



**CLIMA Fund**  
RESOURCING GRASSROOTS CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

# 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, Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism, and Youth Climate Justice Fund**. The CLIMA Fund members pool expertise and funding infrastructure to resource grassroots-led climate solutions at scale. Collectively, we have 130+ 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:

- **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.
- **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.

- **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.

Here is a snapshot of how our grassroots partners are increasing climate resilience, restoring biodiversity, strengthening sustainable livelihoods, and protecting freshwater ecosystems.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

# Increasing climate resilience through watershed restoration

## 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 without being dependent on erratic rainfall. As a result, community members have access to sustainable livelihoods, improved soil health, and enhanced water retention across the landscape.





## Restoring biodiversity through land regeneration

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.

**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. ZIMSOFF and AZTREC restore soil to act like a sponge: storing carbon, holding rainwater, and releasing it during dry periods, reducing both floods and droughts. Their work restores critical vegetation cover and biodiversity.



## Promoting sustainable livelihoods through policy change

**Grassroots movements like the Red Nacional de Mujeres Productoras de la Agricultura Familiar (RENAF) are influencing national policy to improve how water is allocated and used in Peru's agriculture sector.**

Through coordinated advocacy and a national agricultural strike, **RENAF** and its allies secured an 11% increase in public agricultural spending. This shift in public investment has strengthened the adoption of low-input farming practices that reduce water demand and limit contamination of local water sources by avoiding the use of harmful fertilizers. By promoting agroecology and community governance of water resources within national policy frameworks, RENAF is helping direct resources towards peasant-led farming systems that improve soil moisture retention, reduce runoff, and protect watersheds from degradation.

Bringing 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. The group is strengthening 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. As a result, there is reduced pressure on water sources and greater resilience to water scarcity.



## Protecting freshwater ecosystems through Indigenous 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, **Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras / Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH)** has [recovered over 200 Indigenous communal land titles](#) and stopped large-scale extractive projects, including the notorious Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Dam project. The project threatened the sacred

Gualcarque River and the livelihoods of the Indigenous Lenca communities. Stopping the dam preserved the natural flow of the river and safeguarded communities' access to their territories and clean water. 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, including those with the potential to pollute or privatize sources of water.

**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).**



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