

DEBATING FOR SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY



'Debating for socio-environmental advocacy is created by Julissa Jáuregui from Alianza por la Solidaridad in Spain in 2025

This method is part of the online trainers hub, which is one of one of the key adult education tools developed in the multi-year collaboration entitled: **"Gender and Climate Justice: Knowledge for Empowerment", in brief COPGendered**. This project builds up tools and knowledge for learners to upskill themselves (in groups, individually or with a teacher) in the relationships between gender inequality and the climate crisis. This includes providing tools for adult education providers. The project which lasted for three years ended in November 2025.

The associations involved are in this project: WIDE+ (Europe), GenderCC-Women for Climate Justice/LIFE e.V in Germany, WIDE in Austria, GADIP in Sweden, KULU Women and Development in Denmark, Mundubat in Spain and CSCD in Bulgaria.

COPGENDERED PROJECT PARTNERS



Mundubat



Center for Sustainable Communities Development



Bildung Umwelt Chancengleichheit

wide Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk für Frauenrechte und feministische Perspektiven



Co-funded by the European Union

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DEBATING FOR SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

🎯 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This method helps develop a deep understanding of the role of debate as a pedagogical tool in environmental and gender education, including analysing the socio-environmental impacts of climate change on local communities and the responsibility of the global north. It enhances skills in structuring and participating in debates on complex socio-environmental issues, learning to articulate and defend various perspectives. It also fosters skills to work within and as a team. It also enables participants to consider the broader implications of debate outcomes for policy and practice, focusing on environmental and gender issues.

SUMMARY

Debates are a common form of structured discussion, still regularly used in political settings. There are also many other spaces and groups in which this form of communication is structured by having two camps exchanging arguments in different rounds. This method builds on debating methods in a way that allows people to better advocate for a public cause, in particular against environmental threats and potential human rights abuses. The debate is structured as a role-play in which proponents for a cause debate with those in opposition, for example a company CEO or a politician. This activity completes the whole cycle of debate: preparation, debate and evaluation conducted by the participants.

Time needed: This activity could be completed in 90 minutes. A full debate lasts about 60 to 70 minutes (from the chairperson's introduction, the debate itself, breaks, the jury's deliberation and the announcement of winners, photos). How much time is spent on preparation is up to the group.

Space needed: The venue should be large enough to accommodate two teams, the debate jury, the teams' critical listeners and the potential audience (public).

Number of participants: between 15 and 25 participants with extra people forming an audience.

Age: for all ages

Material needed: During the discussion - notebook, pens, microphones for participants, chairs, tables, signs with the names of the teams, etc. and for possible research: internet connection.

Material provided in this guide: the method.

Citation: Debate is a method widely used, the description in this case was created by Julissa Jáuregui from Alianza por la Solidaridad.



FACILITATION GUIDE

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In this section we will take a step-by-step look at how to organise a debate.

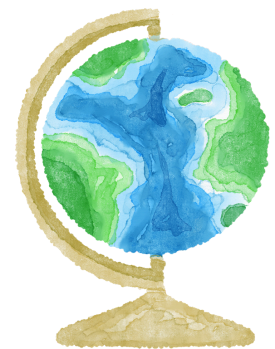
Step 1: Preparation

You need to plan for at least three participants and two listeners in each team, (five in each team in total), a jury of three people, a chairperson and a person to time the interventions. In total, 15 people are involved in the debate.

You can increase the number of participants if you decide to hold a debate with an audience, which is recommended. If you can arrange an audience, you need to plan to host them. For example, if you have multiple facilitators you might want to plan two workshops in which the participants in one workshop can be the audience in the other.

You need to prepare the topic or case to be discussed. It is important that it is a topic of interest to the participants. If you are with a group of people who are already working together towards shared goals, it is advised to take a real-world issue that is of concern to them. For example, this method was implemented with young people in Spain, where they discussed the link between climate change and migration. You also need to decide who the two parties are in the debate.

In the COPGendered project to promote gender and climate justice awareness, the participants used the real case of Coca-Cola proposing to begin production in El Salvador, which would require a lot of water for the production and space for personnel. The case study of Coca-Cola's proposal provided a real-world context to examine the impacts on water resources, local communities and gender dynamics. One team took the role of the women leaders in the community and the other took the role of the company.



Deciding the issue in advance is also important as you may wish to carry out preparatory research. You could bring paper copies of reports, research, policy positions of civil society and other documents on which to base arguments in the debate (such as infographics).

In addition you will need to provide notebooks, pens, microphones for participants, chairs, tables, signs with the names of the teams, etc. In particular, you will need to prepare a general evaluation grid for the jury, as well as printouts of the case description and the rules of the debate.

Step 2: Preparation with the participants

The preparation will determine the quality of the debate and the discussions. The participants can decide themselves how much time they devote to preparing – support them in this effort. It can be adapted to a role-playing model. If you offer this method during an event, you need to plan for at least 20 or 30 minutes of preparation before a debate. Though the more time you have, the better you can prepare.

Start the activity by deciding with the group who will take which roles. The following five roles need to be filled for each side of the debate: a leader, a first speaker, a second speaker and two critical listeners. In addition, you need to plan for a jury of three people, one debate chairperson, and one person to time the interventions.

Explanation of team roles:

Leader:

- Introduces the team.
- Makes the opening statement and introduces the team's thesis and identified strengths.
- Makes the concluding remarks and summarizes the team's point of view and arguments.

Other speakers:

- Develop the thesis introduced by the leader.
- Develop the debate with cited sources, provide evidence in documents (graphs, pictures, etc.).
- React to criticism and counter the arguments of the other team.

Two critical listeners:

- They take note of the arguments presented by the opposing team so that, during the breaks, they can report them to the speakers and allow them to respond.

Explanation of other roles:

Debate chairperson:

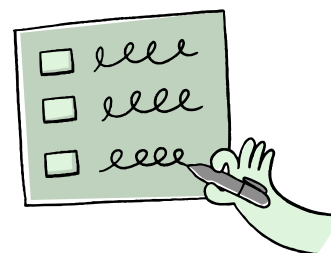
- Opens and closes the debate and each session within the debate.
- Makes sure the debate runs smoothly.

Timekeeper:

- Times the speaking time per team; could inform them by signal when it is time to wrap up (e.g. 30 seconds before closing).

Jury members:

- Keep track of the arguments and delivery.
- Finally decide who is the winning team



The jury should be composed of three people who can judge each group by the same, robust indicators. The jury members will have to take notes to justify their score (against the indicators) and give feedback to the teams. One of the judges will announce the score and justify it.

This is a method for all age ranges. We recommend diversity in the teams, including age range, so that there is no imbalance in knowledge. For example, the number of young people between 18 and 23 years old should be the same in each team.

Before you begin with the research, it is advised that you inform the participants of the rules and structure of the debate, for example, how much time they have for each intervention. This is important so that participants can organize their interventions and know what to expect from the debate. It is also recommended that the rules of discussion be collectively constructed, depending on how much time you have. It might be good to propose some rules and ask the participants if they agree and if they have additional rules to suggest. For example, only honest, reliable, reasonable, respectful arguments are allowed.



Here is a list of the aspects that you should think about in preparation for the debate:

1. Analysis

Underline key words, identify possible strategies: what is the problem, what is the cause of the problem, what is the objective and value of the justified counteraction (social justice, democracy...), why is this the best solution, why will the world be better off with justified action/solution?

2. Research

Use research or undertake your own independent research e.g. using your own peer group.

3. Construction of arguments

What do we want to say? How do we demonstrate the argument? Illustrate with concrete cases, statistics or stories and show impacts.

4. Presentation

Decide how you will present your argument, and plan how you will interact with other teams' arguments, anticipating counterarguments.

5. Participation

Do a mock debate, take notes and listen critically.

6. Analysis of the debate

Collective reflection: what happened in the debate, what could be improved?

STEP 3: Debating

After the preparation, it is time to hold the debate. Below you will find a detailed structure with the time each has for debate and preparation to the next round. This is the generic structure of the debate of about 60 minutes – adjust according to your set up. And it is important to provide some basic rules for the debate (see below).

PRESENTATIONS	Introduction to the topic, the framework of the debates	Organisers of the debate	5 min
	Presentation of the Pro team	PROS Leader	2 min
	Presentation of the Cons team	CONS Leader	2 min
FIRST BLOCK	Present and describe position	PROS Leader	3 min
	Present and describe position	CONS Leader	3 min
	Speech first speaker, with first argument	PROS Speaker	3 min
	Speech first speaker, with the first argument	CONS Speaker	3 min
BREAK	Jury takes notes	Jury	4 min
	Teams reorganise	Teams	
SECOND BLOCK	Speech second speaker, with the second argument and rebuttal	PROS Speaker	3 min
	Speech second speaker, with the second argument and rebuttal	CONS Speaker	3 min
BREAK	Jury takes notes	Jury	4 min
	Teams reorganise	Teams	
FREE DEBATE	Free discussion (the PROS team starts and at least 2 persons/team organically alternate interventions)	At least 2 persons per team	10 min
BREAK	Jury takes notes	Jury	4 min
	Teams reorganise	Teams	
CONCLUSIONS	PROS conclusions	PROS Leader	2 min
	CONS conclusions	CONS Leader	2 min
	Announcement of the winning team (a gift can be given to both teams for their participation) with justification	Organisers of the debate	5 min
Possible: time for taking photos or interviews for capturing the experience of the discussions.			2 min

CONCLUSION

This method can easily be adjusted in terms of content or time or extended to include more elements. It can be used as a general rehearsal for groups that are advocating for a certain change or resisting a proposed change in their (social) environment. The depth of the analysis can vary, and scientific research can be sought from different disciplines. One can introduce interactive elements, such as real-time polls or audience questions to make debates more dynamic and responsive to the participants' and audience's interests. You can encourage role rotation for participants (e.g. leader, speakers, critical listeners) in one or multiple debates, to build a more well-rounded skill set and provide varied experiences. And you can hold the debate online for example.

And if there is no time for preparation for the debate, it can be adapted to role-playing, making it an exercise that can be carried out in an hour. For this, you also must prepare the topic or case that you want to debate and prepare an information sheet to support the case and another one with the roles and the position that each team should have. Each group will have 10/15 minutes to read out their worksheet and agree on a line of argument. They will then present their positions. This will be followed by a free debate encouraging rebuttal of arguments and positions. Throughout the free discussion, the facilitator will then ask some challenging questions to the various groups to encourage respectful confrontation or negotiation.

The method encourages creative thinking in how to structure arguments and could lead to actual improvements in how to convince others of the important connection between gender and climate justice.

