

Youth Climate Funding Study

MAPPING THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE
FOR YOUTH-LED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

A JOINT REPORT BY:



climateworks
FOUNDATION

Executive Summary

The 2025 Youth Climate Funding Study builds on the seminal 2022 Youth Climate Justice Study to deepen understanding of the funding experiences of youth-led climate organizations. Combining a quantitative analysis of climate-related grants from 2022 to 2024 with in-depth interviews with youth organizers and ecosystem actors, the study maps current flows of philanthropic funding to youth-led groups, identifies persistent barriers that youth groups are facing in accessing funding and capacity-building support, and explores opportunities for philanthropy to more effectively resource youth-led climate justice efforts.

Key Findings

- **Youth-led climate movements remain drastically underfunded.** Between 2022 and 2024, just 0.96% of grants from major climate foundations supported youth-led climate initiatives.
- **Modest progress, but limited scale.** While funding to youth-led groups from these foundations has doubled from US\$42.5 million (2019-2021) to US\$85.9 million (2022-2024), the number of grants and funders supporting this work grew only marginally. In contrast, overall foundation funding for climate mitigation tripled during the same period, highlighting a lag in support for youth-led efforts.
- **Stark geographic disparities in funding persist.** While youth-led climate movements are underfunded worldwide, U.S.-based organizations receive a disproportionate share of available philanthropic support. Closing this gap would require an estimated US\$381 million in annual funding to youth-led groups in other countries.
- **Justice-focused funding remains limited.** Just 11.7% of climate mitigation grants from major climate foundations over the past three years focused on addressing climate justice.

Recommendations

Drawing on the study's quantitative findings and in-depth interviews with youth-led groups and partners within the climate philanthropy ecosystem, we offer the following recommendations for how philanthropy can more effectively support youth-led climate justice movements:



FOR PHILANTHROPIC INSTITUTIONS

- Provide flexible, multi-year funding to enable strategic, long-term organizing
- Co-create with youth movements and youth-led funds to invest in relationships, not just outcomes, and provide consistent mentorship, not just funding, to help groups build over time
- Include young leaders at all decision-making levels, from advisory boards to strategy setting, to shift power by ensuring youth are decision-makers in funding processes



FOR REGRANTERS AND MOVEMENT BUILDERS

- Invest in capacity development through training, mentorship, and infrastructure support
- Facilitate networks and convenings to build collective power and shared learning
- Support partnerships and peer-learning spaces to reduce competition and foster solidarity

Youth-led climate movements are already doing the work to drive progress on climate and socio-environmental goals - educating communities, defending ecosystems, and advancing justice on the ground - often with little to no support. Yet, current philanthropic structures overlook their leadership and constrain their potential. This is a critical moment for philanthropy - supporting youth-led climate action is not only about increasing funding, it is also about transforming how funding works. That means centering trust, flexibility, and equity, and affirming youth not as beneficiaries, but as co-creators of climate solutions. Grounded in data and lived experience, the Youth Climate Funding Study calls for urgent, systemic changes in how climate philanthropy engages youth-led movements, and offers a pathway toward a more just, inclusive, and impactful funding future.

Key Terms and Definitions

To guide the analysis and ensure consistency, the following key terms were defined for the study:

Youth-Led:

Organizations and initiatives in which young people (aged 35 and under) hold decision-making power and drive strategy, vision, and implementation. This includes both formal organizations and informal collectives. The definition of “youth” is understood to vary across cultural, social, and geographic contexts; this framing adopts an inclusive interpretation to acknowledge the diverse experiences and roles of youth globally.

Climate Justice:

Solutions, campaigns, and projects that address the climate crisis by jointly tackling underrepresentation, exploitation, and oppression, while enhancing community power, equity, and justice.

Youth-Led Climate Movements:

Collective efforts led by young people to advance climate action and social justice through organizing, advocacy, direct action, and community-building. These movements are often transnational in nature, grounded in grassroots mobilization, and operate at the intersections of climate, human rights, and equity.

Ecosystem Partners:

Funders, movement support organizations, and re-granting intermediaries working to support youth-led movements.

Contents

Foreword by Youth Climate Justice Fund	06
Foreword by ClimateWorks Foundation	07
Introduction	08
Methodology	10
Section 1: State of funding for youth-led climate movements	11
Section 2: Global divides in funding accessibility	17
Section 3: State of funding for climate justice	23
Section 4: Recommendations for the philanthropic landscape	27
Acknowledgements	30
Citations	31

Foreword

FROM YOUTH CLIMATE JUSTICE FUND

In 2021, at COP26 in Glasgow, youth climate activists - in partnership with the Children's Investment Fund Foundation - commissioned the first Youth Climate Justice Study to document the lived experiences of youth-led climate justice movements worldwide. The findings were a wake-up call: only 0.76% of grant funding from the largest climate foundations was going to youth-led climate initiatives. Youth movements were severely underfunded and lacking the long-term, flexible support they needed to thrive.

These findings helped catalyze the creation of the Youth Climate Justice Fund (YCJF) - a global, participative fund committed to resourcing youth-led climate justice groups through flexible, trust-based funding and capacity-strengthening support. Since our launch in 2023, we have channeled over US\$5 million directly to more than 100 youth-led organizations worldwide - groups leading climate education, defending ecosystems, and advocating for their communities, particularly in the Global South. They exemplify what it means to create just, inclusive, and locally rooted climate solutions.

Alongside this progress, however, we are also witnessing a troubling erosion of democratic spaces across the globe. We hear from groups we support about their governments passing laws to curtail freedom of speech and see news about violent crackdowns on protests and increasing censorship. The civic infrastructure that supports youth power is under pressure, and young people are finding it more difficult to organize, advocate, and mobilize their communities.

And yet, youth remains a rising force. Across the globe, young leaders continue to demand climate accountability from governments and advance innovative solutions to the impacts of climate change in their communities.

Since the publication of the first Youth Climate Justice Study, we have also witnessed progress in the philanthropic space. More funders are recognizing the power of youth and funding youth-led organizations. But this still only represents a small fraction of overall climate philanthropy.

We believe that movements, not projects, are what drive durable change. And movements need more than just funding - they need spaces to grow and systems of support. Here, philanthropy has a unique opportunity - to nurture movements by investing not only in organizations, but also in the infrastructure of connection. Philanthropy can forge equal partnership with youth by centering youth-led movements within climate strategies.

As the Youth Climate Justice Fund grows, we remain deeply committed to centering youth in all that we do. We invite funders to rise to this moment by funding youth movements boldly, and standing beside youth to build a just, climate-resilient future.



Nathan Méténier
Co-Executive
Director



Joshua Amponsem
Co-Executive
Director

Foreword

FROM CLIMATEWORKS FOUNDATION

Climate change is no longer a distant threat – it is a crisis unfolding all around us. From record-breaking heat waves to devastating floods, climate impacts are already disrupting lives and livelihoods, particularly in communities that have contributed the least to the problem and often have the fewest resources to respond.

We cannot afford to further delay action. Many of the solutions we need already exist, and every fraction of a degree of warming avoided saves lives and secures a more livable future. What's needed now is bold, sustained investments to put them into practice, and to ensure that the benefits reach the people and places most affected.

Here, philanthropy has a critical and catalytic role to play. It can move quickly, take smart risks, pilot new approaches, and help unlock larger flows of public and private capital.

At ClimateWorks Foundation, we believe that effective climate philanthropy is collaborative and rooted in equity. Our experience shows that impact in terms of ambitious and durable climate action is greatest when funders support holistic approaches that connect climate with what people care about – health, justice, and economic opportunity – and that multi-year, flexible support is the most effective way to enable locally-led organizations to deliver long-term results for their communities.

Youth-led movements exemplify this approach. Across the world, young people are not just calling for action – they are leading it. They are organizing, advocating, and delivering real results in their communities. They bring fresh ideas, deep local insight, and an unwavering commitment to justice.

Yet, youth-led efforts continue to be significantly underfunded, receiving only a small share of climate philanthropy.

This represents both a challenge and a clear opportunity. Supporting youth-led movements is one of the most direct ways philanthropy can drive inclusive climate action. These groups are well-positioned to build trust in their communities, respond to intersecting challenges, and push for the kind of transformational change we urgently need.

ClimateWorks is proud to have supported the first Youth Climate Justice Study and to be a founding partner of the Youth Climate Justice Fund. Together, we are building a funding ecosystem that centers equity, trust, and intergenerational collaboration. As this new study shows, progress is underway – but more is needed. We encourage funders to join us in acting boldly by increasing support for youth-led efforts, shifting power toward those most affected, and investing in climate solutions that are holistic, community-driven, and collaboratively designed.

The climate crisis demands ambitious, collaborative, and inclusive action. By standing with the next generation of climate leaders, together we can build a sustainable and equitable future for all.



Helen Mountford
President & CEO

Introduction

A Critical Moment to Fund Youth-Led Climate Action

Across the globe, youth-led movements are driving ambitious, creative, and community-rooted responses to the climate crisis. They are shifting global narratives, influencing policy, and holding decision-makers to account. Young people have already reshaped climate history – the [fossil fuel divestment movement](#) sparked a global shift in public and private finance, laying the groundwork for the Paris Climate Agreement. In South Korea, Colombia, Germany, and most recently at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) – the world’s highest court with global jurisdiction, youth activists have successfully used litigation to defend their right to a healthy climate, winning landmark constitutional cases.¹ A recent, watershed ruling at the ICJ affirmed that developing nations have the right to seek damages and compensation for the impacts of climate change. Indigenous and frontline youth leaders are also leading resistance against major fossil fuel infrastructure projects like the East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), mobilizing global campaigns and demanding accountability from political leaders.²

This moment presents a powerful opportunity to strengthen and expand these efforts. From [securing the inclusion of disability rights](#) in Nepal’s national climate commitments, to [restoring native species](#) in Brazil’s Caatinga biome – youth organizers are already advancing climate solutions that are deeply rooted in justice, equity, and community well-being. Young people are not waiting for change – they are making it happen. Their work sits at the intersection of environmental protection and social transformation – confronting systems of marginalization while building resilient, people-centered alternatives.

We are at a critical juncture. The climate crisis is intensifying, civic space is shrinking, and democratic institutions face mounting threats. At the same time, half of the global population is under the age of 30 – a figure even higher in many regions of the Global South, where climate impacts are most acute.³ Failing to support youth leadership at this time would only undermine the strength, legitimacy, and long-term success of the climate movement.

Now is the time to invest boldly in the vision, leadership, and capacity of youth-led climate movements. With the right support, these movements can help shape a more just and sustainable future for all.

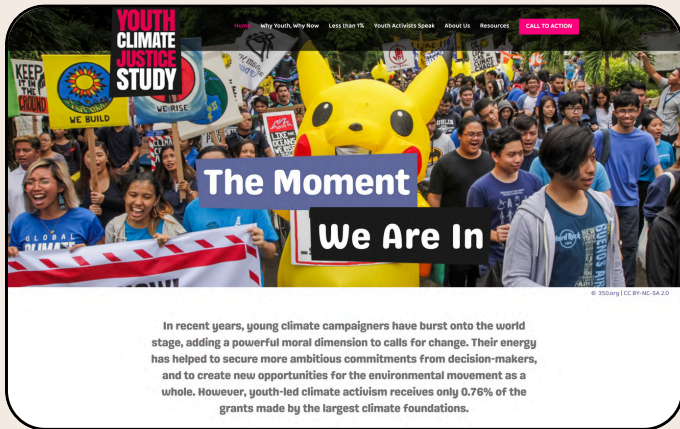
¹ (Bustos, 2018; Eddy, 2021; Rashid, 2024; Stallard & Rannard, 2025)

² (Katushabe, 2025)

³ (*The Global Picture*, n.d.)

Progress Since the 2022 Youth Climate Justice Study

Following the COP26 summit in Glasgow and in partnership with the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation, young climate leaders commissioned the inaugural [Youth Climate Justice Study](#). Conducted in 2022, the study marked a seminal effort to document the funding experiences of youth-led climate justice movements worldwide. It revealed systemic funding inequities and identified key barriers that constrain the work of youth climate movements. It also laid the groundwork for understanding how philanthropy often overlooks these movements, particularly those led by youth in the Global South and Indigenous communities.



The 2022 study was conceived not only as a research initiative, but also as a practical advocacy tool. Grounded in data and the lived experiences of youth organizers across diverse regions, it was presented as an open-access resource that young activists could use to make a compelling case for investing in youth-led climate action – whether engaging with donors, building partnerships, or influencing policy agendas.

Notably, the study helped to catalyze new approaches to resourcing youth movements, including the launch of the [Youth Climate Justice Fund](#) (YCJF), which supports youth climate justice groups with flexible, trust-based funding, resources and capacity strengthening.

The 2025 Youth Climate Funding Study

The updated 2025 Youth Climate Funding Study builds on this foundation with a sharper focus to:

- Understand how accessible and sufficient funding is for youth-led climate justice movements
- Assess the role of capacity development, trust-building, and non-financial support in strengthening these organizations

With quantitative analytical support from [The Hour Is Late](#), this study examined climate-related grant data from 2022 to 2024 to assess recent funding flows for youth-led climate action. By combining this quantitative analysis with interviews from youth-led organizations across diverse regions and thematic areas and ecosystem actors such as funders and intermediaries, the study aims to inform and influence donor practices toward more transparent, flexible, and youth-centered funding models.

Methodology



Figure 1. Regions, themes, and approaches of youth-led groups interviewed for the 2025 Youth Climate Funding Study

To assess the scale and distribution of funding for youth-led climate movements, the study conducted a quantitative analysis of climate-related grants made by leading climate philanthropy institutions. The Hour Is Late carried out the analysis using data provided by the ClimateWorks Foundation, applying the same methodology as the 2022 study to identify grants directed to youth-led groups versus other climate actors. The analysis also examined trends across geography, issue area, and organizational type to highlight disparities in how youth movements are supported within the broader climate funding ecosystem.

To supplement the quantitative analysis with firsthand insights, semi-structured interviews were also conducted between March and June 2025 with 15 youth organizers from diverse geographic regions and working on various thematic areas within the youth-led climate space (Figure 1); and 10 ecosystem partners - funders, movement support organizations, and re-granting intermediaries - who provided broader context on the evolving funding landscape and how youth-led groups are currently being supported. Interviewees were identified through the Youth Climate Justice Fund’s networks. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes and followed a consistent guide, while allowing space for open-ended discussion. Interviewees shared stories, reflections, and concrete recommendations to inform future strategy, particularly in relation to funding equity, power dynamics, and long-term sustainability. These insights directly shaped the analysis and recommendations presented in this study.

State of funding for youth-led climate movements

The Youth Climate Funding Gap

Despite growing recognition of the critical role youth play in driving climate action and justice, philanthropic support for youth-led climate action remains alarmingly low. In 2023, less than 2% of total global philanthropic funding was directed toward climate change mitigation.⁴

Within that limited pool, youth-led climate justice initiatives occupy an even smaller share. Of the grants made by the largest climate foundations between 2022 and 2024, just 0.96% supported youth-led climate justice efforts (Figure 2).

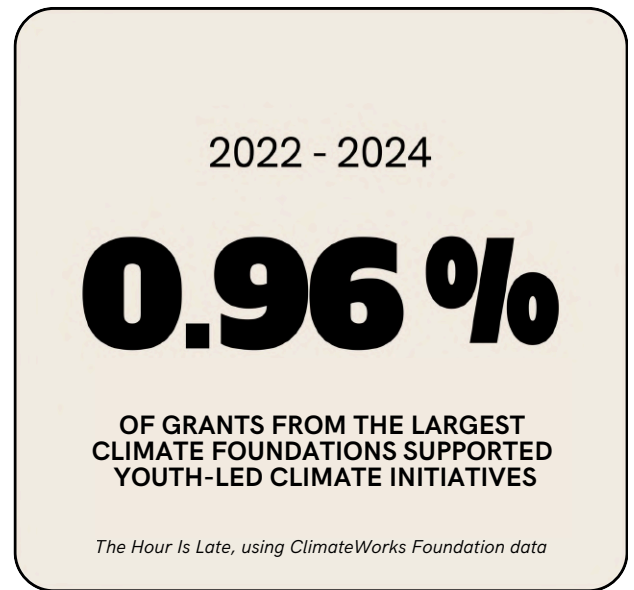


Figure 2: Percentage of grants from the largest climate foundations that supported youth-led climate initiatives between 2022-2024

Over the three-year period from 2022 to 2024, 41 of the largest climate foundations made a total of 307 grants worth US\$85.9 million to youth-led climate organizing. Of this, nearly three-quarters of the foundations - 29 in total - made five or fewer youth-focused grants. These figures highlight a **lack of strategic focus on supporting youth leadership in climate action**. Supporting youth-led movements remains a niche focus rather than a core funding priority. As young people continue to mobilize transformative climate solutions around the world, this funding gap underscores the urgent need for more sustained, scaled, and strategic support.

"We're young people yes, but if you don't have government in the room, you don't have private sector who have some money in the room, and you don't have the actual community leaders who are able to influence and get these things done, then we'll just be doing these exercises in futility."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, KENYA

"One of the assumptions about [youth-led] work that comes from 'above' is that the work can keep going on with or without resources and that is simply not true. There were times when we didn't have money, we simply couldn't work."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, ECUADOR

⁴ (Esmaili et al., 2024)

Comparing Youth Climate Funding Trends

A comparison of grant-making data from the previous study shows modest but meaningful progress. While **youth-led climate action still receives less than 1% of total climate philanthropy** - highlighting a persistent funding gap - support for youth-led organizing has doubled, growing from **US\$42.5 million between 2019–2021 to US\$85.9 million between 2022–2024**.

However, the number of grants and foundations supporting this work showed modest growth. Between 2022 and 2024, 41 climate foundations made 307 grants - only a slight increase compared to the 221 grants made by 37 foundations between 2019 and 2021.

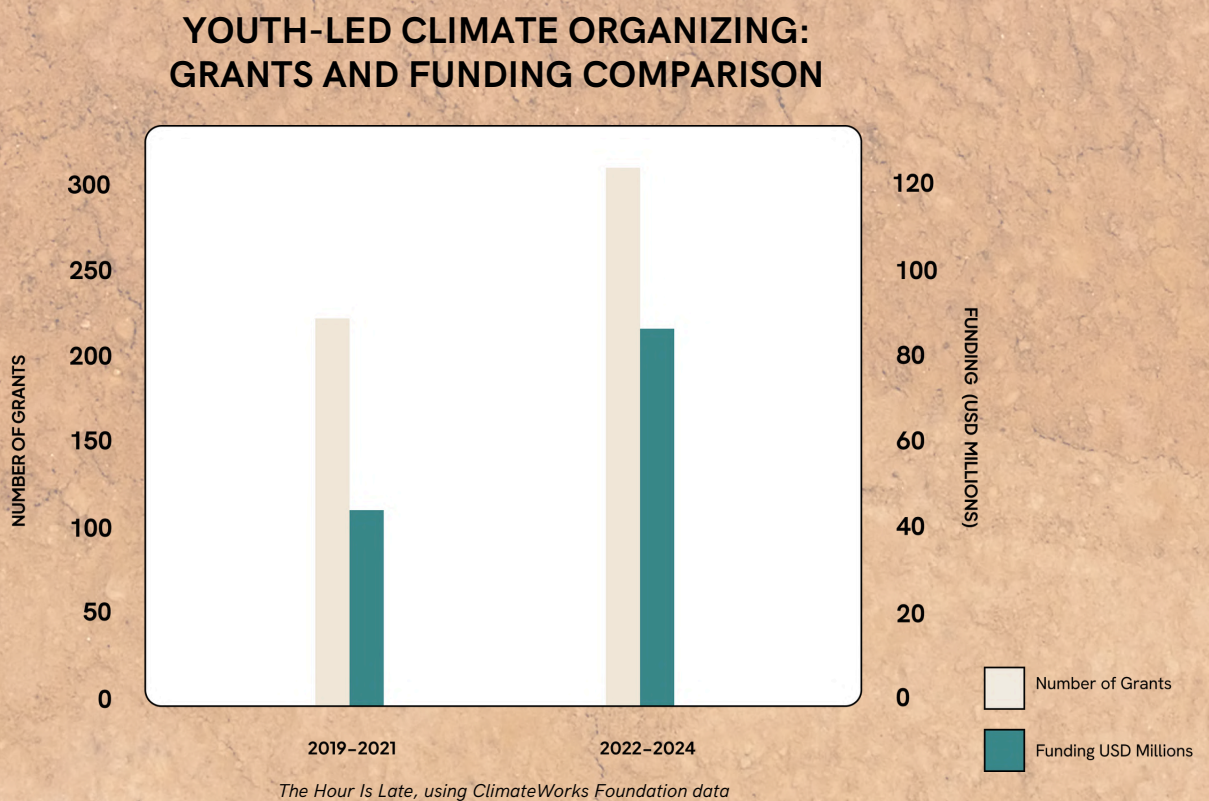


Figure 3. A comparison of the number of grants and share of funding from major climate foundations to youth-led climate initiatives between 2019-2021 and 2022-2024

Challenges Faced by Youth in Acquiring Funding for Climate Work

Across interviews, youth organizers consistently emphasized the significant challenges they face in accessing funding, particularly as new or unregistered groups. Without a prior track record, legal registration, or fiscal infrastructure, many youth-led movements are excluded from funding opportunities that typically favor established NGOs with formal structures.

Traditional funding mechanisms also often entail intensive documentation requirements, rigid programmatic restrictions, and micro-grant ceilings that demand significant administrative effort but offer limited support for building the long-term or core capacities of youth groups. The scarcity of multi-year or scaled funding opportunities further compounds these challenges, making it difficult for youth-led groups to sustain, grow, or deepen their impact over time.

Youth Voices on the Funding Landscape

"Even though they said our idea is good, our proposal is great, and our budget is well detailed, they still turned us down because their strategy is to only approve groups that have managed big funds before. I don't think that's fair."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, TUNISIA

"Connecting with funders is not just about getting funding from them, but also about having support to overcome organizational challenges."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, MOZAMBIQUE

More Support Needed to Strengthen Philanthropic Landscape for Youth

Youth organizers identified several areas of support that would significantly enhance their ability to grow and sustain their work. Chief among these was the need for unrestricted, flexible funding, alongside targeted capacity building – particularly in grant writing, project design, and the administrative skills needed to meet complex donor compliance requirements.

Flexible, unrestricted funding, which allows youth groups to decide how best to allocate resources rather than tying funding to a specific project, was described as essential for moving away from donor-driven models of support and towards youth-led approaches grounded in local priorities. It allows youth groups to define their own agendas, rather than reshaping their work to meet rigid grant conditions. For the many youth groups operating in resource-constrained environments, flexible support makes it possible for groups to invest in staffing, communications, and organizational development – core infrastructure needs that are often excluded from traditional project-based funding. Flexible funding is also a matter of trust: it shifts decision-making power to young organizers, recognizing them as strategic leaders, not just implementers.

At the same time, capacity-building support is critical for youth-led organizations to manage donor funding requirements. Regardless of their impact on the ground, a group's ability to meet technical requirements – such as proposal writing, financial reporting, and compliance – can ultimately determine whether they are eligible for funding support. Several youth leaders also emphasized the importance of mentorship from experienced organizers who can help navigate legal, regulatory, and institutional barriers, which are often opaque to newer or informal groups.

"I think having mentorship from elders in the movement is really important. [...] There are small things that only people who've been doing this for a long time know. To avoid those pitfalls, it's crucial to be aware of them. But it's also difficult for international funders to know these details, because they're very specific to local contexts."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, MALAYSIA

Why Climate Funding for Youth Groups Matters

Youth groups are on the front lines of climate action, particularly in communities already facing environmental, economic, and social vulnerabilities. Because they are deeply embedded in the communities they serve, they offer critical forms of support – emotional, social, and practical – that help sustain grassroots organizing. And despite being chronically underfunded and often overlooked by philanthropy, youth movements consistently bring lived experiences, local legitimacy, and creative, community-rooted solutions to the table.

"Sometimes it's the small things we overlook that actually give the most support to the resistance that's growing in these [historically marginalized] territories – especially in the community we're working in."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, PERU

"One is just for funders – and allies as well – to realize that having youth-led movements is very important, because these are the people on the ground. Sometimes we're in a sense, invisible, because there's no media coverage on what these young people are doing for their communities day in and day out."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, FIJI

Without sufficient and sustained financial support, many youth-led organizations operate on volunteer labor – advancing critical climate action despite struggling to access even small grants, often at the expense of their personal wellbeing. But youth-led groups have consistently shown that even limited funding can go a long way. They are creative, nimble, and deeply rooted in place, allowing them to stretch every dollar, act quickly, and deliver real results.

Critically, youth leaders emphasized that support is not just about the amount of funding – it's also about how that funding is delivered. Flexible, trust-based support, long-term capacity strengthening, opportunities for peer learning, and consistent engagement all play a vital role in creating a collaborative philanthropic ecosystem. Beyond simply writing bigger checks – building strong, responsive relationships with donors is what truly enables youth-led groups to thrive.

“A lot of the time, it’s not just about receiving money – it’s about feeling like there’s foundational support from funders, and that funders see them on equal footing, even if the power dynamic isn’t the same. And I think that can only happen through actually speaking to young people – understanding what they need, who they are as people, why they care about the issues they’re advocating for, and what gaps the funding can help fill. I also think there might be things the philanthropic organization sees that the youth group doesn’t – and being able to support them with that is important.”

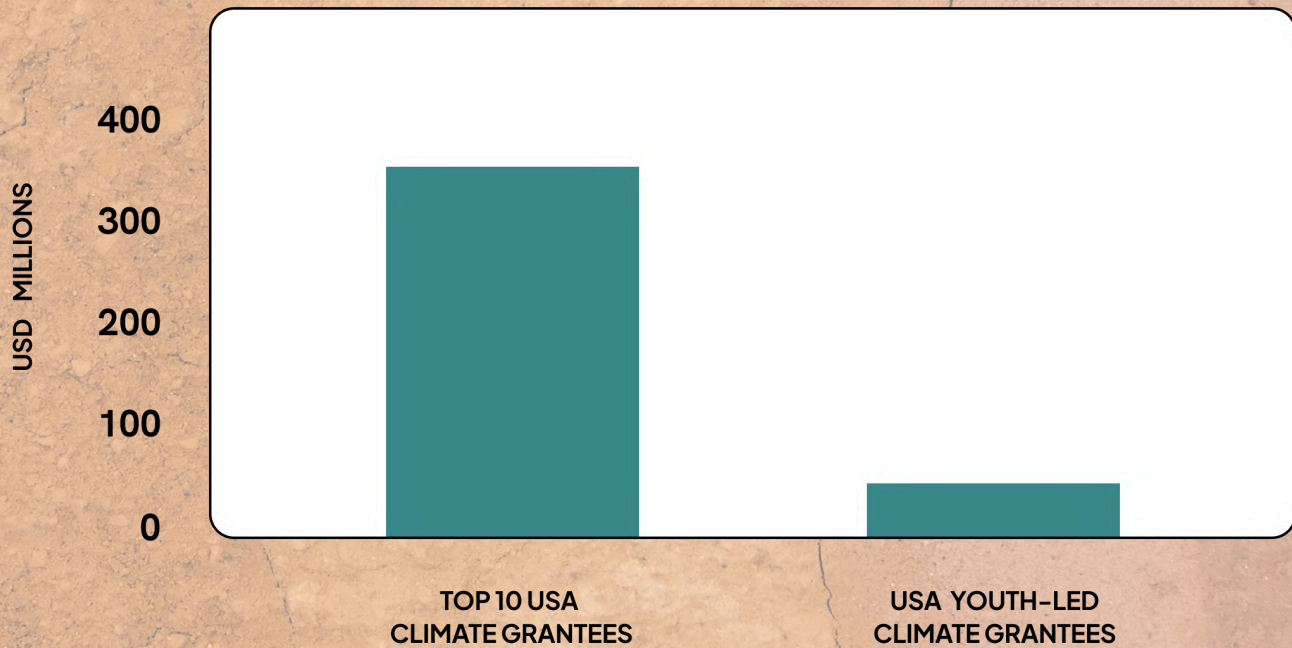
- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, NIGERIA

“We are proof that a small funding allocated in the right place can have a huge impact.”

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, BRAZIL

Global divides in funding accessibility

CLIMATE GRANTS FOR WORK IN THE USA BETWEEN 2022-2024



The Hour Is Late, using ClimateWorks Foundation data

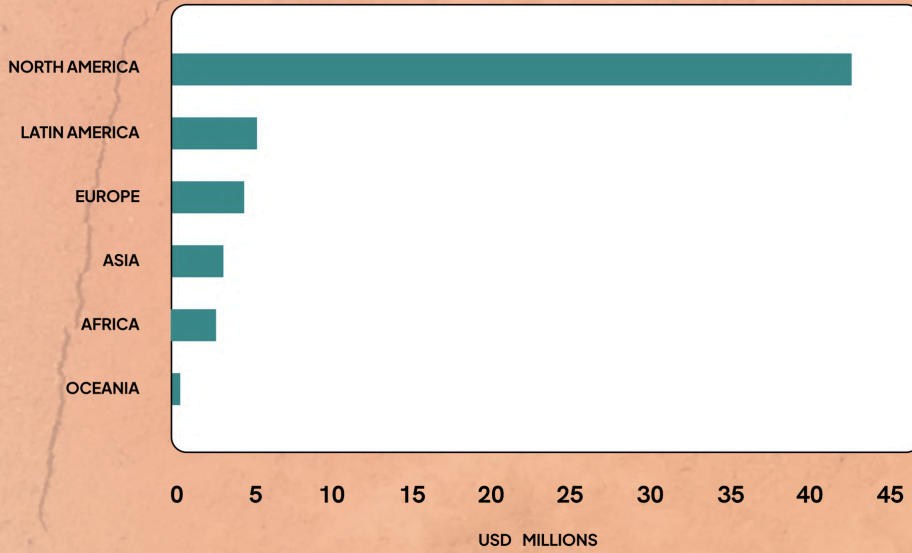
Figure 4. Comparison of major climate foundation grants to the top 10 U.S. climate grantees versus all U.S. youth-led climate grantees between 2022-2024

U.S.-Based Youth Climate Leaders Face Stark Funding Disparities

In the United States alone, youth-led climate organizing in the country continues to be significantly underfunded compared to larger, more established climate organizations. **Between 2022-2024, the top 10 U.S.-based climate grantees collectively received more than eight times the funding directed to all U.S. youth-led climate justice efforts.** This imbalance highlights how much of the climate funding ecosystem continues to favor larger, well-resourced institutions, leaving grassroots youth-led movements struggling to access sustained support.

Global Disparities in Funding Inequities

YOUTH-LED ORGANIZING GRANTS BY CONTINENT



Looking at youth-led climate organizing grants by region reveals stark geographic imbalances in philanthropic support. Youth-led groups in North America received by far the largest share of funding, followed distantly by Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, while Oceania saw almost no funding at all. This disparity highlights how much of the youth climate movement in the Global South remains under-resourced.

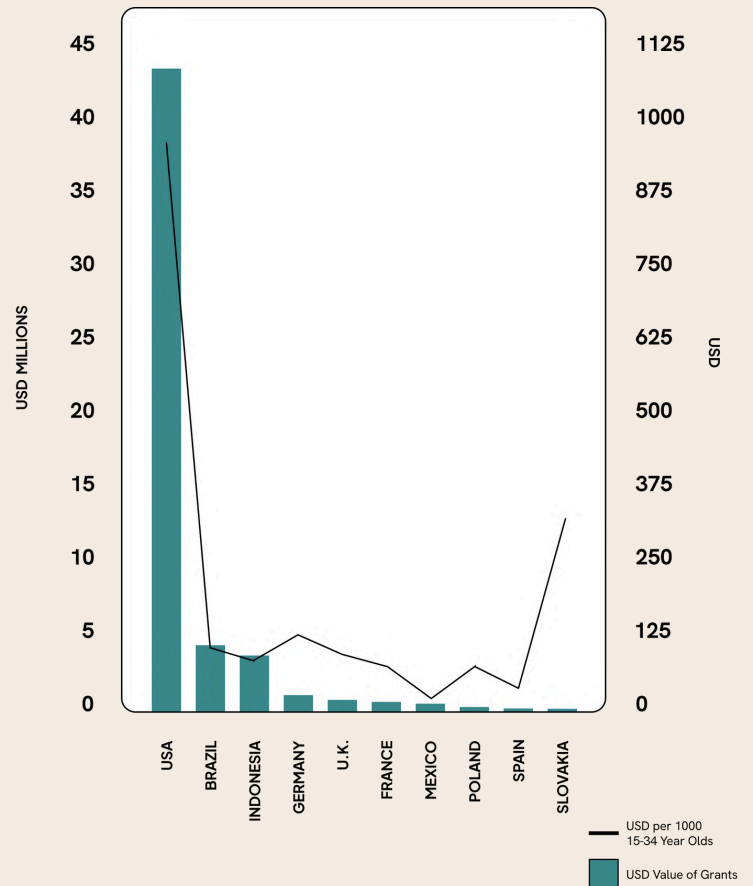
The Hour Is Late, using ClimateWorks Foundation data

Figure 5. A comparison of youth-led organizing grants by continent

When comparing funding for youth-led groups across countries, U.S.-based organizations received by far the largest share among the top 10 countries tracked (Figure 6). **If youth-led climate organizing in other countries were funded at the same level as in the United States, an additional US\$381 million in foundation grants would be needed each year to close the gap.** This highlights both the scale of the shortfall and the opportunity for more equitable investment worldwide.

Taken together, the analyses reveal a significant lack of funding for youth-led work, especially for efforts in the Global South, and underscore the urgent need to rebalance climate funding toward youth-led movements in the regions most affected by the climate crisis.

TOP 10 COUNTRIES 2022-2024



The Hour Is Late, using ClimateWorks Foundation data

Figure 6. Youth-led organizing grants in the top 10 funded countries, compared with grant funding adjusted for youth population size (funding per 1,000 people aged 15-34)

Challenges Facing Global South Youth Organizers

Youth-led groups based in the Global South that we interviewed frequently cited structural inequities in funding accessibility. Many pointed to systemic barriers such as language, limited connections to funders, heavy compliance burdens, and banking or logistical inefficiencies, which excludes them from funding opportunities. They also noted that youth in the Global North - or even Global South nationals based there - often have easier access to platforms, funding calls, and institutional visibility. The dominance of English in donor communications and applications further creates an uneven playing field, making it difficult for groups without strong English proficiency to navigate funding processes and build meaningful relationships with donors.

"Being physically present [in the Global North] gives them access to universities, talks, institutions, and meetings where their work can be featured - opportunities that aren't currently available to many organizations in the Global South. So having an introduction, support with invitation letters, and access to the resources needed to make that trip and be in global organizing spaces can be incredibly helpful."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, INDIA

"For many Africans, English is not their native language. Some speak Swahili, and there are many other native languages. Not all youths can understand or are comfortable applying to donors and filling out applications in English or French."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, TUNISIA

Youth groups in the Global South are disproportionately affected by the problems with traditional philanthropy that all youth groups face. A donor-centric approach with rigid application criteria and project frameworks can be especially exclusionary for young organizers whose lived experiences and local realities do not align with pre-defined funding models. Even when these youth bring deep community knowledge and firsthand experience, gaps in technical capacity - such as proposal writing or navigating policy language - can limit their eligibility. These layered inequities highlight the need not just for more funding, but for support that is fairer, more accessible, and rooted in local contexts.

Overlooked Youth Communities in the Global North

And while funding inequities remain stark in the Global South, it is also important to recognize the systemic exclusion that affects many youth communities in the Global North. Black, Indigenous, Romani, and queer youth organizers working on the climate crisis in high-income countries often also operate with limited resources and are frequently sidelined in funding conversations. In interviews, youth organizers emphasized that geographic location can create misleading assumptions about access, infrastructure, or privilege – masking the realities of groups who remain significantly underfunded despite living in high-income countries.

“Communicating to funders who want to support Indigenous communities in the Global South or in South America – but not Indigenous communities in northern Canada – can be difficult. These communities are left very isolated, because there’s this idea that just because they’re in Canada, they have access to things, when they really don’t.”

- ECOSYSTEM PARTNER, CANADA



Specific Types of Support Needed

Support needed to address these inequities, as suggested by interviewees, includes strategically targeted funding that prioritizes organizations and communities often underrepresented or facing systemic barriers within the global climate funding ecosystem. Many interviewees also emphasized the **critical role of youth-led funds** in channeling resources more equitably, providing accessible entry points for grassroots groups, and ensuring funding structures are responsive to the realities young organizers face. Such focused investment is not only essential for addressing existing inequalities but also serves as a strategic approach to strengthen and diversify the global youth climate movement, making it more representative, resilient, and effective in delivering climate justice.

To support meaningful inclusion in global spaces, youth groups also emphasized the importance of donor assistance with travel support, visa processes, and exposure opportunities. Youth organizers operating in restricted civic spaces also highlighted the need for emergency and safety resources, such as activist protection funds.

"Accessing protection for activists is very difficult. For example, if we want to hire a lawyer to represent us in court when we are being criminalized by the police because we want to defend our land, it's really pricey. It's a high price. And as activists, we don't really have full-time jobs. We don't have access to sufficient funds to protect ourselves."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, INDONESIA

"Capacity building is definitely a big one. Even though we have lived experiences as youth from a frontline community that really faces the devastating effects of climate change, there are still some technical things we don't know - like policies that we don't fully understand."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, ETHIOPIA

Finally, many youth leaders called for co-created capacity strengthening and longer-term accompaniment, which could help shift power and increase youth-led groups' readiness for larger grants. When donors take the time to understand local contexts, they are better able to tailor their support to the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities of youth-led efforts. This relationship-building creates space for co-learning, responsiveness, and more equitable partnerships that enable youth-led climate justice movements to thrive.

State of funding for climate justice

GRANT FUNDING FOR JUSTICE-FOCUSED WORK AND YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES 2022-2024

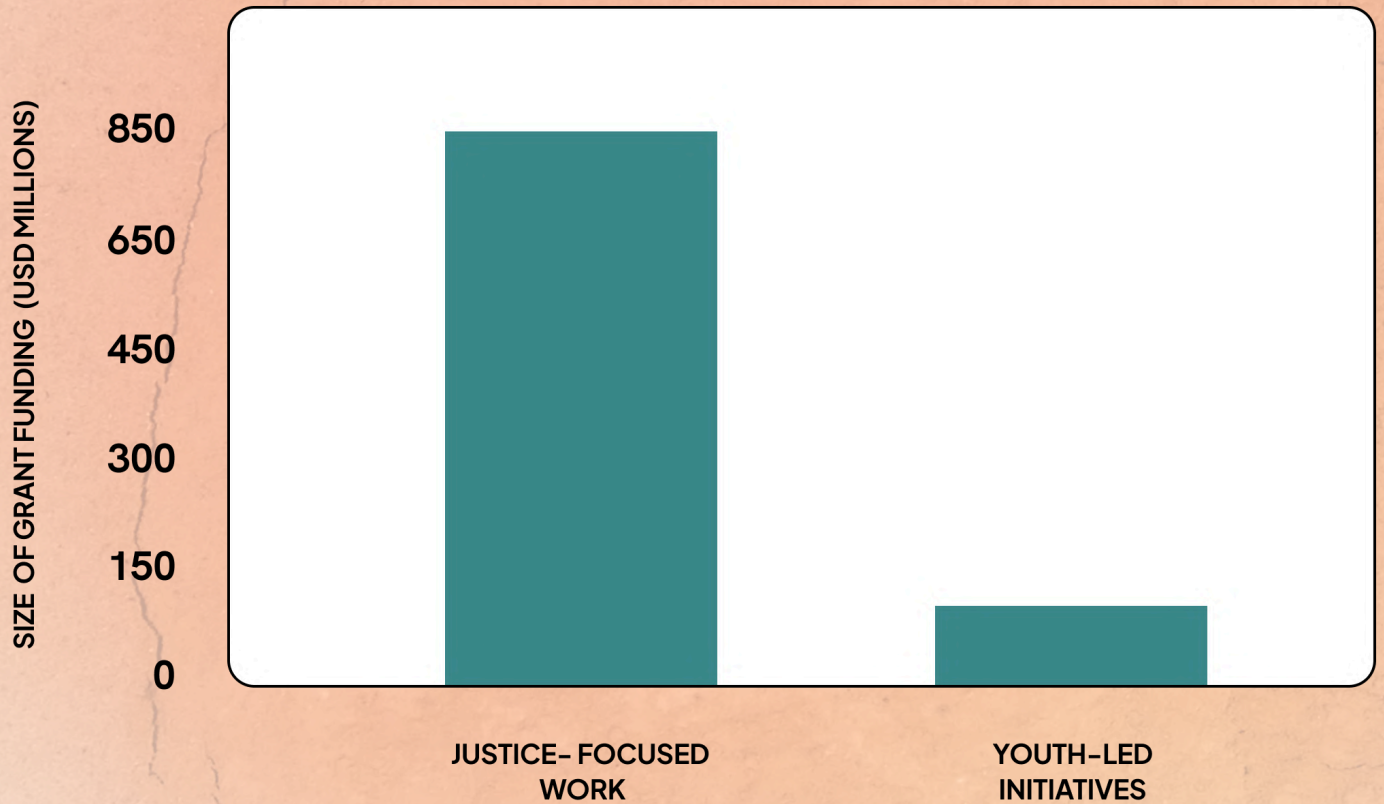


Figure 7. Grant funding from major climate foundations directed to justice-focused work and youth-led initiatives between 2022-2024

Analyzing Climate Mitigation Grants for Justice-Oriented Work

In this iteration of the study, a quantitative analysis of justice-focused climate mitigation grants from 2022 to 2024 was also conducted. **In total, 11.7% of all climate mitigation grants that were analyzed for this research were directed toward work explicitly addressing issues of equity, rights, and justice. These grants totaled US\$841.3 million over three years, accounting for 9.2% of overall climate mitigation funding by value.** This funding for justice-oriented work is geographically skewed towards the United States, which received nearly half of all such climate mitigation grants.

In comparison, the US\$85.9 million awarded to youth-led organizations is equivalent to 10.2% of the funding directed to climate justice initiatives. On average, grant sizes for broader justice-focused work were **1.6 times larger** than those awarded to youth-led initiatives, underscoring funding disparities faced by youth climate organizers even when compared to philanthropic efforts aimed at advancing equity and justice.

Strategic Climate Action is Intersectional and Holistic

This underinvestment in youth-led and justice-focused initiatives reflects a broader disconnect between funding practices and the complex, intersectional realities youth organizers face on the ground. Youth climate movement organizers interviewed consistently emphasized that effective climate solutions must be grounded in social justice principles and support intersectional work across climate and other areas such as health, education, rights, justice systems, and livelihoods. Many youth organizers voiced challenges with funders who prioritize siloed, short-term programming that fails to capture the full scope of community needs, and noted the tension of fitting their work into narrow programmatic scopes that do not reflect the realities or priorities of their communities.

“When we talk about climate change to communities that face [issues] like water insecurity, climate change is not the main point for people that do not have their basic services accomplished.”

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, PERU

“Our region is facing a very high unemployment rate [...] We urge funders and donors to support green entrepreneurship, as it enables young people to gain skills, build sustainable businesses, and secure their livelihoods.”

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, YEMEN

Several youth organizers observed that while donors recognize the value of working at the community level, they impose thematic restrictions that prevent organizations from addressing intersecting local needs – such as water access, mental health, housing, and land rights – alongside climate goals. Youth-led groups emphasized that real impact requires intersectional strategies that reflect how issues manifest together on the ground, and support for solutions that are grounded in the lived experiences of communities.

Importance of Supporting Holistic Approaches

A holistic approach to climate action and philanthropy entails supporting grassroots, youth-led civic engagement and community-driven solutions that tackle systemic inequities. This approach recognizes the leadership of youth who live these interconnected challenges daily, strengthening the global movement’s resilience and impact. Supporting democratic participation and long-term capacity building among youth is essential to fostering inclusive climate solutions that can endure political and social upheaval and deliver sustainable, just outcomes.

Furthermore, a truly holistic and equitable approach to climate philanthropy also requires rethinking how funding is structured and delivered. Traditional funding models that often prioritize broad reach and scalable impact can inadvertently exclude the very groups most in need of support, particularly those led by historically marginalized communities. Youth organizers interviewed emphasized that a holistic approach to funding is not only about inclusion in principle but also about intentionally designing funding opportunities to address specific barriers to access.

Beyond One-Size-Fits-All: Funding Diverse Climate Realities

To make climate philanthropy truly inclusive, funders must move beyond conventional program criteria and recognize that meaningful impact can look different for groups facing systemic barriers. Youth organizers highlighted that standard funding models often fail to account for the real costs of access and participation – particularly for marginalized groups that may require additional operational or accessibility support just to engage. Rigid expectations around scale and reach can unintentionally sideline groups doing vital, deeply rooted work in their communities. A more equitable approach values not just how many people are reached, but who is being reached – and whether those most affected by the climate crisis are being meaningfully supported.

“For organizations led by people with disabilities that are creating significant impact, there should be room for them to express where they need additional operational support. Given the limitations and challenges that come with disability, these organizations still remain deeply committed to creating impact in their communities. So how can we support them more effectively, beyond just the usual program-related expenses? For example, if I’m hosting 10 wheelchair users – who may each come with one or even two assistants – the cost of hosting that group is not the same as hosting 10 able-bodied individuals.”

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, UGANDA

“If there is no access to such discussion, there will be no participation of persons with disabilities. And if there is no participation of persons with disabilities, there will be no issues, concerns, or policies that come forth in favor of persons with disabilities. So we have to make sure they are empowered and included in every decision that guides policy. That policy, in turn, guides the work of other stakeholders.”

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, NEPAL

Supporting holistic, justice-oriented climate work means funding the full scope of what it takes for youth-led movements – especially those led by disabled, Indigenous, or otherwise marginalized young people – to engage and lead. By doing so, philanthropy can help ensure that climate solutions are not only community-driven but also accessible, sustainable, and just.

Supporting Transformative Partnerships

Underlying these issues is a deeper call for power-shifting philanthropy that trusts youth-led groups as strategic actors advancing holistic, community-based solutions to the climate crisis, and not just as implementers. The youth groups we engaged consistently showcased holistic approaches – advocating for the intersections of climate and mental health, representing Indigenous and pastoralist communities, championing disability-inclusive climate action, and advancing Afro-Indigenous-led reforestation initiatives. As climate impacts intensify and democratic space contracts in many regions, now is a critical moment for funders to align with the leadership of youth organizing for climate justice – by resourcing holistic, community-rooted responses that address both planetary and social crises.

Recommendations for the philanthropic landscape

To Philanthropic Institutions



Interviewees offered clear recommendations to create a more equitable and effective funding landscape for youth-led climate justice movements:

- **Provide flexible, multi-year funding to enable strategic, long-term organizing.** Youth-led movements stressed that short-term, project-based grants limit their ability to plan strategically or adapt to shifting local and political contexts. Multi-year funding – paired with flexible reporting requirements – allows groups to go beyond implementation, strengthen internal systems, and pivot as conditions evolve.
- **Co-create with youth movements and invest in relationships, not just outcomes, and provide consistent mentorship, not just funding, to help groups build over time.** Many interviewees highlighted that some funders operate at a distance, focusing on project deliverables rather than building relationships. A more collaborative grantmaking process centered on ongoing dialogue and mentorship can ensure funding structures and strategies align better with on-the-ground realities and support the strengthening of organizational capacity.
- **Include young leaders at all levels of decision-making to shift power in funding processes.** Those interviewed emphasized the need to embed young people as decision-makers, not just as implementers or beneficiaries. Their presence on governance bodies, grant review and strategy-setting panels ensures genuine influence in shaping how and where resources flow and that funding priorities reflect the emerging needs of their communities.

To Re-granters and Movement Builders



- **Invest in capacity development through training, mentorship, and infrastructure support.** Many youth groups operate without paid staff or core admin systems. Targeted support for personal and organizational growth is key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of their organizations.
- **Facilitate networks and convenings to build power and shared learning.** Youth organizers often operate in silos due to limited resources and geographic barriers. In-person convenings create spaces to share strategies, foster solidarity, and build alliances, especially in contexts where youth face repression or restricted civic space.
- **Support partnerships and peer-learning spaces to reduce competition and foster solidarity.** Competitive funding can pit groups against one another. Creating opportunities for coalition-building and peer learning allows youth-led movements to work collectively and amplify their impact.

Conclusion

Youth-led movements are at the forefront of climate justice, but current funding practices do not reflect this reality. Youth-led climate movements envision a future where funding systems recognize their value not only as beneficiaries but as co-creators of solutions. Changing the funding landscape is not just about more money - it is also about shifting power, building trust, and supporting the holistic work that youth groups are already leading.

"I think mobilization and protesting are really great ways to reach different objectives in different types of organizations like student movements, unions, workers, and others. That's something that has achieved a lot of goals in the context of our country. For climate justice, social justice, and other kinds of justice - which are all interconnected - we need to continue using those methods."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, PERU

Across geographies - from the Amazon rainforest to Ethiopia's pastoralist rangelands - young people are demonstrating courage, creativity, and care in responding to the climate crisis. To build a just, sustainable future, philanthropy must rise to the challenge: not just by writing checks, but by showing up, listening, trusting, and standing beside youth on the frontlines of change.

"We are partners in this journey of creating impact."

- YOUTH CLIMATE LEADER, TUNISIA

Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the generous support of the ClimateWorks Foundation, which provided the data underpinning this analysis, and the invaluable guidance and mentorship of ClimateWorks staff - Nikita Mistry, Narine Esmaeili, Jennifer Rigney, and Tara DiMaio. We are also grateful to Jon Cracknell from The Hour is Late for leading the data analysis; to our designers, Yarminiah Rosa and Simon Lagerlöf, whose visual work brought this study to life; and to the YCJF team - especially Lucia Solis, Cherelle Fruean, Danielle Casipit, Mikella Hosein, and Many Correa - whose dedication, insights, and support were instrumental in shaping this study.

Most importantly, our deepest thanks go to the youth-led organizations and philanthropic actors who shared their time, stories, frustrations, and visions. We hope this study reflects your insights with care and underscores the shared experiences of youth-led movements and leaders — together, these voices chart a path toward a more just and resilient future.

Over three months of interviews, one thing was clear: youth-led climate organizations are not waiting for support - they are already doing the work. They are educating communities, creating livelihoods, protecting land and water, and organizing for justice in places where the odds are stacked against them. While the world debates "ambition" and "scale", these groups are already delivering the future we're all talking about.

To all the youth climate organizers out there: we see you. We see your work, and the sacrifice behind it. And we'll keep pushing for a kinder, more just, and supportive philanthropic landscape - one that doesn't just acknowledge your leadership, but invests in it. Thank you for everything you do.

Too often, this work is invisible. Too often, youth groups are asked to prove themselves again and again. And still, they keep going - showing up, rallying, healing, resisting.

We hope this study helps make that invisible labor visible. That it amplifies the voices too often left out, and exposes the gap between where resources flow and where real climate leadership is happening.



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