

Draft playbook for NGOs on climate assemblies

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Structure

- Context for the playbook and definitions
- The case for public participation
- 8 step approach for NGO engagement
- Discussion





Context: the need for public participation in climate policy



Key definitions

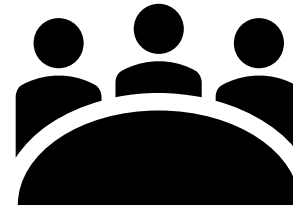
Public participation is direct engagement of everyday people in political decision making.

Climate assembly is a form of public participation where a diverse group of everyday people that resemble the wider population go through a facilitated process of learning and deliberation and come to collective recommendations.




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Stakeholder participation refers to engagement of organised interests such as environmental NGOs, business associations, trade unions in political decision making.



Public participation on climate change can help

- Deliver more robust and ambitious climate policy that reflects the interests, needs and attitudes of citizens
 - Break political deadlocks, increasing confidence and willingness of political leaders to act on climate
 - Increase legitimacy and public acceptance of action as transition begins to impact people more directly
 - Develop more climate aware and politically confident citizenry that will take action at individual and collective level
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Legal basis

The Aarhus Convention grants the public rights of access to information, public participation and access to justice, in decision-making on environment

Public participation and engagement is required under the EU governance regulation at the regional and state level

Each state “shall ensure that **the public is given early and effective opportunities to participate in the preparation** of the draft integrated national energy and climate plan..., in the preparation of the final plan well before its adoption — as well as of the long-term strategies” (Art. 10).

To date public participation has been sporadic and not implemented in consistent manner.

Politicians increasingly turn to **climate assemblies** when thinking of public participation

How climate assembly works

Members are recruited through a 2-stage lottery

- Initial invitation to randomly selected large group of people
- Quota sampling based on socio-economics, gender, politics, are applied to the group that accepts the invitation to ensure resemblance with the diversity of wider society.

Random selection

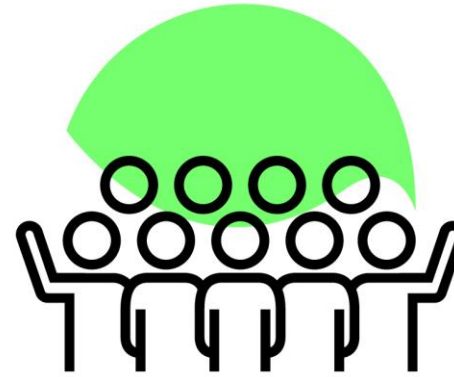
- Ensures diversity of perspectives
- Avoids dominance by powerful and entrenched interests and political considerations

Deliberation

- Members learn from experts, advocates, those with experience of climate impacts
- Members deliberate and collaborate in developing recommendations
- Active facilitation promotes mutual respect and collaborative decision making

Recommendations

- Are submitted to the government or parliament and expected to have some follow-up
- Are more progressive than existing climate policy



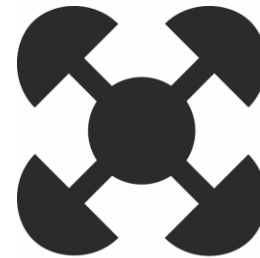
DER KLIMARAT



An **Tionól Saoránach**



The **Citizens' Assembly**



Global Assembly

Roles of NGOs vis-à-vis climate assembly

Proponent and
advocate for the
assembly
(Scotland)

Convener or co-
organiser
(Germany)

Expert advisor/
provider of evidence
(Ireland, Spain)

Independent
observer; message
amplifier
(Ireland)

Watchdog for the
integrity of process
and follow-up
(Spain)

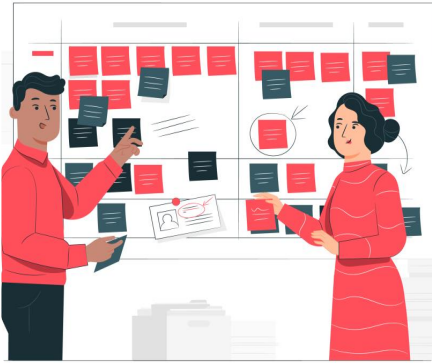
Campaigner and
advocate based on
recommendations
(UK, Austria)



8 step approach to NGO engagement with climate assemblies



NGO playbook on climate assemblies



Before

1. Understand opportunity
2. Define objectives
3. Advocate for an assembly

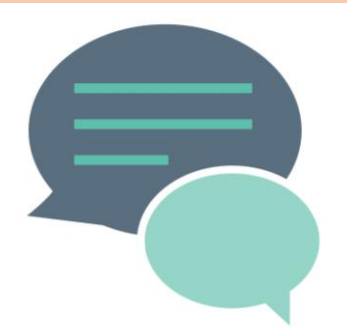
During

4. Contribute to the design
5. Provide expert input
6. Talk about the assembly

After

7. Push for follow-up to the recommendations
8. Integrate recommendations into political campaigns

Integrate the assembly into strategic communications

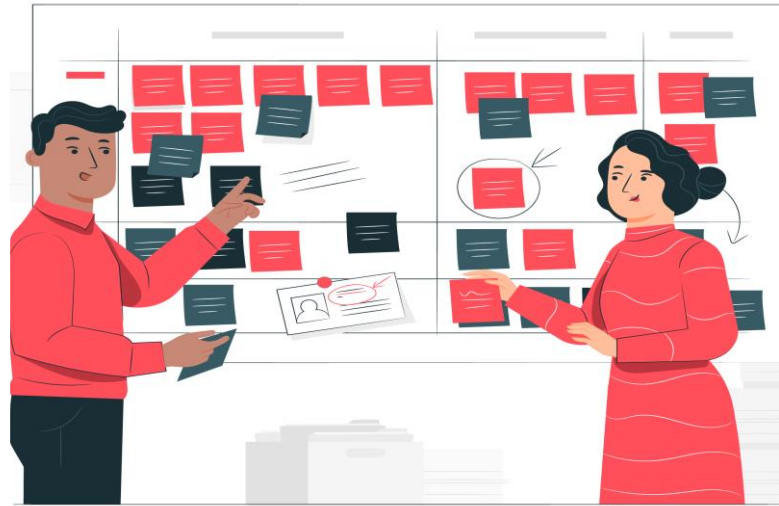


Concept & potential

Process

Recommendations & Importance

Before the assembly: Assessment, Strategy and Advocacy



Step 1: Understand and identify opportunity

- Learn about past assemblies, their remit and impact.
- Consider the potential for an assembly to help advance public and political debate on climate action and to advance policy and law making.



*“[Assemblies] show that citizens across different parts of society do care for decisions taken by governments. This is a **powerful tool to show citizens awareness and mobilization**”, civil society expert.*

*“One of the most important outcomes [of the UK’s assembly] was for the government to find that in certain ways **the public actually is ahead of their own thinking and is prepared to go further and faster than the government might have expected**”, Member of Parliament.*

Clarify internal misconceptions about the assemblies

- Citizens are not taking policy decisions, but making recommendations
 - No threat to representative democracy, parliaments and NGO roles
- Past practice shows that citizens are perfectly able to handle complex issues around climate change when provided balanced accessible input and opportunity to learn
- Past climate assemblies show that citizens often recommend more ambitious policy solutions than politicians expect

*“The main misconception both with the public as with civil society, as well politicians and policymakers is that they **underestimate people**”, citizen assembly expert.*

Useful considerations

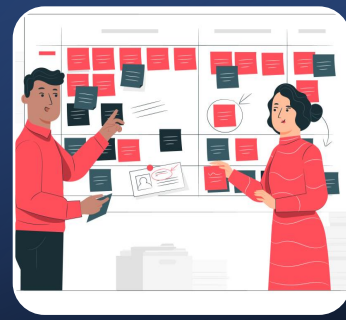
- Contrary to still some widespread misconceptions, citizens can be among the most powerful allies of civil society in pushing for ambitious and effective climate response.
- As public interest institutions, it is arguably a duty of climate NGOs to help ensure citizen's input is considered in policy-making process.
- Recommendations from a group of citizens that represents the average make up of the population across the political and socio-economic spectrum can be a powerful argument for political advocacy.
- Yet for this to work the process of the assembly needs to be understood and well know, and it needs to be considered as legitimate and credible.
- Impact of the assembly can't be ensured post-factum after the assembly has finished.
- Many NGOs make a mistake of taking a distance from the assembly until it issues the recommendations and only then determine whether to engage.
- By distancing from the process, NGOs are missing the opportunity to influence the strategic thinking about the assembly, its process and diminish their ability to capitalise on the assembly outcomes.

Climate assemblies have best potential for impact when...

- An opportunity exists to affect change – a decision has not already been made
- There is a policy dilemma with options for action that have trade-offs
- Policy makers recognise a need for change and are receptive to public input
- Sufficient time is available to organise an assembly before a final decision is made
- There are influential policy actors that are ready to champion the assembly and its recommendations



Step 2: Define specific strategic objectives you are working towards that an assembly can contribute to achieving



Based on policy cycle and political debate, objectives may include:

- ✓ Increasing policymakers' confidence to act by providing ideas and insights on what actions citizens are willing to take
- ✓ Driving changes to legislation and policy
- ✓ Shifting political debate and positions on climate action
- ✓ Enabling ambitious action by countering the power of critics and lobbyists
- ✓ Change media coverage of climate change
- ✓ Changing behavior and empowering public action on climate change
- ✓ Changes to democratic systems and forms of governance
- ✓ Activation and mobilization of citizens

Examples of impact of past climate assemblies

- **On policy**

- Irish Climate Action Bill (2020) translated many of the recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly 2016-18
- Climate and Resilience Bill (2021) translated some of the French Convention measures into law, although many modified – e.g., partial ban on domestic flights

- **On stakeholders**

- Climate Change Committee used CAUK recommendations to frame its Sixth Carbon Budget – and has integrated deliberative methods into its work
- Danish Climate Assembly given same status as (sectoral) social partnerships

- **On public debate**

- French Convention stimulated extensive public debate on climate transition

- **On participants**

- Strong and consistent effects on attitudes and behaviours

Consider where the assembly can add most value, e.g. with recommendations on:



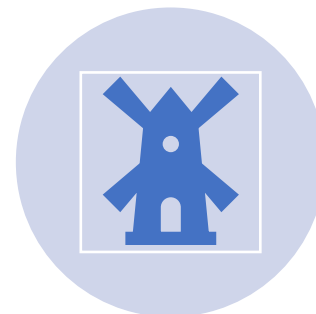
Strategic targets, e.g. to achieve net-zero emissions by a certain date



Long-term strategic decisions, e.g. guidance on what kind future scenarios citizens prefer



Guiding principles for designing policy, e.g. on how costs and benefits ought to be fairly distributed



Proposals for concrete policy measures to achieve emission reduction or adaptation, e.g. phase out coal or gas by a certain date; how to allocate public investments

For more guidance on remit of assemblies see KNOCA KDP 1 briefing.

Examples of potential issues

- How may a country reach climate neutrality by 2050?
- How to ensure a fair share of costs and benefits from climate neutrality by 2050?
- In the national context agree to a climate neutrality date
- Fossil fuel exit and just transition strategies (especially in coal regions)

Consider potential risks and how you can contribute to mitigating them

Limitations of the assemblies tend to be connected to 3 main issues:

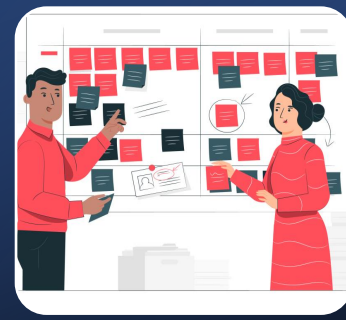
- The **definition of a relevant remit** (too broad mandate, trade-offs not identified, limited to “citizens issues, non alignment with policy windows)
- The **robustness and transparency** of the process (limited efforts and investments for recruitment, lack of accessible information, little scrutiny of the process)
- **Weak integration in the political system** (little preparation of the follow-up process, no clear articulation and distribution of roles (including for stakeholders), weak attention and engagement from climate NGOs and other climate policy actors)

The key questions for NGOs:

- Is there political will to listen to the recommendations?
- Can such political will be created/enhanced?

Risks	NGOs strategies to mitigate the risk
Knowledge; misconceptions	Increase awareness among policy actors
Badly run process	Observe; put pressure; mobilize others
Badly chosen remit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider issues that would benefit most from an assembly and articulate why • Enter into dialogue with the assembly convener • Coordinate with other civil society actors to come with a unified position
Low attention to the assembly little	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate the assembly into strategic communications before, during and after the process • Champion assembly concept and its outcomes.
Lack of political follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early on identify and engage with potential political champions (ideally across the political spectrum to ensure assembly and its outcomes are seen as non-partisan process) • Increase attention to the assembly by speaking about it to the media; follow the debate and link to the assembly while writing about relevant topics on social media • Organise/collaborate with other NGOs on messaging around the recommendations; key innovations and most powerful recommendations • Identify key recommendations that are aligned with/can help advance strategic policy issues • After the assembly lobby for implementation of strategically important recommendations

Step 3: Advocate or support advocates for holding a climate assembly



Connect	Connect with deliberative democracy experts working on climate assemblies or proposing assembly in your area
Coordinate	Coordinate with other policy actors, e.g. other NGOs, to consider joint position. Alliances with or bringing on board other sectors of civil society can help build a balanced political perception of the assembly (not being seen as dominated by the greens).
Develop	Develop or contribute to the case for an assembly and make recommendations on useful remit
Engage	Engage with commissioning authority (if appointed) or with potential institutions that may take this role
Consider	If the assembly is being organized by the NGOs, consider how you may be able to support or lead the process
Communicate	Talk about the case for an assembly in the media and in the policy forums, lobby decision-makers

Leading up to and during the assembly: Design, Input and Awareness





Step 4: Contribute to the assembly's design

Provide

Input to the commissioning authority and decision makers on:

- the desired objectives
- most useful focus for recommendations
- expected impact of the assembly

Respond

To calls for input on the agenda and design of the assembly

Push

For credible design and for clarity on the envisioned follow-up process upfront (see KNOCA briefings)

Do not expect

And do not ask for an upfront promise for all recommendations to be implemented

Rather ask for a thorough and clear process of consideration and follow-up



Step 5: Provide expert input into the assembly

Consider engaging with the assembly in various ways:

- Give evidence to the assembly in expert capacity (most assemblies invite NGO experts)
- Join expert or advisory board (e.g. Spain)
- Be part of a stakeholder group (e.g. Austria)
- Act as a watchdog : making sure the process is credible

Useful considerations

- Engage effectively with the assembly, but also be aware of the risk of it being perceived as being driven by NGO/green interests, which may limit its impacts
 - Need for balanced input and wide range of stakeholder supporting
- Input needs to be in an accessible form and based on robust evidence rather than driven by political considerations
- If/when the need to criticise the assembly process arises, consider the best channel for the critique and the possibility of keeping an option to support the outcomes at a later stage
 - In some assemblies. NGOs have been very critical of the process upfront and faced difficulties later to capitalise on the outcomes
 - It is important to engage with the organisers as early as possible at the planning stage



Step 6: Raise awareness about the assembly during the process

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- During the assembly raise awareness about it and climate change broadly among the public, politicians and the media:
 - Use it as an information point to talk about climate policy via variety of channels
 - Consider running social media debates on issues that are being discussed by the assembly (e.g. Spain)
 - Establish good communication channel to the organisers to make sure you are kept informed on progress become available
 - Be aware of the need to protect privacy of the members of the assembly to preserve credibility of the process and be guided by the organisers on what information can be released publicly

After the assembly: Follow-up and Political campaigning



Step 7: Push for a follow-up to the recommendations



Weak follow up has been one of the main limitations to the impact of climate assemblies

- **Lobby politicians and decision makers at the minimum for consideration of the recommendations and public response**
- **Consider supporting a mechanism for tracking and assessment of the follow-up after a certain period of time**
- **Push for implementation the recommendations that align with your priorities**

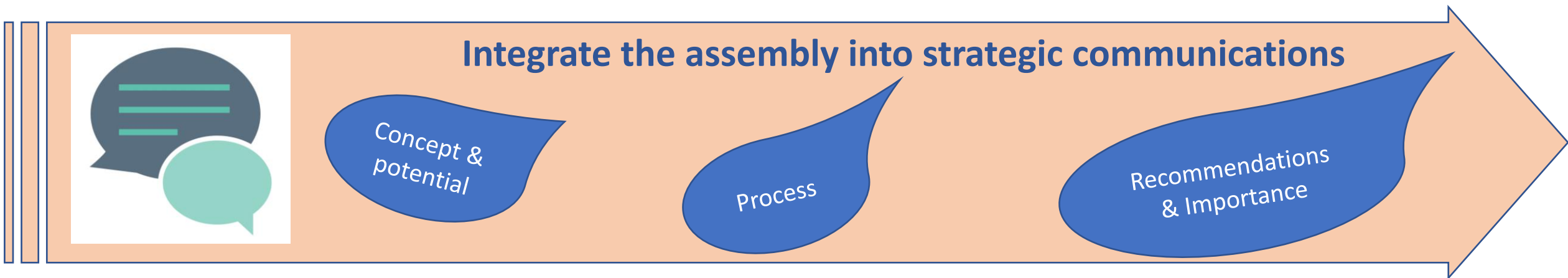


Step 8: Integrate assembly recommendations into your campaigns

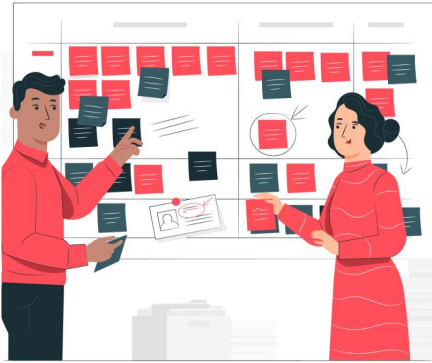
- Analyze the recommendations of the assembly and identify those that align particularly well with your strategic objectives set at the start
- Campaign on the key recommendations that align with your priorities
- Spread a word about the recommendations among your allies and build them into your campaign materials
- Make politicians and policy makers aware of the recommendations
- Engage with the former assembly members to bring them into storytelling and campaigns (many become politically active post assembly)

During steps 1-8: Strategic communication

- Draw on the assembly in the communications before, during and after
 - Shifting emphasis from the case for assembly and its potential, to the process and then to recommendations and their importance
- Raise awareness about the assembly among the public and use it as an information point to talk about climate policy to the media, politicians and citizens via variety of channels
- Impact of the assembly to large extent depends on perception of its legitimacy and political neutrality.
 - Avoid creating perception that assembly is driven by green lobby and emphasise in communications support from across political spectrum and draw on stories of assembly members that come from different political backgrounds and sectoral occupations.



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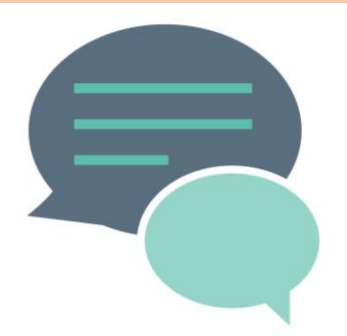
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Process

Recommendations & Importance

Questions for discussion

- The scope: are there any issues missing or some that should not be covered in the NGO playbook?
- Comments on the format and the content presented
- Are there any specific examples of NGO engagement (positive or negative) that should be included?

Thank you for your attention!

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