

# INEQUITY, TRANSFORMATION AND TALKING HOPE:

## Towards a New Discourse on Sustainability and Climate Change

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TALKING  
HOPE

### INTRODUCTION

The climate crisis is exacerbating inequalities in food security. Mitigating and adapting to climate change is therefore crucial to improving food systems. In turn, transforming food systems is beneficial for the climate agenda as food systems today make up one third of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Nonetheless, science communication has remained ineffective in building sufficient public support to realize the Paris climate goals of keeping global heating within 1.5 degrees. Concern about the climate crisis has reached high levels globally, but policy and behavioral changes required as part of the sustainability transformation are frequently rejected, often out of concerns over social impacts.

### OBJECTIVE

To develop a new narrative on climate, which

- is anchored in the principles of social justice and inclusive democracy,
- highlights the social benefits of sustainability, and
- mobilizes more broad-based support for the sustainability transformation across sectors and socioeconomic groups.

### CHALLENGES

Established discursive patterns and sociocultural factors impede broader social acceptance for the sustainability transformation:



**Fear-based discourses** which frame climate action as a battle against catastrophe mobilize audiences only to a limited extent. Dissociation and defeatism are frequent outcomes instead.

**Discourses primarily focused on the costs of climate action** pit intra-societal, intergenerational, and international stakeholders against each other in conflicts over distribution.



Discourses primarily **framing climate issues in scientific and technological terms** marginalize their interdependency with and impacts on social (in)equity and democracy aspects.

**Discourses** focused on cognitive instruction are **at risk of being rejected as elitist**.



**Discourses are socioeconomically biased** as the climate movement tends to be overwhelmingly academic, urban and of higher socioeconomic status.

Polarizing discourses **undermine social cohesion and democratic participation**, as socioeconomically disadvantaged groups are inequitably represented and engaged due to psycho-social determinants.



### TOWARD A NEW STORY ON CLIMATE

The discursive approach of Talking Hope puts psychological and social justice considerations at the core of climate communications. Drawing on psychological, sociological, communications, and transformation research, the new narrative on climate change engenders hope, embraces the participation of disadvantaged groups, and encourages an integrated approach to climate, social justice and democracy.

#### HOPE

- Imagining alternative future scenarios transcends false perceptions of inevitability.
- Transformation histories showcase that bottom-up social change is possible.
- Solution-oriented storytelling conveys self-efficacy and empowerment.
- Peer-led communication is more effective in inviting behavioral change.

#### SOCIAL JUSTICE

- Social justice, inclusivity and diversity are fundamental to the climate transition: Future scenarios must be attractive also for disadvantaged communities to mobilize their support.
- Peer-led and participatory communications increase mobilization as they validate the experience of self-efficacy.

#### INTEGRATING CLIMATE, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY

- Communicating sustainability is more than “engineering” climate goals: Failing to address the dynamics between climate action, social justice concerns and the need for a robust democracy will also torpedo the climate transition.

### CONCLUSIONS

Given their interdependency, an intersectoral communications approach is required to effect broad-based social support for policies on food systems inequality and climate change. This approach needs to address policy impacts on social justice issues and democratic engagement, and avoid discursive patterns that jeopardize social acceptance.

Talking Hope’s narrative approach holds demonstrable potential for addressing inequalities in food systems through an increased social mandate for sustainability. Its focus on hopeful future scenarios – which derives the need for climate action from a commitment to social justice, and utilizes an intersectoral approach to achieve sectoral and systemic change – offers pathways for engagement through positive empowerment and a broader social purpose for sustainability.

IMAGINE TOMORROW. THEN CHANGE TODAY.

[www.talking-hope.org](http://www.talking-hope.org)

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