**Headline:** Movement Generation Works to Usher in a Sustainable Just Transition

**Teaser:** Movement Generation educates activists on the dynamics of social and environmental justice.

By Aric Sleeper

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**[Article Body:]**

In the mid-2000s, when the documentary featuring former Vice President Al Gore, “[An Inconvenient Truth](https://www.algore.com/library/an-inconvenient-truth-dvd),” first alerted viewers that human activity was drastically altering the environment, and global warming would insidiously thaw the North and South poles and raise the sea levels, urban organizers like Mateo Nube heard the warning loud and clear. Nube quickly banded together with other activists in the San Francisco Bay Area to educate their communities about humanity’s devastating [impacts](https://interestingengineering.com/11-ways-humans-impact-the-environment) on the environment and what needed to be done to try to abate the eventual irreparable changes by shifting people’s views about the economy, which was contributing to the environmental degradation.

“At that time, most of my peers in urban organizing weren’t even discussing climate change,” says Nube. “Once we started digging into it, we realized our peers organizing in Miami might be underwater 50 years from now, and that climate change was a symptom of a much deeper set of interlocking crises rooted in industrial extractivism.”

In 2006, Nube and his colleagues co-founded the [Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project](https://movementgeneration.org/) to create an analytical foundation for organizers interested in the relationship between ecology and social justice, and as a hub for strategic organizing efforts through workshops, retreats and campaign development.

More than 15 years later, with undeniable signs of climate change becoming more apparent in the form of extreme weather events, which are being experienced with [growing](https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2021/08/09/ipcc-2021-extreme-weather-climate/) frequency every year, and the [ongoing](https://www.mic.com/impact/pandemics-will-likely-keep-happening-if-we-dont-address-climate-change-41294284) COVID-19 pandemic, Nube and other longtime organizers are trying very hard not to say, “I told you so.”

“Fifteen years ago [just after we started Movement Generation], a lot of our work was about being a proactive Chicken Little of sorts, telling folks that things are really dramatic, but now we’re way past that,” says Nube. “In the last five years, it’s easy to see that change is afoot.”

Movement Generation’s first weeklong [retreat](https://movementgeneration.org/our-work/retreats/) in 2007 united Bay Area activists to simply unpack the climate crisis and its origins. Nube found that the initial retreat’s participants were shocked by the information, and ready to act, but they didn’t know what the abatement of climate change looked like in practice.

“To use a ‘Matrix’ parallel, folks came out of the retreat saying, ‘We’ve eaten your red pill, so what’s next?’” says Nube. “But the retreat was a grand experiment, and the outcome was to really start thinking about what the work of creating a just transition looks like on the ground.”

Since then, Movement Generation’s annual weeklong retreat has become its flagship program. Other organizations have branched off from Movement Generation’s efforts, like the [Climate Justice Alliance](https://climatejusticealliance.org/) and [Seed Commons](https://seedcommons.org/), which all have their frameworks based in the philosophy and practices of a just transition. For those unfamiliar with the concept, a just transition is the process of shifting from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy.

“To put it another way, a just transition is moving from a banks and tanks economy to a sharing and caring economy, or moving from a me and I stance to a we and us stance, as we digest and process a very dramatic reality [resulting from the climate crisis] on the planet Earth,” says Nube.

One key strategy to ensure a just transition in the scope of the environment, according to Nube, is to relocalize, which Movement Generation facilitates through their programs like [Earth Skills](https://movementgeneration.org/our-work/earthskills/) and regionally focused [EcoSchools](https://movementgeneration.org/our-work/workshops/) workshops. Meanwhile, Movement Generation’s four-part workshop series [Course Correction](https://movementgeneration.org/our-work/coursecorrection/) examines the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic and what it means to move forward within the framework of a just transition.

“In January 2020, when the pandemic started to become serious, we realized that this outcome had been a part of our instructional course material for some time,” says Nube. “If you’re continually paving over vibrant ecosystems and constraining the capacity for the species in an ecosystem to thrive, one of the things that will happen is that a virus will jump and spread. The industrial economy and corporate capitalist globalization have created a system of viral superhighways.”

Nube and others at Movement Generation moved their workshops primarily online and soon found that they were reaching thousands instead of hundreds of people. They also realized how economic inequities were highlighted in the context of the pandemic, and that large-scale social support is possible when backed by political resolve.

“We saw how easy it could be to build something else and transform systems when the political will is there,” says Nube. “There’s a lot of potential in the knowledge that all systems are human creations and can be changed. They’re not ordained and fixed by a deity. That’s a gift that the pandemic gave us, with the contradiction of what it means to have a pandemic that’s so destructive.”

Nube points out that the pandemic and all other environmental crises humanity currently endures were created by outdated economic systems and attitudes founded in racism and exploitation, and enforced with violence. One of the critical flaws in the mainstream environmental movement, according to Nube, is to think of conservation as something that is outside the influence of human systems.

“The military infrastructure that enforces white supremacy and anti-Blackness is the same system that facilitates the… [destruction] of the Earth. You can’t disconnect one from the other,” says Nube.

After working as a grassroots organizer for decades, and with Movement Generation since its founding, Nube is still baffled by critics who think that he and his peers are unrealistic in their worldview.

“I have always found it curious and somewhat humorous when a voice from the status quo says we are not being realistic,” says Nube. “It’s very clear that if we don’t make a pivot, life systems [will] collapse. This concept of endless growth and speculation as a form of wealth creation that somehow sustains itself over the arc of time is an illusory reality, and is on a fast track to collapse.”

Moving forward, Nube is wary of the fascist movements emerging around the world, and the way that fear is used on a large scale to manipulate populations, but he still remains hopeful that more people will learn what a just transition means and will decide to do the necessary work to change society and protect the environment.

“With our opposable thumbs and our creative minds, only we can cap all the oil wells, and tear up all the concrete, and repurpose and regrow healthy soil. That’s going to take a [lot] of labor, and we should have started yesterday, but nevertheless, we can get it done,” says Nube. “It will be hard, but hard and bad are not the same thing. The future will be hard. It’s on us to ensure that it’s not bad.”