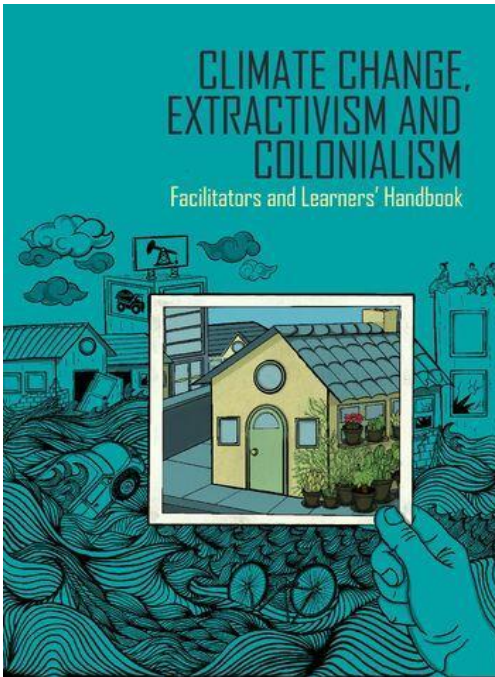


CLIMATE CHANGE, EXTRACTIVISM AND COLONIALISM: FACILITATORS' AND LEARNERS' HANDBOOK

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Cowman, Sian (2022) *Climate Change, Extractivism and Colonialism: Facilitators' and Learners' Handbook*, Dublin: Friends of the Earth Ireland.



Climate Change, Extractivism and Colonialism (Cowman, 2022) is a peer-reviewed facilitators' and learners' handbook which aims to make the historical and present-day connections between the climate crisis, extractive capitalism and colonialism. Written by Sian Cowman for Friends of the Earth Ireland with a train-the-trainer methodology, it is aimed at environmental activists in order to deepen their understanding of systemic oppressions and encourage justice-based solidarity with communities who are most affected by

climate change drivers and impacts. However, despite the stated target group, it could also be effectively used by development practitioners, educators and policy-makers towards similar aims.

The handbook is divided into four key learning (and unlearning) modules: historical colonisation, modern-day colonisation, extractivism and colonialism, and solidarity and justice. Firstly, however, facilitation guides and

activities are shared that can be used throughout the modules when opening and closing sessions and for times when reflection is needed. The first learning module - historical colonisation - encourages recognition of how today's environmental and climate crises have colonial roots. Through a mixture of reading and video, group discussion and case study analysis, participants are guided through the history of racialisation: its invention used to aid European colonial expansion and its continuation in the form of modern-day environmental injustice. The important learning here is that colonial expansion relied on environmental destruction (mass deforestation, mono-cropping, extraction) as well as savagery towards newly racialised peoples (slavery, genocide). Capitalism, similarly, depends on the exploitation of nature (intensive production, extraction, pollution) and of racialised people. Tilley (2021), in a video lecture which is included in the handbook as an additional resource, further explains how this idea of racial capitalism 'helps us to remain attuned to the constant production and reproduction of difference; and the exploitation and expropriation of those who are differentiated as "inferior"'. Examples of current outworkings of this are poor/unstable labour conditions, the industrial prison complex, polluted environments, and racialised communities being the most vulnerable to climate breakdown. Thus, environmental and climate justice is also a matter of racial justice.

In the second learning module we delve deeper into the out-workings of modern-day colonisation. Again through video, text and group discussion, and also creative art, we explore the five dimensions of colonialism: economic, political, social, cultural and geographic. Of particular importance to global educators and practitioners is the learning that the cultural dimension of colonialism embedded the belief that there is one universal knowledge and it is drawn from Western society. The understanding of 'development' is still often understood by development institutions as being mono-directional, with funds, efforts and structural adjustment conditions still being funnelled into detrimentally diverting global South peoples away from their own culturally appropriate development pathways (Sinkala, 2022). We are encouraged to consider narrative - and how the dominant narrative being promoted in educational, media and political spaces continues to propagate injustice. To expand on this, the resource quotes from another toolkit, 'The Uprising':

“It has created a state of amnesia, leaving many with a false assumption that the stories they are being told are neutral and objective... It requires an understanding of the mechanisms and tactics that are being used to shape stories and therefore our collective memory of history. Once we understand those mechanisms, we’re better able to address the missing links in those stories” (Baboeram, 2020: 36).

Practical examination of this idea is facilitated through study of three recent media stories of environmental injustice, accompanied by group discussion.

Theme three covers the concepts of extractivism and colonialism, both of which are defined in an easily followed reading from the ‘Still Burning’ website. Extractivism includes not just the extraction of raw material from the earth, but ‘the whole economic system and ideology, as well as the social and human-nature relations through which the extraction of natural resources is mediated’ (Still Burning, 2023). It also ties extractivism more firmly into the tangle with colonialism and capitalism. We further explore their connections by hearing from communities with lived experiences of harm from extractive industries through different mediums including a ‘Watch Party’ (where a video is watched by the group at the same time and then discussed) and a World Café style discussion. We also consider how ‘an understanding of the colonial foundations of extractivism, global inequalities, and vulnerability to climate impacts might change approaches to climate activism’ (Cowman, 2022: 28).

This leads nicely onto the final learning theme: solidarity and justice. In this module we have an opportunity to look at case studies of solidarity in action - to discuss and critically evaluate them from a decolonial perspective. We’re brought back to capitalism and racism, as we’re reminded in the stimulus documentary ‘Geographies of Racial Capitalism’ that ‘Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it’ (Wilson Gilmore, 2020). There is a useful table in the handbook, taken from Decolonial Futures (2012), which could be used to assess the actions of activists, however, it could also be used by educators, practitioners and policy makers as a guide to decolonise the institutions of power in which they operate, as well as their own activities within them. For instance, under hegemonic practices we’re asked, ‘What assumptions and imaginaries

inform the ideal of [solidarity] development and education in this initiative?’ To challenge ahistorical thinking, we’re asked, ‘How is history, and its ongoing effects on social/political/economic relations, addressed (or not) in the formulation of problems and solutions in this initiative?’. Or to tackle depoliticised orientations, the following questions are posed: ‘What analysis of power relations has been performed? Are power imbalances recognised, and if so, how are they either critiqued or rationalised? How are they addressed?’. The module ends with a process to help the learner define their ideas of justice (Cowman, 2022: 37).

In terms of overall accessibility of this handbook, the diversity of activities and the flexibility afforded the facilitator make the resource easily adaptable for groups from diverse contexts, abilities and learning styles. It works both online and in person optimally for groups from a minimum of six and maximum of twenty. Videos will soon be made accessible with captions and transcripts and the resource also points to other tips for tailoring accessibility according to the needs of learners. No prior knowledge of colonialism/colonisation is required, however it states that a good working knowledge of climate and environmental justice and climate change drivers, such as extractivism, are required. Yet, despite this stipulation, as this is a group-directed learning experience, there is space and flexibility for the group to stop to fill any gaps in knowledge, therefore the resource shouldn’t be out of reach for any knowledge level.

The importance of this resource is underlined by the fact that racism and neo-colonialism still permeate institutions of power in rich nations, further embedding the deep roots of environmental and climate injustice. Practitioners, educators and policy makers can play their part in decolonising their practice and their spheres of influence by engaging with the invitations to unlearn and learn anew which this handbook presents. This resource necessarily concentrates on the historic and present injustices perpetrated on the global South, and the inspiring resistances that persist across centuries of oppression. A recommendation for further exploration in future editions is to look at neo-colonial dynamics behind extractivism and environmental and climate injustice in the global North; focusing as well on racialised and marginalised communities. There are possibilities for learning about solidarity between these communities -

how it is flourishing and challenging the long-imposed feelings of separation, while still recognising and addressing imbalances in privilege and access to resources. Yet the foundation that this handbook affords is essential before progressing on this never-ending task of reflective action, of becoming better acquainted with reality so that ‘by knowing it better, he or she can transform it’ (Freire, 1970: 13).

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