

A review of the **Climate Justice Resilience Fund's Phase I portfolio**

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Cover Photo: IMPACT Kenya

Executive Summary

The Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF) was launched in 2016 to make grants that support women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples to create and share their own solutions to climate change through a climate justice approach. Between 2016 and 2023, CJRF pooled USD 25 million from funders such as the Oak Foundation, The Kendeda Fund, and the Robert Bosch Foundation to support more than 40 grant partners at the global level and in the Bay of Bengal, the North American Arctic, and East Africa.

In 2022, CJRF finished its initial six-year phase, and has launched its second phase of pooling funds and grantmaking for the 2023-2029 period. CJRF also transitioned from a donor-led fund to a fully participatory, movement-facing and constituent-led fund with a Governing Board comprised of nine activists and practitioners from around the globe. In its second phase of funding, CJRF aims to build towards climate justice through a greater focus on transformation and systems change, movement building, and capacity bridging. During Phase II, CJRF also aims to double the amount of their Phase I pool to USD 50 million.

In this context, this portfolio evaluation seeks to inform: (1) CJRF's ongoing strategic discussion about the future of the fund and (2) external funders in the climate justice space to support CJRF's fundraising and change in the broader climate justice philanthropy arena.

The evaluation team does this by: taking stock of results and achievements from Phase I relative to transformation and systems change, movement building, and capacity-bridging; and, identifying ways forward for Phase II, with a particular focus on how to support transformation and systems change, whether to support cross-movement building, how to support inclusivity, whether to open up grantmaking beyond its current focal geographies, and if/how the organizational mix represented its grantmaking could be changed to better serve CJRF's Phase II goals.

Overall, CJRF supported dozens of outcomes across the globe in a wide variety of sectors. CJRF grants and grantmaking style serve as an example for other funders in supporting climate justice work. The key findings are as follows.

Transformation and systems change

CJRF has made notable progress on transformation and systems change around climate justice. Systems change occurred both at the local level as well as internationally. Outcomes included a series of:

- Policy changes (e.g., public policy shifts that enable inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making processes; legal judgements that secure the rights of marginalized groups); and
- Practice changes (e.g., marginalized groups empowered and increasingly conducting their own advocacy; increased household- or community-level resilience through climate change adaptation interventions; and strengthened collaboration between communities and government or grant partners and government).

These outcomes have broadly provided marginalized communities with access to decision-making, access to financial resources, access to critical infrastructural services, access to ecosystem services, and guaranteed their rights.

However, local level changes were often limited to small numbers of people, and regional grant partners sometimes missed opportunities to engage or scale out their project gains beyond the local level or ensure the sustainability of those gains. Some of the most enduring and widespread systems change work is happening where grant partners are working across scales to achieve a broader goal, because creating systems change requires a range of capacities and engagement across sectors and scales. Global grant partners have had greater success given their access to higher levels of decision-making and ability to connect the grassroots to the national and global levels.



Photo Credit: Thank you for the Rain

Movement building

Grant partners and CJRF itself have achieved important outcomes in building climate justice movements around the world. Some of the most successful movement work and advocacy is happening where global organizations are sequencing empowerment, capacity bridging, network strengthening, and knowledge development and dissemination activities to raise awareness, pressure policy makers, and achieve discourse/narrative shifts and policy changes. Beyond this, global and regional grant partners broadly are setting the stage for greater movement engagement. They have:

- Mobilized considerable financial resources in the Arctic to support their work, often through working in collaboration with CJRF. Grant partners have also generated and mobilized tools and knowledge products to aid movement advocacy;
- Made significant progress in developing movement infrastructure, and in this process have supported marginalized communities to advocate for themselves. In the Arctic, partners are building leadership among youth from an Indigenous perspective, and in East Africa, partners are working to build in-country land rights movements consisting of community groups and NGOs; and
- To a lesser extent, changed narratives around climate justice where they have leveraged 'big' moments or political opportunities such as COP events to amplify local stories on climate change. CJRF has also leveraged its experience and expertise in justice to promote more participatory grantmaking during the wave of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Recommendations for transformation and systems change and for movement building include:

- CJRF refining its focus to fund a more cohesive portfolio centered around a specific set of systems issues, such as climate finance, building resilient systems, access to decision-making, etc.;
- Focusing on systems across regional, local, national, and global scales
- Building systems change approaches into grantmaking by funding local-to-national and even global organizations to work collaboratively and over the long-term across well understood systems; and
- Working in partnership with global and regional experts and advisors to make strategic and grantmaking decisions.

Capacity bridging

CJRF funding and networking yielded an impressive series of outcomes around capacity bridging. Capacity bridging refers to the practice of boosting the capacity both of organizations in positions of power and of marginalized partners to work together, recognizing the complementary strengths both bring to a relationship. Major areas of progress include:

- Facilitating entry of grant partners into new spaces of funding and decision making;
- Generating opportunities to have real influence over important decisions around climate finance, adaptation policy and practice, and environmental rights from local to national levels;
- Adapting spaces to make them more accessible to Southern organizations, more so for learning and networking than for decision-making; and

- CJRF simplifying its own systems and creating a new governance board made up of representatives of the global majority to further democratize funding.

Beyond outcomes, the CJRF style of grantmaking has been a powerful way of bridging capacity. CJRF trusts local organizations that what they are doing is what climate justice looks like where they are, whether that means promoting climate resilient farming, building women's leadership, rejuvenating Indigenous culture, or advocating for government policy change.

Recommendations include:

- Addressing language justice, so that English language ability is not a prerequisite for funding; and
- Continuing the process of opening up the CJRF system to majority governance over strategy and grantmaking decisions.

Focal geographies

There are both advantages and disadvantages to having focal geographies for grantmaking.

- Advantages include the ability to develop a deep understanding of the local context, and the relative ease of creating a strategic portfolio of grants.
- Disadvantages include the inability to fund movements that span national borders, and the difficulty of promoting systems change where the entry points for action range from local to international.

More globally oriented strategies can gain coherence by having a thematic focus organized around the topic or the problem that needs to be solved. Within constraints of time and funding, there is room for opening up new regional focus areas.



Useful criteria for deciding where to expand include:

- Areas of high climate risk due to: high exposure to climate hazards; significant population of marginalized people vulnerable to those hazards; and low capacity for reducing risk on the part of government, private sector, and civil society.
- The existence of civil society organizations which can receive foreign funding, and underfunding by other funders relative to the scale of the problem.
- "Global" can be a focus if it is constrained by clear themes—such as opening up public climate finance, or self-determination of Indigenous Peoples—that are aligned with the issues regional grant partners are focused on.



Photo Credit: DRCS, Kolkata, India

Types of organizations in the portfolio

CJRF has funded a wide variety of organizations, and all organizational types have been effective in different ways. International NGOs, sub-national NGOs, and national NGOs produced the most significant outcomes, though nearly always in combination with partner organizations, local grassroots NGOs, or local or national governments. Funder coalitions or regranters and media organizations produced less significant outcomes; however, given the nature of their work, it is more difficult to discern outcomes from these two types of organizations. The most effective grantmaking was to organizations or combinations of organizations that worked from grassroots to national or international level.

Recommendations include:

- More intentionally funding youth, women, or Indigenous-led organizations; and
- Continuing to fund global grant partners to convene local and national organizations and connect between the grassroots and national and global levels, which has been one of the strongest elements of the program to date.

CJRF's Learning Program

CJRF's Learning Program took a variety of forms, from webinars to meetings on the margins of international meetings. Survey respondents rated all events highly: 87% moderately or strongly agreed that learning events increased their understanding of climate justice and how to promote it.

Recommendations include:

- Focusing on specific topics rather than one organization's approach;
- Rotating time zones of online sessions;
- Promote skill sharing workshops; and
- Promoting more broadly for bigger audiences and involving others outside the CJRF grant portfolio.