

Women's leadership for united action on climate change

Report from meeting 2

Tuesday 11 February 2020, 6.30-9.30 pm

Hosted by A Chorus of Women

Report prepared by Janet S.

Our second meeting was attended by 31 women. The women gathered over refreshments and the question of 'what brings you here?'

Gathering in circle, Sarah Stitt welcomed everyone and gave an acknowledgement of country. As a reflection we watched the video of Paul Kelly's new song 'Sleep Australia Sleep'.

Janet Salisbury introduced her paper and its basic themes. Glenda Cloughley gave some social context on the systems change we need from hierarchical power-over structures to more collaborative regenerative ways, and why women's leadership might be helpful to achieve this.

In breakout groups we discussed:

Who we are (identity and vision)
Organisation (how to organise ourselves)
Actions (what we want to do)
Communications and outreach
Concepts development
Education (what we need to know about)

Some focus points/conversation starters were provided for each topic based on the outcomes from the first meeting.

Who are we?

Focus points

- *What are we called?*
- *Who are we really?*
- *Is 'climate change' too narrow? Should we be engaged more broadly with Sustainable development goals? (Women's Environmental Congress/Women's Earth Congress)*
- *What's our vision (see draft)?*
- *What can we hand out to people (see draft)?*

We need to clarify purpose and what we want to achieve. Vision inspires action and vice versa

In 1915 — the women sought to create conditions for *permanent peace* (ie more than just stopping the war)

Now — we seek to create conditions for a *sustainable life* (ie more than just stopping climate change)

- equal participation of women and men
- create safe spaces for dialogue and mediation on polarised positions
- avoid the brink of ecological breakdown
- avoid human systems breakdown
- fill the 'love tank' (rebalancing to relational qualities)

Values/principles

- permanent sustainable life
- non-adversarial/bridging/mediation
- equality/social justice/participation
- consensual collaboration/combining strengths
- compassion/nurture of life
- truth
- peace/reconciliation
- active listening
- empowering/equipping
- transition the economy/energy security

Vision

We have a shared vision to put the earth on a sustainable footing... making change together.

We have a shared purpose to heal the Earth by consensual collaboration using wisdom for the common good ... to avoid systems breakdown.

Saving/healing/nurturing the life of the planet

Save life (on Earth) and lives (human)

We are about continuation of life/life systems in the face of climate change

Name (ideas)

The Gaia Group

Women's Earth Congress/ Collective

Beehive

Fresh Harvest

Fresh Air

Women for All Life on Earth (WALE)

Organisation

Focus points

- *Name?*
- *Should we set up an organisation? What sort of organisation?*
- *Should it sit, at least at the start, under the auspices of A Chorus of Women?*
- *Funding*
- *How will we make decisions?*
- *What range of skills do we need? (How can we ensure we have those?)*
- *How would working groups work and report?*

We don't want to reproduce the sorts of hierarchies we are seeking to change. So need to set up new models of organisation consistent with our values and principles. Organisation needs to be adaptable to other locations, and over time.

Ultimately the style of organisation depends on what we want to achieve/who we are.

Need to address:

- How will we make decisions?
- How will we deal with conflict?

- What does collaboration mean for us?
- How do we sustain ourselves?

Need a name which implies the ongoing nature of the group (like 'Chorus') rather than a single event ('Congress'??)

Next steps

Define commitment and skills for a CORE group and put out a call for interest

Outreach and communications

Focus points

- *Develop Communication materials on our principles, concepts and strategies*
- *Website, social media*
- *Develop communication approaches to reach a wide range of women*
- *Develop info into guide meetings of women in other places.*

Many groups are doing this sort of work. We could link up with others to discuss climate concerns. May not all be visible about climate issues such as the Catholic Women's League. Also seek out wide and varied partnerships, such as Country Women's Association, religious and spiritual groups.

Compartmentalisation or siloing of climate change discussed and the recognition that these ways of thinking contributed to developing the climate issues (wicked problem). How can we break down the silos?

Need a communication strategy, reflecting the vision. The purpose of outreach and communication in the context of the vision also needs clarification. In the service of..... to recruit and or influence? No blame is an overriding philosophy. Apply this principle across other organisations.

What are some of the skills we need? Go beyond working with the converted, help develop skills to have hard conversations and raise the tough issues with others (climate deniers).

Internal communication

- Face to face coffee morning, communicate key points to others
- Google drive.
- How about a google email for internal communication?
- Email everyone first, ask participants to nominate other concerned groups so we can later invite them to our Facebook.
- Think broadly, include other relevant groups such as mediation, ACF, take policy form these other big groups.
- Who is the audience for FB? Internal dialogue or a vehicle to spread far and wide such as 1 Million Women?
- FB closed and safe so can manage unwanted / unhelpful posts.

External communication

- What is our narrative we wish to communicate?
- Create credible website once governances, principles, names etc. worked out. Be sure with image before it goes out. Reflect the organisations purpose and influence.
- Individuals send politicians praise letters for supporting regenerative climate action. Frame letters as a guide for others to use.

Actions

Focus points

- *Build a network of women committed to this initiative (fast!)*
- *Form collaborations with other organisations, such as National Council of Women, Women's Environmental Leadership Australia, CAPaD, 1 Million Women, New Democracy Foundation, organisations with expertise in mediation*
- *Create a network of local groups (how?)*
- *National conference (when?)*
- *Prototyping mediation*
- *Engage with politicians to influence policy (how/when?)*

Build network of women:

This is already happening. Encourage organic growth through meetings/conversations in other locations with feedback to central group.

Liaise with other women's groups, such as National Council of Women and their contacts. Form alliances.

Need communications (website, info for distribution)

National conference

Gives something concrete to work on – generates energy

May take at least 6 months. Women only? Where? Costs?

Would need clear purpose for the conference (eg for us to develop principles for sustainable, just transition of our economy; or a forum with politicians invited to present and we respond).

Insights

This is going to take a lot of work!

Next steps

Identify what networks we already belong to

Form working groups

Set up communications

Identify funding needs

Concept development

Focus points

- *Why do we need women's leadership?*
- *What do we mean by bringing 'nurture of life and custodianship of the Earth for future generations into priority political consideration'?*
- *What do we mean by mediation in this context?*
- *What do we mean by 'no blame'. How does this relate to accountability?*
- *What do we mean by independence from political influence and how does this work in practice?*

Women's leadership

Why women? There is an intuitive sense that this is a good thing to try. This builds on inspiration from the 1915-19 story of women during WW1 (mentioned in Janet's paper).

Women are drawn to work with other women. It is experimental and experiential – not ideological.

We are trying this in the context of women having been excluded – so there is a need for radical inclusion and rebalancing to bring women back in. Rewriting the narrative from the dominant hero-story with power over (triangle) to a regenerating model (spiral); tipping the balance from rational (logos) to relational (eros) ways.

Tipping points

The concept is bigger than climate change and includes society and environment. Creativity comes out in these conversations as well as empathy and importance of loving caring relationships.

But climate change is the litmus and the catalyst. Dynamics of complex systems (including human systems) creates tipping points, which can be positive or negative/creative or destructive. How to tip the system to the good? Need levers for change (eg Zali Steggall's paper as a tipping point). There is so much good and so many positives (eg communities after the fires). Need to find ways of coalescing voices.

Mediation

How do we understand mediation? It is a way of bridging a difficult divide. Problem of us versus them polarity and not being invested in the outcome. Are people ready for this?

Insights

We need to create safe spaces for discussion of polarising issues, and mediation for tackling wicked problems.

Refine the art of listening and 'bringing in fresh air' to the discussion, including listening to suffering. Importance of silence.

Next steps?

More of these conversations, connections

Education

Focus points

- *Identify issues that need to find out about*
- *Reach out to people who have specific info we need*
- *Coffee groups, circulation of reading list, sending out materials for women to comment on etc.*

Internal – educate ourselves about our vision statement and core values

External – listening to experts – sharing ideas

Invite professionals to share knowledge - guest speakers

Need to know the facts – what are we talking about?

Not just climate. About relationship to everything – especially the natural environment

Need safe places to explore issues

Stimulating imagination – sharing regeneration stories:

- Music, poetry, dance
- Articles, visual arts
- Enacting stories by physically embodying the stories
 - dancers, musicians, song people, Aboriginal leaders

Insights

We need to support each other to make change together.

We need to identify what can't be compromised – eg clean air, water, earth, energy, security

Do we want to invite polities who are more progressive? Or show our support toward them in some way?

Check out

The table conversations generated a lot of energy and purposeful conversations. For those who had attended the first meeting, there was a sense of building on what we had achieved there. For most there was a sense of something good happening. For some there was a sense of puzzlement in where all this was going. This was reflected in the check out to the question 'how are you leaving':

excited (x2), exhausted/tired (x2), inspired, confused (x2), connected (x3), encouraged (x3), thoughtful (x2), reflective, satisfied, stimulated, intrigued, possibilities, gratitude (x2), impressed, puzzled, not sure (x2)

Overall, I (Janet) felt there was a strong sense of togetherness in the room – with highly engaged and articulate women searching for answers together. It seemed like something we don't often get a chance to do together and something to build on as we find a way to give voice to our concerns and have influence.