

Resourcing Grassroots-led Climate Adaptation

A brief on locally-led climate action for funders

Community self-determination as adaptation

The end of 2023 was the hottest on record: scaling back emissions is required for a liveable future. In addition, communities need to have the resources to implement solutions for adjusting to a treacherous and uncertain future. When communities do not have the ability to adapt, impacts - and thus displacement, violence, and cultural erasure - are amplified. In this brief, we outline how community self-determination can best support adaptation to the climate crisis.

Community means a social group whose members reside in a specific place and often have common heritage.

The majority of institutional climate philanthropy is focused on mitigation: how to reduce the emissions associated with climate change. There is also increasing interest in supporting adaptation. Adaptation is adjusting to the current catastrophe underway or avoiding future impacts. Adaptation is distinct yet interrelated with resilience, which is the capacity to cope with impacts. Adaptation requires adjusting the ecological, social, and economic systems on which humans depend and a fundamental shift in the structures and processes that are enabling the climate crisis in the first place (to avoid future harms).

Community-led adaptation works because solutions are:

1. **relevant** and **responsive** to a place (as impacts will be inherently place-based),
2. **durable** because they are created and owned by the community whose livelihoods depend on them,
3. **innovative** because they are not 'one size fits all', and
4. **just** because they build power among those most impacted by the climate crisis.

Adapting the food system

GRANTEE PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: DEVELOPMENT, RESEARCH, COMMUNICATIONS AND SERVICE CENTER



Pictured here: Mangrove plantation as part of disaster risk reduction in Sunderbans. Photo courtesy of DRCS.

The Development, Research, Communications and Service Center is supporting women's leadership in the flood-prone Sunderbans region of India. The group is building seed banks, training and implementing sustainable agriculture, and adding livestock to their farms. They recognize that seed banks are repositories of native saline- and flood-resistant crops, a part of an experimentation process as floods are expected to get worse and more frequent in the region.

To support the capacity of communities to respond in relevant and effective ways to the climate crisis, we can fund groups building community self-determination. For example, Red de Ambientalistas Comunitarios de El Salvador (RACDES) supports adaptation in communities by building resilient resource-use practices and the relationships needed to more creatively adapt to climate crises.

Recognizing the limitations of the legislative process in their local context, RACDES has built community stewardship around clean drinking water to ensure that the next climate-induced storm doesn't undermine access to a life-sustaining resource. The advocacy work of the Alianza Nacional contra la Privatización del Agua, of which RACDES is a part, has continued to prevent the privatization of water resources in El Salvador, increasing water access during increasingly water insecure years. RACDES is now recovering traditional farming practices and protecting water reservoirs as the climate crisis threatens food and water security. The group also held disaster-preparedness workshops to build community resilience in the face of the COVID pandemic and storm recovery, as well as prepare for future climate disasters.

Many of the strategies climate philanthropy supports - for both mitigation and adaptation - do not shift the underlying structures and systems that make communities more vulnerable to climate impacts in the first place. For example, climate-smart agriculture (CSA) was proposed to increase crop yields and income, while drawing down emissions. However, many approaches to CSA have been implemented in ways that disenfranchise small-scale farmers by creating dependencies on expensive seed, while making it easier for multinational, large agri-businesses to assume control over food systems. These implementations of CSA - without community leadership - are examples of climate adaptation strategies that increase vulnerability while reinforcing the food systems that greatly amplify the climate crisis.

Adapting the energy system

GRANTEE PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: DOORKOP COMMUNAL PROPERTY ASSOCIATION



Pictured here: solar panel installation by DCPAs community members. Photo courtesy of DCPA.

Mpumalanga in South Africa is experiencing high levels of unemployment, extreme climate impacts, and has a long history of land dispossession and displacement. Doornkop Communal Property Association is addressing its community's challenges by designing community-led climate adaptation and resilience-building programs. DCPA has fostered community governance of energy generation, waste management, and smart agro-processing, and has retrofitted infrastructure to keep buildings cooler.

Through its partnerships with other local groups and the municipality, DCPA has installed an 18-kilowatt solar energy system to power three communal buildings so they are independent from more unreliable state systems that can fail with the increasing instability of the climate crisis.

Communities advance systemic change with durable impact

As the grassroots response to the COVID pandemic has shown us, movements can quickly and effectively adapt to catastrophes through thoughtfully built systems of mutual aid and existing organizing infrastructure. As communities grapple with the deadly impacts of the climate crisis and its root causes, they respond with the ingenuity that comes from having the greatest stake in solutions. Moreover, responses aren't limited to narrow, bandaid action, but are systemic and sustainable, such as strengthening and adapting entire food systems.

For example, Haiti was once nutritionally self-sufficient, but now imports 70% of its food due to the enduring legacy of colonization and decades of impoverishing trade, aid, and development policies. The Haitian Platform to Advocate Alternative Development (PAPDA) is helping rural communities adapt by implementing agroecology and disaster preparedness across Haiti. The group is installing renewable energy sources, propagating local drought-resistant seed varieties, and building storm-resistant structures to prepare for future natural disasters. In responding to emergent climate threats, PAPDA is ensuring climate adaptation materially serves communities while simultaneously shifting the governance of energy and food systems so they are more bioregionally sustainable in the long run.

Reviving territory

GRANTEE PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: SAHYOG SANSTHAN



Pictured here: self-help group discussing a common pool of funds for members. Photo Courtesy of Thousand Currents.

Guided by the philosophy of self-governance and in response to climate-driven drought, Sahyog Sansthan organizes and educates farmers in sustainable farming practices and watershed management in one of the driest areas in Rajasthan, India. Their long-term monitoring, management, and accountability project revived a common pastureland in the region from drought conditions, which was then replicated in several other villages. Sahyog Sansthan's work has taken the guesswork out of agrarian planning, allowing local communities to farm and rear livestock throughout the year. This ensures access to sustainable livelihoods, income, and basic necessities for local families.

Resourcing community-led adaptation

Funders support locally-led climate adaptation work by:

1. **Dramatically increase funding to the thousands of grassroots movements** that are ensuring communities have the energy, food, and governance systems to innovate in response to unprecedented and rapid change. Funding needs to be unrestricted and multi-year to support flexible and self-determined adaptation.
2. **Support grassroots-led policies to scale adaptation solutions** (e.g., a farmer movement in Zimbabwe influencing the government to revise their food and nutrition policy to protect farmer-managed seed systems).
3. **Influence global investment mechanisms** that inform how billions in climate finance move to Global South countries.
4. **Lift up community-led adaptation solutions** in philanthropic spaces.

The scope of the climate catastrophe invites funders to invest in those with the greatest stake in solutions that support their survival, link to regional and global efforts, and shift the root drivers of the climate crisis. For more information about these solutions, contact the CLIMA Fund: [community\(at\)climasolutions.org](mailto:community(at)climasolutions.org).