

Grassroots Movements and Systemic Change

Investing in Grassroots Systemic Climate Solutions



INTRODUCTION

The root causes of the climate crisis are complex and intertwined in nature, and so must be the solutions. Multiple interconnected strategies at all scales are needed to solve the complexity of a global ecological crisis that touches every aspect of human life. Yet, states and corporations in the Global North have tended to invest heavily in tactics that are quick fixes to isolated problems or easily measurable on short time horizons, despite the scale and longevity of the challenges. The complexity of the climate crisis demands holistic strategies that not only cool the planet, but also effectively innovate and transform human social, economic, and governance systems.

Grassroots movements build climate solutions because they experience the real-world consequences of the climate crisis and associated top-down decisions. For example, Indigenous Peoples often directly depend on the ecosystems in which they live for physical, spiritual, livelihood, and community resources. Although only 5% of the world's population, [Indigenous Peoples protect around 80% of the world's biodiversity](#) and are consistently found to protect that biodiversity [better than strategies implemented by non-Indigenous groups](#). These aren't "new" solutions per se, but rather ones that have historically protected the planet from catastrophe and will continue to do so.

FINDINGS

Through our Outcome Harvesting process, which entailed analyzing 65 reports between 2015 - 2021, we identified

- **254** outcomes influencing
- **285** actors among
- **19** grassroots groups

Many of these outcomes were not predicted in advance, demonstrating the need for flexible, long-term support to grassroots groups to nimbly respond to emergent opportunities for social action. The examples on the next page highlight how outcomes are relevant across the economic, governance, and social dimensions of communities, and cannot be neatly packaged into grant proposals or reports.

"Outcome" can be understood as the change that occurs as a result of the intervention or contribution by the grassroots grantee. By tracking 'who changed', 'what changed', when, and where', we identified behavioral changes that took place at the level of discourse, policy, and/or practice. Outcomes are categorized into types of changes.

We identified a few strategies in the systemic outcomes that grassroots grantees influenced. These strategies are interrelated such that, when shifted, they can challenge underlying value and cultural systems, political structures, institutions, and power dynamics. Strategies include:

- **Enhancing community participation** in dialogues about environmental matters that affect them
- **Improving security and rights** for peoples facing gender-based violence
- **Shifting underlying narratives** that drive decision making

Given that systems are composed of identifiable parts that are organized in specific ways to form an interrelated whole, systemic change occurs when shifts in those parts are significant enough to alter the whole system, in function and/or behavior. Systemic change may be sparked by influencing key structures, institutions, cultural norms, value systems, narratives, and/or power dynamics that are integral to the current business-as-usual systems, and replacing them with a paradigm shift toward equity, justice, and right relationship with Earth and communities.

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Examples of Grassroots Influences on Systemic Climate Solutions



The following examples highlight grassroots-driven systemic change outcomes that drawdown emissions and build resilience:



Honduras: The **Articulación de Mujeres de La Vía Campesina** is the women's delegation of the 200 million-strong international peasant movement. They have sparked a transformation in gender norms in Honduras, in recognition that women do the majority of peasant farming and are at the helm of creative climate solutions, including promoting agroecology techniques which have the potential to mitigate 390 to 490 gigatons of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) globally by 2050.

After organizing a series of workshops titled "**Women's Right to Live Free from Violence in Honduras**", linked to agrarian reform, a network was formed to accompany women survivors of violence and to require conditions of care be centered in their work. This campaign included demands to integrate a zero-tolerance policy for violence against women into the organizations of the La Via Campesina network. As a result, there was an increase in women's representation on national boards and organizational boards - positioning women within decision-making roles.

They also established links with several governmental and legal bodies to push for gender-sensitive policies and budgets. Women leaders presented to a United Nations Human Rights Council Working Group on the discrimination of rural women and drafted a new Comprehensive Law on Violence against Women to submit to the Honduran National Congress. This is complemented by their work to promote an Access to Solidarity Credit for women, which led to the development of the CREDIMUJER program, enabling rural women to access financial resources to generate their own income sources and dignified living conditions.

Image courtesy: Articulación de Mujeres de La Vía Campesina Centro América.



Haiti: **Mouvman Peyizan Papay (MPP)** is a grassroots organization initially focused on food sovereignty that has expanded to apply the principle of 'sovereignty' toward improving the lives of its 61,000 members. As food production is dependent upon a stable climate, adequate water sources, forestation, soil, and local knowledge, MPP recognizes that building healthy social and ecological systems together is needed to ensure climate resilience.

Largely led by a circle of women, MPP has organized communities around a number of relevant initiatives, including installing water recapture systems for homes and crops, re-foresting previously deforested areas, revitalizing soil health, fitting solar panels on homes for energy sovereignty, providing trainings to women and youth around agroecology practices, and running a radio station through which to share this knowledge.

They are actively establishing cross-sectoral movement-building spaces to push for policy changes, having recently organized a forum with over 20 progressive political organizations and 46 CSOs in attendance. In addition to directly contributing toward cooling the planet, MPP also builds resilience to natural disasters by organizing rapid response teams with food, water, and seed distribution following crises like the 2021 earthquake. Unrestricted funding, allowing space for systemic creative solutions to emerge, has helped support MPP's work strengthening the health and power of communities.

Image courtesy: Mouvman Peyizan Papay.

The [CLIMA Fund](#) is a collaborative composed of four public foundations. The CLIMA Fund grants unrestricted funding to grassroots groups in over 160 countries globally. Unrestricted funding provides freedom for movements to set their own contextually-relevant strategic priorities. In contrast, project management cycles that rely on models such as logframes for planning and implementation may constrain or fail to predict more holistic, systemic outcomes.