has become my bridge to the community. It started out of preoccupation for them during the pandemic, but nowadays I'm there quite regularly. First, I talk with him and he sets up everything for me there, so when I go I can conduct workshops, in which many fishermen participate. We have really become friends with the fishermen."*

### 3.9.4 Underfunding and dangerous liaisons

When asked about the most pressing challenges faced by Sensitive Territories, Walmeri talks about violence in Brazil. *"So, the violence made it so hard to work with this community [referring to Quilombo do Feital, another fishing community of the Guanabara Bay in Rio, a drug and weapon-trafficking route, where Sensitive Territories began working in 2021]. I needed to negotiate with the militia boss. I was probably more dangerous because I am a woman."* These negotiations involved making sure Walmeri understood what Sensitive Territories was allowed to do and what not. *"It's really important to understand that, not only because I am at risk, but I could also jeopardise other community members."* Fortunately, she found a way to work there without putting herself or the community in harm's way.

*"My advice for anyone activating for climate justice is to try to understand the situation of the communities most affected by these problems. This will really open their perception and they will create something that is really meaningful."*

Walmeri Ribeiro, Founder Sensitive Territories

Also, very challenging is to obtain funding to support the activities of Sensitive Territories, and Walmeri compares the little help local and national governments give to the arts and marginalised communities as a form of violence. *"In this kind of territory, you can see different kinds of violence every day and it is really difficult. At some point, you realise we are all hit, although obviously not equally, by this capitalist system that places no value on the kind of work that we do. It's really difficult to get some funds because it is not interesting for our government."* Even when Sensitive Territories manages to continue, mostly through Walmeri's paid work as a university professor and through some international funds, *"it is still very difficult for artists."*

Walmeri recognises that using art to spur action for climate justice is really hard work and that overstretched artists and students may be tempted to impose their projects on communities in order to comply with the requirements of donors or to increase their portfolio and therefore their opportunities. *"My advice for anyone activating for climate justice is to try to understand the situation of the communities most affected by these problems. This will really open their perception and they will create something that is really meaningful."*



# 4

## Lessons learned

This section summarises how art campaigns impact climate justice advocacy and learn how art can mobilise and strengthen the movement through inclusivity, creativity, and innovation. Moreover, the challenges faced by climate activist initiatives are highlighted, with some recommendations for Hivos and the Voices for Climate Change programme.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. argued that *“human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.”*<sup>25</sup> Certainly, the case studies presented in the previous section illustrate MLK’s assertion, by refusing to adjust to the impending climate breakdown and, instead, using creative and engaging ways to spur action for climate justice.

The case studies present unique initiatives each with different art forms, objectives, and geographical focus, but one core commonality: the belief in the power of art to advocate for climate justice. The selected case studies included 4 initiatives in Latin America, 4 in Africa, and 2 in Asia. The different initiatives also harnessed different art forms to get the message across, including paintings, digital art, drawings, poems, installations, photography, and performance.

To learn from both the similarities and the differences, this section outlines the key learnings from climate activism initiatives in the Global South and globally. The insights from the ten case studies are further complemented by a total of 16 interviews, including with initiatives that were not selected (see interviewee list in Appendix 2) among the final ten cases, as well as interviews with donors.

The lessons learned are summarised below, divided into three sub-sections: harnessing opportunities recapitulates main lessons from the case studies; overcoming challenges highlights common obstacles faced by these initiatives and recommendations.

## **4.1 Harnessing opportunities**

### **4.1.1 Building bridges**

As it has been mentioned in some of the experiences presented here, art can be the bridge between ideological and generational divides, but it can also bring closer urban and rural communities, and it can increase understanding public and policymakers, and between scientists and artists.

### **4.1.2 Overcoming language barriers**

Climate change communication has long relied on scientific and technical language with complicated data. This poses significant language barriers, not only between different languages with most scientific content being in English, but also technical jargon, illiteracy, and different understandings of abstract concepts. Art can overcome these language barriers by communicating through emotions and logic, often calling upon the commonalities in humanities to create a deeper understanding.

### Box 3. Art and the limitations of language

A common thread across the interviews was the power of art to overcome and challenge the limitations that language poses. These language challenges take place from various different aspects. One challenge, of course, is language barriers between people with different mother tongues. Artforms that rely on visuals, or performance and embodiment rather than spoken or written language can overcome these barriers. By appealing to our emotions and our common sense, rather than to our language-driven understanding of the world, art can help to overcome such language barriers.

Another language barrier is that even if we can find a common language to interact, the same words do not have the same meaning to everyone. According to Yasmine Ostendorf from the Green Art Lab Alliance, *"in our language, there are already so many things ingrained, that are reinforcing this separation between us in nature, but also that are reinforcing coloniality that are just incredibly unhelpful. And a lot of terms, even like climate change, or sustainability, are actually also contributing to that, because it creates a lot of confusion because the word sustainability doesn't mean the same here as it does in any other place in the world. And the language is the prism through which we see the world. So if already in in that essence, we don't mean the same thing with the same word. That's, that's, that's quite problematic."*

Because of art's unique power to reshape and reconceptualise complex and intangible concepts like 'sustainability', 'climate change' or 'justice', with and through art we can find common understandings between different people with different languages.

For artforms that do rely on language, however, these challenges remain. Jason Davis from the Climate Stories Project, which relies on interviews and recordings of storytelling, recognises this language barrier. Because the workshops and interviews by Jason have been done in English and more recently Spanish, it has been difficult to tell stories of people who speak different languages.

Catherine Diamond from the Kinnari Ecological Theatre Project explained the incredible importance of translating theatre plays to local languages. This is not just a manner of direct translation, but it needs to be locally contextualised, using local slang and humor. But because of the wide variety of languages in South East Asia alone, where Catherine directs her plays, this remains a big issue. Aside from the different languages, it is also about having a different understanding of concepts. *"To avoid misunderstandings, we use stories that are very familiar and tweak them for an environmental problem. I try to find stories that already have an embedded environmental view that I can use, but I don't want to create a whole new story or coming in with my idea about what do they see as a problem. It starts with using local narratives, and next step through translation draws it closer and also that's the opportunity to make changes to the language to introduce local references or slang."*

#### 4.1.3 Art can make climate change tangible, visible, audible

Many communities around the world, particularly those in the Global South, are already observing the tangible impacts of climate change. For others, however, its causes and impacts are more abstract. Art can make climate change more tangible, visible, and audible as a crucial strategy to reach the people not yet impacted by climate change and to mobilise those who are immobilised by the complexities of the climate crisis.

Also, by visibilising the impacts of climate change, activist initiatives harbour the potential to influence policymaking. The cases of Zambia (section 3.2) and the Philippines (sub-section 3.2.1) show that policymakers can hardly ignore these effects when confronted with imagery of or by the people who are at the forefront.



#### Box 4. How art can influence policies

*"It's important for artists and other figures to make our voices heard because people know us. Artists inherently identify with the environmental cause. We have a spiritual responsibility to nature as creators. So, it's good when we can use our platform to amplify the issue."*

These words of the 'living legend' **Brazilian singer-songwriter Caetano Veloso** present a good example of how arts influenced policies. In March, he led a rally – The Stand for the Earth act - that drew 50,000 people to Brasilia to protest against the so-called Environmental Destruction Package, a string of bills under analysis in Congress that would be a catastrophe for the country and for the climate – especially the already beleaguered Amazon rainforest. Among those bills is Law Project Bill # 191, which allows mining and other development in inside Indigenous Territories. The power of these artists to draw people to the Environmental cause is very strong, says Paula Moreira (Brazil Country engagement manager for VCA). "We had much more support and much greater attention from the population." Veloso and 40 other artists also met with Senate head Rodrigo Pacheco to ask for his help blocking the bills when they reach the upper chamber. Before visiting Mr. Pacheco, the artists had a hearing with four Supreme Court ministers, which led in the following weeks to an unprecedented trial in the Court, in which seven lawsuits filed since 2019 against Bolsonaro's anti-environmental policy would be appreciated at once (the trial is ongoing at the moment of writing). One of the clearest impacts to public policy, was the reference of the Artist's call and the Stand for the Earth act, in one of the Federal Supreme Court judges (Mrs. Carmen Lucia's) reasoning on her judgment. She made a clear comment to Caetano's call for the Stand for the Earth act, to the multi activism demonstration, and the civil society's final recommendation for the blocking of the Environmental Destruction package. The president's party tried - to no avail - to forbid another event, a three-day concert in Sao Paulo, and fine the organisation. One of the reasons was that [several singers were calling](#) for the president to leave.

In **Tunisia**, the Youth Climate Movement and Greenpeace Middle East collaborated with a film actress, to produce a short video that included a call to include climate education in the official school curriculum. This act contributed to the announcement of the Minister of Education to indeed follow this up. This has led to an agreement between civil society and the Ministry to consult and prepare this program.

**African Crossroads** had several opportunities and platforms to present its manifesto. The manifesto was presented at the COP26 summit in Glasgow, giving a voice to African artists, scholars, and entrepreneurs. One of the resolutions after the event was to engage African Crossroads members or organisations on how they can operationalise the manifesto in their work. Boniface Mwalii: *"This is another way through which the network can shape policies in their communities of practice."*

The actions of **Ecoton in Indonesia** and the attention it drew to river pollution on Java island impelled the local government to introduce new regulations. In 2013, the governor of East Java DR Soekarwo agreed to create a new sanctuary zone for native fish - a Fish Sanctuary Area - in the Surabaya River. This was agreed after a research project by Ecoton revealed that the water quality was clean enough to provide that habitat. More recently, in 2019, governor Dra. Hj. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, M. Si announced a programme to address the problem of diapers pollution in the Brantas river and she actively involved Java's universities. This so-called Brantas Tuntas Program ('pollution-free Brantas') is a collaboration of 21 universities, including eight state universities in East Java.

#### 4.1.4 Art can be amplified through the digital space

The increasing importance of digital communication offers opportunities for art initiatives to reach wider audiences. In this digital world, we have grown accustomed to a strong focus on visuals and sounds, shared through social media platforms. Art lends itself perfectly for dissemination through these platforms to reach new and larger audiences.

##### Box 5. The double-edged sword of the digital world

In one way or another, the various climate activism initiatives presented here have had to navigate the digital world in their work. For many, digital tools became more prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdowns and travel restrictions forced the changemakers to shift part of their work to the digital space.

Most interviewees describe digital tools as a double-edged sword, recognising both the opportunities but also the challenges it has brought. Simon Mwamba from the Zambia Climate Change Network described social media as an opportunity to reach younger audiences and connect with artists and activists whose main mode of communication is through images and videos. *"We saw that the fun part of it, for instance, was also on how young people were busy drawing or making poetry or making some small videos that they were constantly posting on their social media platforms."*

According to Jason Davis from the Climate Stories Project, *"the benefit of the online approach is you can reach people more easily, there's a lot less logistics involved. Plus, it is also the travel thing, which is problematic for climate change, but that's not an issue with online work. So yeah, I think it's, I'd say more beneficial than, than not at this point."*

Other interviewees also recognise these benefits of reducing the project's ecological footprint. This goes further than travel. Juan from the Art Shapers project, which has launched an eBook rather than a physical book to promote reforestation projects, stated: *"the book will be easier it will be easier to sell over the globe, because it's just one click away. The other opportunity is the that we don't use paper. So, making this climate argument, we're trying to be consistent with that."*

But although digital tools have allowed some projects to expand to new audiences across geographical divides and reduce environmental impacts, it is not quite the same as face-to-face interaction. According to Jason from the Climate Stories Project, a particular challenge of online engagement is retaining people's attention. *"I think this is true of a lot of online workshops, the challenge is retaining people in attention. And sometimes we'll get like, 80 people registered for the workshop, and then only 40 show up, which is not uncommon."*

Juan from Art Shapers also noted that their need to rely on community outreach online rather than in person has meant that there will be communities and artists that are not reached. *"The more marginalised voices might not be there, because the tech gap in Latin America is huge."*

#### 4.1.5 Approaching the climate crisis through art harbours out-of-the-box solutions

Despite using different words to refer to the added value of arts and artists, the informants interviewed for this report repeatedly mentioned the 'free spirit' of these artists as an untapped potential for more out-of-the-box solutions.

#### 4.1.6 Wider reach through diverse art forms

The diversity of art forms within a single initiative or project allows for a wider reach of audiences that may be more receptive to certain expressions over others. By the same token, a diversity of art forms can increase the visibility, functionality, understandability, and reliability of art projects, thereby making art more inclusive for persons with disabilities.

## 4.2 Overcoming challenges

### 4.2.1 Limited funding for art initiatives

There is a need to recognise that for artists, art is their livelihood and financial compensation for their work should be the norm, not the exception. Yet, art projects tend to rely mostly on volunteer work and in-kind contributions. This, in itself, poses an injustice. As explained by many of the informants, this situation is rooted in the non-for-profit nature of their interventions, which renders them almost exclusively dependent on funding. Funding, in turn, can be difficult to obtain for the following reasons:

- There appears to be limited funding for art projects in general, while some art forms can be expensive and require time, capacity, and funds.
- Closely related to the point above is the fact that the bulk of funding is found in the Global North and in many instances art projects in the Global South are only eligible if there is substantial involvement of the Global North (for example, the six national cultural funds of the Netherlands impose such conditions).
- According to the informants interviewed for this project, there seems to be a limited understanding by prospective donors in the cultural sector of the intersection between art and climate justice advocacy. In this context, donors often claim that art should be apolitical and that climate change is a highly contested issue with multiple political agendas.
- Some of the donors interviewed for this research targeting climate activism highlighted that they mostly support direct actions (such as demonstrations, flash mobs, and other types of short-span ludic interventions) and that funding is much more limited for longer-term, wider-reaching projects, such as those documented both in the mapping exercise and the case studies.
- Informants also pointed out that it is difficult to obtain funding for new initiatives without a track record of impacts. Many donor agencies require reports of activities, including monitoring and evaluation of impact, often emphasising quantitative results to measure this impact. In this context, there was consensus amongst informants about the difficulty of measuring the impact of art projects in general. While it is possible to quantify the reach of activities when these take place in art venues such as musea and galleries, many of the activities presented here take place in open, public spaces, where it is difficult to count the number of visitors. Moreover, measuring impact qualitatively is challenging because sometimes the effect of an intervention in someone's worldview is not immediately visible.
- Likewise, informants pointed out that groups or artists that do not have a formalised organisation with a legal structure and significant reporting capacity struggle to gain access to funding. Forming a legal entity is dangerous, if not impossible, for artists in contexts of authoritarianism or where there are no safeguards for activists.
- In some contexts, the limited recognition of art as a profession complicates the access to funding.

### Box 6. Evidencing and measuring impact of climate activism

Several interviewees raised the difficulties associated with measuring or evidencing the impact of climate activism, and art projects in general. Yet, documenting impacts can be a requirement set by donors, and therefore crucial for initiatives that rely on external funding.

Jason Davis, founder of the Climate Stories Projects, articulated this challenge by explaining that the intangible and nebulous intention of art projects does not lend itself well to measure impacts. *"What I'm trying to do is engage people with climate change on a personal level. My goal is not to change those people's minds, I don't think I can, but my hope is that I can reach people who are aware of the issue and concerned, but just haven't really don't really see it as relevant directly to themselves or their communities."* According to Jason, these types of personal impacts cannot easily be measured, because it is about perspectives, mindsets, and relationships rather than tangible proof of changed behavior or reduced emissions.

Similarly, Catherine Diamond from the Kinnari Ecological Theatre Project, emphasised that her evaluation of the success of a specific theatre play focuses on the performance rather than the audience, because the impact on the audience cannot be measured. *"The actual learning to me seems that it is going to be the participants that they pick up something more than the audience. Because for the audience it's a one-off show, but the people who participate, it's with them I see change in consciousness and feel a new importance behind the issue. It's a small group, but it's one where I feel change has been made,"* Catherine states. *"We are never sure how performance influences people unless it's a clear activist protest theatre with a clear agenda directed towards particular issue in which the community senses its own involvement. But in those cases, it's not that they learn something, but it's an expression of something they already know and feel. How much a play or performance changes one's consciousness and if that changes behavior, that is a difficult thing to measure."*

This challenge in evidencing and measuring the impact of a climate activist project is particularly difficult for initiatives in a starting phase that need some initial funding without having a track record of success. According to Simon Mwamba from the Zambia Climate Change Network, *"people don't believe in a new initiative. It's when they some positive strides have been scored, that people would say: 'Oh, so this can work!' So it's about that challenge of having the opportunity to implement your new initiative."*

Moreover, measuring impact, which is already difficult in itself, is almost impossible under complex contexts, such as conflict. To this, Diana Quirschfeld from Het Actiefonds says: *"measuring impact is difficult in countries where the activists are in opposition, because they're often silenced. While they can still do some underground work, it cannot be measured in number of people who visit an exhibition because there is no official exhibition. That's why we don't have an impact measurement in place as some donors do. And that also brings us some difficulties in getting funding ourselves."*

### 4.2.2 Decolonising art

Despite of the potential of art to bridge language barriers, it is undeniable that art is not free from reproducing the inequalities that characterise other aspects of the human experience and that are expressed as knowledge (e.g., science), beliefs (e.g., religion), and practices. To truly promote diverse perspectives, artists and institutions that host, fund, and disseminate art must come to a reckoning with their role in perpetuating oppressive systems that marginalise peoples from non-hegemonic backgrounds (for example, Indigenous artists, or self-taught artists, and queer artists, amongst many others).



#### **4.2.3 Protecting the safety of artists and activists**

A recurring issue highlighted by the informants interviewed for this project is that of violence. In this context, artists have encountered aggression and violence and some live and work in conflict contexts, where demonstrating or even larger gatherings are not always possible. In some cases, artists face extreme forms of violence against women (and genderqueer identities). In others, art is not accepted as an expression or recognised as a profession, and as such artists cannot count on protection when they are faced with aggression.

#### **4.2.4 Lack of capacity to engage marginalised groups**

In some countries or contexts vulnerable or marginalised groups have to deal with many problems on a daily basis, including unemployment and poverty. Some organisations find it a challenge to talk about climate problems if they cannot cater for these basic needs. In particular, understanding and supporting youth navigate the difficulties they may face (for example, unemployment, family issues, lack of perspectives) is often not part of the skills or expertise of these organisations.

#### **4.2.5 Lack of knowledge to grasp the complexity of climate change and climate justice**

The climate topic is complex and heavily debated and contested. Most artists lack sufficient knowledge and accurate information or expertise. As such, they can find it a challenge to grasp and integrate the complexity of the topic into their works. Likewise, while scientists may be very knowledgeable of climate change, they might not be versed in climate justice. This is a challenge widely acknowledged in the initiatives documented here, which are tackled by fostering trans-disciplinary collaborations.

### **4.3 Recommendations**

Below are some recommendations on practical steps Hivos and the Voices for Climate Change programme partners can take to more effectively support climate justice activists and activist initiatives.

#### **4.3.1 Ensure that initiatives reserve sufficient budget to pay artists for their work**

As stated earlier in this chapter, funding can be a constraint to planning and executing wide-reaching climate activism projects. As a supporter of the arts and activism, Hivos and the VCA programme partners are funding arts and artists within the program. Organisations should carefully budget enough funds to pay for the labour of artists and other collaborators.

Likewise, support for artists and activists using art for climate justice should be supported in increasing their capacities to understand the complexities of climate change. In doing this, donors and supporters should also increase their capacity to work using unconventional methods, such as art.

#### **4.3.2 Time activities with empathy**

Donors and the promoters of activist initiatives should inform themselves thoroughly about the situations both local communities and artists face that are unique to those groups, and time accordingly. This includes trying to keep an eye on local developments and be lenient when delays occur. The right moment and period should be sought for any activity. As one representative said: "Don't speak about human rights when people are in the dry season, when people have no money."

#### **4.3.3 Foster collaborations between artists, scientists, and civil society**

One of the main learning of this study is the need for collaboration between artists, NGOs, and initiatives, but on many occasions, it could be beneficial to also involve other professionals, such as workers who can support with specific social skills.

In fostering these collaborations, it is important to take into account the different ways in which these groups work and to give time to reach a pace of work to effectively complement one another. Likewise, it is important to reflect on the administrative setup of the project, especially when working with artists. If the project can provide them with some security and a salary (see 4.3.1), this enables them to optimise their artistic contributions. Moreover, collaboration can empower artists and make them less vulnerable to the economic fluctuations that affect the art world. Collaboration also enables learning, to understand what works and what does not.

#### **4.3.4 Invest in long-term relationships built on trust**

To conduct meaningful and far-reaching climate activism projects, is important to be grounded in communities and to understand daily realities of people's lives and to suggest activities make sense to them. In this context, engaging marginalised communities can be enhanced when activities are hands-on and a direct relation can be established to people's lives. This requires time and patience and a good dose of humbleness. Time is also needed when working with communities and other stakeholders, such as government officials, to increase their understanding of what art can bring to them, how it can benefit them.

By the same token, working with artists requires building trust. While there may be need for capacity building around climate justice, an organisation supporting or funding an artist should not influence how or what they create. This means there needs to be a mutual relationship of trust that both artists and donor or supporting organisation can rely on each other.

Yet, in investing in long-term relationships with artists that are based on mutual trust, selecting projects and partners for the VCA programme should also be informed by project Theory of Change and objectives, organisational capacity, examples of previous work done, and strength of proposed work. Also, the intended audience, nature of the message, mode of dissemination, and available resources should be taken into consideration.

#### **4.3.5 Enlist dedicated staff to engage with vulnerable and marginalised groups and communities**

As discussed in the previous section, the lack of capacity to engage marginalised communities remains a challenge. Therefore, VCA programme partners should engage dedicated staff with the competencies and expertise necessary to engage with marginalised or vulnerable communities and groups and to capture their needs and aspirations and turn them into interventions targeted to serving these communities.

#### **4.3.6 Harness the benefits of technology to reach wide audiences**

The potential of technology (specially streaming platforms and video-conference applications) to reach wide audiences became particularly notorious during the COVID-19 pandemic. As illustrated in some of the case studies presented here, using these technologies allowed climate activists to engage people who would have not had the chance to experience a performance, visit an exhibition, or participate in a debate because of geographic or time constraints. Accessing and using these technologies is still challenging for many people the world over. For example, still in many countries there is no reliable internet access, or even steady energy supply, but even under those circumstances, streamed events can be recorded and accessed at a different time, and also video-conference applications offer features such as subtitling and facilities for simultaneous translation, which increase inclusivity.

#### 4.3.7 Support partners (and other climate activist initiatives) in measuring outcomes and impact

Despite the above-mentioned difficulties of measuring the impact of art for climate advocacy (see box 6), it would still be worth exploring methodologies to distil valuable results of activist initiatives. Specific tools to measure less tangible and attributable impacts of advocacy interventions do exist, like outcome harvesting (OH) and narrative assessment (NA), and while some present and past collaborators of Hivos (e.g., partners of the VCA programme and African Crossroads) are familiar with these two methods, none of the other informants interviewed for this project are aware of the existence of these methods.

Moreover, laudable potentials notwithstanding, users of OH and NA stress that these methodologies need some improvement. As Samantha Nengomasha of African Crossroads says: *“These methodologies take account of the impact derived from the projects, document the impression of partners, users, and beneficiaries and connects the implementation to results.”* But, she, adds, *“They are non-assertive and lack quantitative analysis of the impact.”* However others stress that quantitative measurements are less valuable for interventions aiming to change perceptions and policies. Using OH and NA methodologies together with Theories of Change provide more relevant information without being expressed in numbers.

Against this background, partners of the VCA programme applying OH and NA could help mainstream these tools while also benefiting from sharing their knowledge with other climate activist initiatives. In this context, sharing experiences in measuring impact in the context of climate activism can be a powerful way to create or strengthen communities of practice and can lead to the co-creation of new impact measurement tools (and also to the improvement of existing tools). Knowledge co-creation activities can take the form workshops, congresses, or joint exhibitions.

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## Appendix 1 Interview guiding questions

Leading questions		Research question(s) addressed
Questions for artists and campaigners		
1.	Can you briefly describe the campaign/project/initiative? Did it start from a campaign/project or from a work of art? How does this relate to other activities you conduct? (if key informant is a sponsor or represents a donor agency, ask question 14)	Questions 1
2.	What is the key objective of the campaign/project/initiative?	
3.	What is the campaign's/project's/initiative's target group and what is its geographic reach (e.g., local, national, regional, global)?	
4.	What art form(s) is/are used in the campaign/project/initiative?	
5.	What is the role of art in this campaign/project/initiative, and in the wider climate justice movement? (if necessary, ask questions 12 and 13 to elicit answers related to the potential of activism to impact the climate justice conversation)	Question 2
6.	How are artists, activist and vulnerable groups included in the campaign/project? What does their participation look like?	
7.	What are the successful elements of art campaigns/projects/initiatives? Would these same positive outcomes have been achieved without the use of art? Is there a particular channel or artistic form that has proven more successful?	Question 3
8.	Can you describe some of the challenges you encountered in advocating for climate justice through art?	
9.	How can art move the climate justice movement forward?	
10.	How can different communities, networks, activists, artists and organisations work together in this space? Is there also a role for governments and/or the private sector in activism?	
11.	What advice would you give other communities, collectives, artists and organisations in using art advocacy for climate justice?	
12.	How can art get this message across compared to other mediums?	
13.	How can art help to reach and include voices of marginalised groups? How has the reception been from government when it comes to the use of art as an advocacy tool?	
Questions for sponsors and donors		
14.	Which campaigns/projects/initiatives are you currently funding / have funded in the past that use art as a medium to influence the climate justice conversation?	Questions 1 and 2
15.	What is the geographic reach of these campaigns/projects/initiatives?	
16.	What do you look into when selecting climate justice activism campaigns/projects/initiatives? How do you measure the impact of those campaigns/projects/initiatives? (continue to questions 7-13)	

## Appendix 2 Interviewee list

Name	Organisation	Country or region	Role
Annemarie Kaiser	Patagonia	Europe	Grants Manager
Catherine Diamond	The Kinnari Ecological Theatre Project	South-East Asia	Artist
Dhafer Ben Khalifa	Collectif Creatif – Eco'logic	Tunisia	Artist
Martina Manterola	Colectivo Amasijo	Mexico	Curator
Diana Quirschfeld	Het Actiefonds	Netherlands	Partnerships Coordinator
Ela Spalding	Colectivo Nuboso	Panama	Artist and curator
Essia Guezzi	Hivos	Tunisia	Tunisia Country Engagement Manager
Jason Davis	Climate Stories Project	USA	Director
Juan Diego Martinez	Art Shapers	Latin America	Senior Project Manager
Khaled Zaghdoud	Climate Justice in Sejourmi Project	Tunisia	Artist
Claudia Feltrup-Azafzaf	AAO/BirdLife Tunisia, Climate Justice in Sejourmi Project	Tunisia	Executive Director
Merel Oord	DOEN Foundation	Netherlands	Programme Manager
Arjuna Hiffler Mani	DOEN Foundation	Netherlands	Programme Team Officer
Maxim Hollande	HAWAPI	Peru	Founder
Susi Quillinan	HAWAPI	Peru	Curator
Padma Perez	The Agam Agenda	Philippines	Chief Strategist
Paula Moreira	Hivos	Brazil	Brazil Country Engagement Manager
Prigi Arisandi	Ecoton	Indonesia	Founder

Merissa Bhernaded Lie	Ecoton	Indonesia	Founder
Samantha Nengomasha	African Crossroads	Zimbabwe	Community Manager
Boniface Mwalii	African Crossroads	Africa	Communications Consultant
Simon Mwamba	Zambia Climate Change Network	Zambia	Partnerships and Advocacy Manager
Walmeri Ribeiro	Sensitive Territories	Brazil	Founder
Yasmine Ostendorf	Green Art Lab Alliance	Global	Founder
Carmen Serra	Colectivo Amasijo	Mexico	Founder
Maria Faciolince	The Agam Agenda	Spain	Coordinator

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