



Sustaining All Life

A Project of the Re-evaluation Foundation

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Sustaining All Life's submission to *The Belém Mission to 1.5*

The Re-evaluation Foundation is admitted by the Conference of the Parties as observers to the UNFCCC. Our climate project is Sustaining All Life (SAL), a global organization that allies with and supports organizations and individuals working to end the climate crisis by addressing the emotional impact that impedes our work. SAL believes that it is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment. There is hope. But organizing people to make the large-scale changes needed is difficult if we do not address the emotional burden of climate grief and fears about our future.

Below we identify three barriers to ending the climate crisis, and how engaged listening that supports emotional release can help people regain the energy, courage, and ambition to stay engaged in resolving the climate emergency.

Effectively addressing oppression

The environmental crisis we are in cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. It has been clear for a while now that the impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations. The inclusion of these groups in developing strategies and solutions to address the climate emergency must be a priority. The goal of the global climate community to decisively transition to a new era focused on implementation is best achieved through world-wide unity, built by a united massive movement of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and oppression. Divisions caused by oppression are a major barrier to unity.

Despair and discouragement

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the role despair, discouragement, powerlessness, and isolation play in slowing down our progress, especially as we are surrounded by bad news about our climate. More and more frequently, we can expect feelings of despair and hopelessness to confuse us and cloud our thinking. Failure to acknowledge this affects our health, well-being, and ability to come up with sustainable solutions. We have all accumulated a lot of emotional hurts over our lifetime. This emotional burden interferes with how effectively we are able to think about and act to end environmental degradation.

Building unity

Building this unity requires listening to people we disagree with. When we strongly disagree in our work, the best strategy is to first listen for the upset feelings that might be underneath the comments you disagree with. There is often a story or personal life experience that has led the person to have the views they have. Listening creates the conditions for a change of mind to be possible, helps us process strong, unhealed, or unlistened to feelings and rigid beliefs.

Even though we don't agree on everything, we can hold the perspective that it is okay to have different viewpoints and listen to each other with respect. We can ask everyone involved to make a decision to stay with each other and learn from each other, no matter how much disagreement there is to begin with or how much pain those disagreements seem to be causing. But how can we listen to people when we are so upset with them?

Tools for healing

To face the challenges of climate change year after year, everyone needs a strong support system. We need to build relationships in which we can pay attention to difficulties as they arise, overcome them, and move ahead. In Sustaining All Life we do this by supporting people to free themselves from past emotional hurts (especially those that leave people feeling powerless and alone) that keep us from engaging effectively with others to resolve the climate emergency.

SAL offers tools such as *Listening Exchanges* and *Listening Circles* that assist people to address emotional barriers to effective climate organizing. Being listened to with full attention frees our minds to do internal healing work. After releasing our painful emotions, we aren't so weighed down by upset and tend to see reality more clearly, including the reality about ourselves and others. We will be able to think more clearly about the climate crisis and build and strengthen our alliances.

These same tools help people uncover and heal from damage and separation caused by oppression—both the personal harm resulting from oppression and the effects of that “internalized oppression” on our well-being and functioning. And by acknowledging our feelings of discouragement and despair without holding back our emotions, whether that means crying or trembling, we gain renewed hope and inspiration to work for change. We can remember that we are a powerful force for change and there is hope. For us to bring about sustained action, we must undo this harm on an individual and collective basis.

These are tools we can help you learn to use in your groups and organizations. Please reach out to us on sal@rc.org if you would like to learn more. For more information see: www.sustainingalllife.org.

There is hope

We are working together to build relationships, communities, organizations, and alliances to build a just society that allows the Earth and every living being to thrive. Despite all the challenges and discouragement we face, our planet and our species have effectively and successfully faced huge challenges before. Global movements have changed the course of human history and improved conditions for humanity and the world we live in. We have worked together to transform societies. We can draw inspiration from many movements over the past century. When we move together as a united front, we are a powerful force. We can take on the biggest challenges of our time—ending the climate emergency and creating a just and sustainable world. We can ensure that the Earth and its inhabitants thrive well now and into the future.