

# SCALE

**Grassroots movements have sophisticated approaches for growth and these methods ensure that solutions are sustainable, resilient, and equitable.**

Philanthropy has often taken a narrow view of 'scale' when it comes to the climate crisis. Scale is about so much more than speed or reach. By reimagining the idea of scale, funders can resource multiple strategies that will help cool the planet over the long-term.



**Scale is about DEPTH, RELATIONSHIPS, DECENTRALIZATION, and POWER**

## DEPTH

Instead of focusing solely on a single strategy that emphasizes quantity or how quickly and widely it is adopted, grassroots movements value a solution by its depth, reach, and influence. **Grassroots strategies multi-solve: not only drawing down emissions, but building equity, resilience, and planetary health in the process.**

**Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP)** in Haiti engages in community-based efforts to build climate resilience, while connecting across communities to **exchange Creole seeds, knowledge, and labor.**<sup>1</sup>

There is common infrastructure, such as a savings and **credit union, multi-sectoral cooperatives** for storage of agricultural products and a **farmer's bank, and a network of agroecology schools.**

By focusing on a holistic vision of what communities need to face increasing climate disasters, MPP is transforming the economies, governance, and social contracts across Haiti.

**MPP is expanding agroecology, which, if implemented worldwide, has the potential to mitigate 390 to 490 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>e (carbon dioxide equivalent) by 2050, the same as the emissions from China over that time period.**<sup>2</sup>

## RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships and connectivity are the lifeblood of movement building. Many political power-building efforts create widespread impact through relationships. As opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach, **many locally-tailored solutions scale to generate global shifts through strong relationships, robust coordination, and mutual amplification.**

The fossil fuel industry supplies receives **\$5.9 trillion in subsidies.**<sup>3</sup>

Fights by **Indigenous Peoples** against fossil fuel infrastructure have **prevented the carbon equivalent of 12% of annual U.S. and Canadian pollution** (779 million metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e) according to a recent assessment.<sup>4</sup>

These stories are coordinated and amplified through regional networks like the **Indigenous Environmental Network** or global ones like **Oilwatch International.**<sup>5</sup>

**Direct resistance efforts have the potential of mitigating 1,300 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>e by 2050, or the equivalent of the amount of carbon in the standing stock of all global forests.**<sup>6</sup>

## DECENTRALIZATION

Grassroots movements accelerate scale through distributed impact and leadership. **Well networked and decentralized organization is more effective and resilient in the face of uncertain and rapidly evolving political and ecological conditions.** When communities have sovereign power to advance locally-relevant solutions, those solutions are often nimble and durable because they are spread through local networks of trust.

**ZIMSOFF** in Zimbabwe engages farmers in exchanges; **organizes food and seed fairs;** and has **recruited over 12,000 people** into Small Farmers Organizations (SFOs).<sup>7</sup>

Farmers are fighting for their **communities** by connecting local leaders together and coordinating meetings with the national government.

Because of the many **community-driven and locally-directed efforts, ZIMSOFF has had the political power to influence policy makers,** including the Ministries of Agriculture and of Health and the Parliamentary Commission on Climate Change, to increasingly recognize the value of Indigenous seeds and food.

## POWER

To build broad political will that can enact political change, to organize millions against entrenched corporate interests, to ensure a community group can sustain a new way of sharing energy: there must be strong organization to build power. **Power is central to scale, especially where politics are stacked against the majority.**

In 2018, **Save Rivers Sarawak** engaged the Kayan people of Long Liam village, Malaysia around the idea of installing a micro-hydro renewable energy system.<sup>8</sup> Through organizing and workshops, the village built their capacity to take on and sustain the initiative. In the process they also built out initiatives to better protect their local forests.

The village, among many supported by Save Rivers, **has the organization and collective power to identify and mobilize** on their commitments to protect their ecosystems and way of life.

**Community-controlled renewables have the potential to mitigate 250 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>e (carbon dioxide equivalent) by 2050, the same as global energy emissions over nine years.**

### What are models of scale in mainstream philanthropy that are limiting us and could be reimagined?

Funders can keep an eye out on our biases and broaden our frame.

- SPEED OVER IMPACT.** Hastily made plans often run into trouble, and this is especially true for decisions that impact the complex ecologies of our planet. Unintended consequences accumulate the faster decisions are made, and long-term impact is eclipsed at the expense of superficial short-term gains.
- QUANTITY OVER QUALITY.** An age-old adage, quantity over quality often doesn't deliver. Shoddy strategy or diffusion plans that don't account for heterogeneity are unlikely to be durable.
- BREADTH OVER DEPTH.** International development projects preference a wide footprint and short-term improvements, rather than a change in outcomes and sustainable implementation, which may be at the expense of long-term impact.
- NOVELTY OVER THE TRIED-AND-TRUE.** Entrepreneurism and the chase of novelty are prioritized over tradition and diverse ways of knowing built up over generations. The mainstream tendency is to see homogenous, newer strategies as more 'scalable', rather than valuing ways of knowing or creating that may be harder to measure with highly controlled measurements.
- IMMEDIACY OVER SYSTEMS CHANGE.** Often popular culture falls for what is immediate and tangible, instead of investing in the transformational process of systems change. Movements are chronically undervalued because the shifts in culture and power happen through diverse mediums, over variable timescales, and with systematically marginalized communities.
- SERVING THE GLOBAL ELITE RATHER THAN THE GLOBAL MAJORITY.** Often a focus on scale will reinforce strategies that heighten inequality and from which the global elite profit most.

### How can funders and donors serve grassroots groups as they continue to scale their critical work?

- PROVIDE UNRESTRICTED, LONG-TERM FUNDING.** Flexible funding allows grassroots groups to be nimble, responsive, and self-determined. Grassroots movements know best how to prioritize, how to convene, or how to track their success. Long-term, core support is key so they can self-determine the solutions they know are best.
- SHIFT LEARNING & EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS.** Often philanthropy's evaluation frameworks reinforce colonialist tendencies of top-down control of resources and supremacist assumptions of what's 'right' or successful. We as funders can create adaptive learning models responsive to grassroots' articulations of their work.
- SUPPORT GRASSROOTS-DRIVEN CONNECTIVITY.** To confront global threats and to exchanged knowledge, grassroots movements must be interconnected. Spaces for grassroots movements to convene, exchange, and collectively articulate are necessary for scale. Funders can support these connections when asked to do so.
- LOOK BEYOND NOVELTY.** Instead of funding the flashy new technology in the news, funders can move money to community solutions that have been proven through sustained participation over time.
- ENSURE COMMUNITY CONTROL.** Scalable strategies are those that are owned by local communities so they may support the application of those strategies in changing conditions amidst complexity. We can start by asking ourselves who benefits and who decides.
- BE READY TO CHANGE THE PROBLEM FRAME.** No challenge exists in a silo and often ecological challenges are underpinned by complex social drivers. Expanding scale to mean depth, power, and transformation requires flexibility in how funders frame the problem.
- INVEST IN GENERATIONAL SCALE.** Systemic change is nonlinear, and often requires time. Humans can create significantly more value by investing in the future we covet 100 years from now as much as our future tomorrow.

1 Peasant Movement of Papaye <https://www.mpphaiti.org/History-of-MPP-27.html>.  
2 Elliott, Matthew, et al. Soil to Sky: Climate Solutions that Work. CLIMA Fund, 2019. [www.climasolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Soil-to-Sky-1.pdf](http://www.climasolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Soil-to-Sky-1.pdf).  
3 "Fossil Fuels Received \$5.9 Trillion in Subsidies in 2020, Report Finds." Yale Environment360, 6 October 2021. <https://e360.yale.edu/digest/fossil-fuels-received-5-9-trillion-in-subsidies-in-2020-report-finds>.  
4 Goldtooth, Dallas, et al. Indigenous Resistance Against Carbon. Indigenous Environmental Network and Oil Change International, 2021. <https://www.ienearth.org/irac-counting-up-the-impact/>.  
5 Indigenous Environmental Network <https://www.ienearth.org/> and Oilwatch International <https://www.oilwatch.org/>.  
6 Elliott et al.  
7 Zimbabwe Small Holder Organic Farmers' Forum (ZIMSOFF) <https://www.facebook.com/zimsoff/>.  
8 Save Rivers Sarawak <https://saverivers.org/>.  
9 "Reimagining Scale." CLIMA Fund, <https://climasolutions.org/clima-resources/videos/reimagining-scale/>.