

# Funding Grassroots Water Solutions

Water is life. Our global water systems are destabilizing due to the climate crisis and threatening the arteries of the planet. Droughts and floods are intensifying, the quality of groundwater is declining, and industry continues to pollute water sources with impunity. These shifts are threatening access to food, public health, and political stability while accelerating biodiversity loss and watershed degradation across critical landscapes. Grassroots climate justice movements are meeting these challenges head-on by restoring waterways in ways that reinforce landscape connectivity and long-term ecosystem integrity.

The CLIMA Fund is a collaboration between Global Greengrants Fund, Grassroots International, Thousand Currents, and Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism. The CLIMA Fund members pool expertise and funding infrastructure to resource grassroots-led climate solutions at scale. Collectively, we have 150 years of experience and have made over 25,000 grants.

## Grassroots movements are multi-solving

Grassroots-led water solutions are key to climate adaptation, as healthy ecosystems buffer against floods and droughts. When climate action is grounded in the experience, knowledge, and leadership of grassroots movements that directly address the root causes of the climate crisis, the results are transformative and durable. Movements that nurture healthy waterways advance:

- 1. Biodiversity protection:** Freshwater ecosystems support 10% of all known species, while covering less than 1% of the Earth's surface. Researchers found that the annual deforestation rate in Indigenous-governed areas is two to three times lower compared to similar, non-tenured areas in the Amazon.
- 2. Climate mitigation and adaptation:** Peatlands, mangroves, and wetlands store large amounts of carbon. Peatlands store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests combined, while covering only 3% of land.
- 3. Democratic processes:** Research shows that community-governed water systems reduce the likelihood of violent conflict in water-stressed regions.

Grassroots movements also advance public health goals (such as access to clean water, which lowers the risk of waterborne diseases) and gender equity (through increased school attendance for girls who no longer have to walk miles to find clean water).<sup>1</sup>

For conservation funders pursuing landscape-scale strategies, investing in community-led watershed governance reduces long-term risk.

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1. Women and girls collectively spend 200 million hours daily fetching water. One study from Tanzania found that school attendance increased by 12% when safe water was available within 15 minutes of their home. A similar study in Bangladesh found a 15% increase in school attendance.

Here is a snapshot of how our grassroots partners are uplifting Indigenous self-determination, advancing waterways restoration, strengthening food sovereignty, and lowering emissions.

### ***Uplifting Indigenous rights and strengthening community governance***

Supporting water health and watershed protection requires enforceable Indigenous rights, recognized land tenure for Indigenous communities, and locally-accountable governance of resources. Without legally-backed authority over land and water, communities cannot protect watersheds, prevent extraction, or implement restoration plans at scale. Globally, Indigenous-managed lands overlap with areas of highest biodiversity and intact freshwater systems.

In Honduras, extractive projects are harming Indigenous communities and their water sources. Since the early 1990s, **Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras / Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH)** has expelled dozens of illegal logging operations from the territories of the Lenca people of Honduras and recovered over 200 Indigenous communal land titles.



COPINH mobilized community members to speak out against the FMO, a Dutch development bank, for financing the construction of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam project. Photo by COPINH.

The world's large dams emit 104 million metric tons of methane annually from reservoir surfaces, turbines, and spillways. Dam methane emissions are responsible for at least 4% of the total global warming resulting from human activities. COPINH successfully forced major international financiers to withdraw from the notorious Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Dam project. The project threatened the sacred Gualcarque River and the livelihoods of the Indigenous Lenca communities. The Honduran Supreme Court tried and convicted David Castillo, CEO of the company behind the Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Project and a high-ranking military intelligence officer, for his involvement in the assassination of Berta Cáceres, the leader of COPINH. This conviction was a result of COPINH's tireless national and international efforts to seek justice for Berta Cáceres.

COPINH protected eight other communities from the harmful impacts of other dams and mega-projects, and expelled 30 sawmills from the western region of Honduras. The group successfully lobbied the Honduran government to ratify Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization. This legal framework guarantees Indigenous Peoples the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent for any development work proposed on their traditional lands, strengthening oversight of future infrastructure and extractive projects.

## ***Restoring water sources and reviving pastureland***

Grassroots movements are regenerating waterways and bringing back water to their communities. Access to clean drinking water and sources of irrigation is critical to food sovereignty. Community-led water management mitigates floods and ensures resilience in the face of droughts.

**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. Seeing the success of Sahyog Sansthan's work, communities in several other villages replicated their approach. Sahyog Sansthan's work has taken the guesswork out of agrarian planning, enabling local communities to farm and rear livestock year-round. As a result, community members have access to sustainable livelihoods, improved soil health, and enhanced water retention across the landscape.

**Zimbabwe Smallholder Organic Farmers Forum (ZIMSOFF)** and **Association of Zimbabwe Traditional Environmental Conservationists (AZTREC)** have successfully revived arid cattle-ranching land into rich, abundant food forests. Addressing significant soil degradation caused by poor livestock management, the Zimbabwean movements are ensuring adequate soil cover, preventing wind and water erosion, and managing water resources in ways that restore ecosystem function and biodiversity.



Zimbabwean movements engage farmers and government officials in a knowledge-sharing workshop. Photo by ZIMSOFF.

## ***Promoting sustainable livelihoods***

When water systems fail, harvests decline and livelihoods are lost. Degraded soil reduces the capacity of land to retain water during dry periods. Degraded soil is also unable to absorb water when it rains, leading to rapid runoff and flash flooding. Agroecology promotes soil health, creating resilience to droughts and flooding at the watershed scale.

Grassroots movements like the **Red Nacional de Mujeres Productoras de la Agricultura Familiar (RENAF)** are promoting agroecology and community governance of water resources to ensure resilience and sustainable livelihoods. RENAF brings together 19 organizations led by women farmers from the Peruvian coast, the Andes, and the Amazon. RENAF is uplifting women's role in agriculture and advocating for the protection of agrarian interests at the local, state, and national levels in Peru. As a result of RENAF's advocacy and a national agricultural strike organized by RENAF and its allies, the Peruvian government increased spending in the agricultural sector by 11%. The group is advocating for women farmers' land rights and for the sustainable management of water resources through hydroponics and artisanal fishing, contributing to diversified and climate-resilient food systems.

To learn more about how you can resource grassroots-led water justice work, please get in touch with us at [community@climasolutions.org](mailto:community@climasolutions.org).