

2017 TO 2021

What The Water Brings

Lessons on funding young feminist activism
on climate and environmental justice

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What The Water Brings

For every ora

FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund



Construyamos entonces sociedades capaces de coexistir de manera justa, digna y por la vida. Juntémonos y sigamos con esperanza defendiendo y cuidando la sangre de la tierra y sus espíritus

—Berta Cáceres ● an environmental defender from the indigenous Lenca people of Honduras

The crises currently unfolding have no precedent for any of us. Firstly, a global pandemic that brings structural global inequalities to the forefront, including a wave of gender-based domestic violence and increasing surveillance of human and environmental rights defenders. Secondly, more frequent and more devastating climate disasters have occurred, including forest fires, typhoons and hurricanes, severe droughts and catastrophic floods. This is THE MOST TIMELY moment for us at FRIDA - and for humanity - to address the climate and environmental crisis with the urgency it requires to envision a better future for all.

To look into the future we must learn from the past. *What the Water Brings* is a reflection on how FRIDA funds and accompanies young feminists activists whose work is at the intersection of gender, climate and environmental justice. In 2017, the first six FRIDA grantee partners joined our community under this intersectional thematic area

during the Climate & Environmental Justice Special Grantmaking Round. Since then, this particular working lens has been quickly growing. This reflection dives into the experience of these grantee groups, FRIDA staff, and donors. We aim to map the learnings of this process and feed these learnings into the social justice philanthropic sector, especially for those interested in appropriately funding youth working towards climate and environmental justice.

We structure these learnings around the metaphor of water: we are inspired by water's ability to unite territories, to clean wounds and to keep life afloat. While the Climate and Environmental grantee partners from whose experiences we reflect on in the learnings presented here are based in different regions - from the high Andes to the Pacific coastlines - they have in common the defense, protection and care for water as an element that unites them in their fight towards ecological justice. They all dream of a world free from fossil fuels, mining as well as fracking and where communities

can thrive in balance with their ecosystems and where the youth is prepared to face the climate crisis as the most urgent challenge of our times.

At FRIDA, we recognize that young feminists who care about the wellbeing of their ecosystems, the politics that affect the environment and inequitable gender structures envision a more balanced, more harmonious relationship between society and nature where diversity flourishes. We believe that if, as funders, we provide more and better support to these young feminists and allow them to lead the way, we could see major transformations in the unequal structures that have caused this crisis, and build a better future where we no longer survive but actually start thriving. As we deepen our own practice of funding intersectional work, we hope that What the Water Brings also inspires reflection in the funding community about how we can collectively leverage the power of young feminist climate and environmental justice activists around the world.

What the Water Brings is based on a qualitative participatory research process from May to September 2020 that involved in-depth conversations with numerous staff, grantee partners and selected donors who specifically support this thematic work at FRIDA. The reflection contains five sections: FRIDA's vision of how feminist youth activism also takes up the struggle to move towards an ecologically just future while advancing gender rights; the highlights of FRIDA's Climate and Environmental Justice work; the challenges and lessons that FRIDA identified while doing this work; a reflection on FRIDA's role in the philanthropic ecosystem as an activist fund; and lastly, FRIDA's recommendations for social justice donors interested in delving deeper into the nuances of funding intersectional Climate and Environmental Justice work.

—Maria Alejandra Escalante

Climate & Environmental Justice Advocacy Officer
at FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund

What The Water Brings

A delta for funding:

where climate & environmental justice meets
young feminist activism

This generation is drawing the line here. No more excuses. No more unmet targets. No more corporate bullying. No more silencing our voices. No more putting profits before our future.

—Young Pacific Climate Warrior

The last meaningful decade for radical climate action is here. While the impacts of climate change are being felt more strongly in vulnerable regions of the Global South, while environmental disasters are occurring much faster than scientists previously predicted, and while environmental degradation continues to increase due to exploitation, extraction and corporate privatization of natural goods -it is essential for funders to increase meaningful and core support to justice-based alternatives. International governing bodies, industrialized nations and corporations have a higher level of responsibility in delivering funding and transferring resources due to their historical and contemporary role as the main polluters and causers of the climate wreckage.

The philanthropic sector has an important role to play in mobilizing resources to frontline communities. This sector has historically tended to be more supportive of **large-scale and conservationist climate solutions**. For the philanthropic sector, the climate crisis must be comprehended not as a technical issue that technology and markets may solve, but an issue of historical and contemporary power inequalities in the world. Resources directed to climate change mitigation stand at just USD \$5-9 Billion, which is **less than 2% of total philanthropic funding**. This isn't enough and does not include urgently needed funding of local resiliency-building which directly addresses the multidimensional aspects of the crisis, such as its racial and gender intersections.



A delta is a land formation made when rivers meet new waters. A delta is a place of exchange of sediments and is constantly reshaped by the course of water flows. At FRIDA, we believe that women, gender non-conforming people, young people, disabled people, indigenous peoples, the LGBTIQ+ community as well as rural and black communities from the Global South - who hold the least responsibility for the climate crisis and yet shoulder its greatest burden - are also enduring structural patriarchy, white supremacy, ableism, transphobia, and homophobia, all of which increase their vulnerability in times of crisis. It is in these intersecting identities, where climate and environmental justice meets young feminist activism and, like in a delta, form new ways of organising. Young people need to be a part of shaping the world they envision in the near future as it is us who will endure the effects of the climate and environmental crises which is now coupled with a global health emergency created

by the coronavirus pandemic. Young feminists in the Global South are on the frontlines of efforts to resist, undo and mitigate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation because the current crisis represents a threat to their futures, bodies and territories. The coronavirus pandemic is making it evident that women, young people and gender and sexual minorities are at higher risks when systems fail to protect them, given already existing structural inequalities. The current health crisis allows us to observe how a parallel and unfolding emergency—the devastation of our ecological and climate systems—is also hitting these same communities more harshly.

At the same time, young feminist movements on the ground are able to adapt and respond to rapidly changing circumstances. For instance, a young feminist group might not have historically worked on environmental protection as a core issue before, but the installing of an oil exploration block in their lands makes them take up this fight. This is the case of **Corporación Sihyta**, a

young feminist-led group in Bogotá, Colombia, who do conservation work in their communities while also promoting workshops with young women and girls about how their femininity is deeply connected to the earth. As a fund with an intersectional feminist praxis, FRIDA understands that priorities change for young feminists, and we believe in supporting and amplifying the many ways young feminists are fighting back and creating alternatives, as well as accompanying young feminist journeys of change with the flexibility they require.

We see young feminists respond to the multifold challenges of rising global temperatures, a chaotic climate, and the consequences that the exploitation of nature leaves behind, while also battling with gender-based violence at multiple levels, from the increasing threats to women and youth human rights defenders to the encroachment of sexual and reproductive rights during the pandemic. These are caused by colonialism, capitalism, white supremacy

and patriarchal logics embedded into institutions, corporations and international relations.

This is why, as young feminists, the fight for our liberation is interlinked with the liberation of our bodies from patriarchy and of our territories from exploitation. Young feminists desire a healthy environment to flourish, one where community-based determination rises above corporate interests.

Many young organizers hold different interpretations of ecofeminism as a practice of reciprocity and care with others and nature, including with living and nonliving forces.

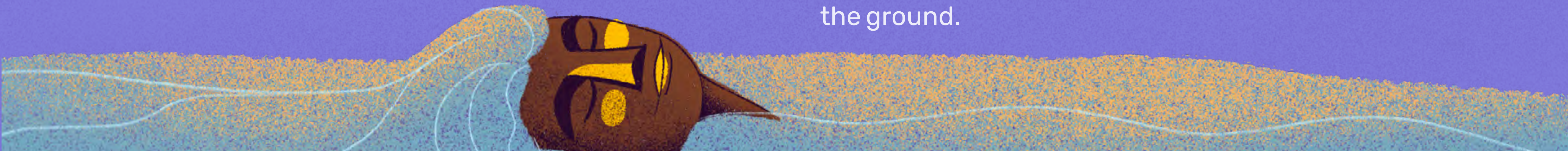
Many ecofeminists hold a close relationship with land and territories across time and generations, which deepens the links in the web of life, the practices of self and collective care, and the push for social structures of equality and justice. **Ecofeminism can teach us about the inter-relations of human and non-humans and the need for diversity in these ecosystems. Just as an agroecological**

garden can stand stronger against plagues because of the diversity of its crops, so too do ecofeminist movements see resiliency in fostering societies where diverse genders, races, ethnicities and bodies can flourish.

Taking a stance on the climate and environmental crisis is one of the biggest challenges of the decade if we – as a global society – want to preserve a dignified life on a healthy planet for human and non-human beings. Communities around the world are already living with the effects of an increasingly warming world. For many of these communities, many of whom are located in vulnerable areas and surviving under precarious conditions, this is already a fight for their survival. **In some years, it will be the youth of today who will endure the impacts of continuously rising temperatures. This is why their voices, needs and perspectives are extremely important to today's actions to halt these crises.**

A look into the environmental movements of the past decades shows us that these have been based on northern readings of the climate and environmental crisis. With the rise of environmentalist Non-governmental Organizations, which for a long time have been male and white led, the global environmental movement has taken long to start to deconstruct the internal racism, patriarchy and white-supremacy that lies at the center of it. There is still a lot of work to do around these. Young and diverse feminists, indigenous communities, Global South movements and people of color have taken on the big task of reclaiming the environmental fight, and to speak up from the ancestral knowledge of our territories and the power of community-based alternatives.

As a global south community and a transnational feminist fund, FRIDA is committed to learning from this delta of intersectional work to better support the evolving youth movement and organizers on the ground.



What The Water Brings

PEANNS

highlights of funding young feminists
doing intersectional climate and environmental
justice work



Body and water are not two unlike things—they are more than close together or side by side. They are the same—body, being, energy, prayer, current, motion, medicine. This knowing comes from acknowledging the human body has more than six senses. The body is beyond six senses. Is sensual. Is always an ecstatic state of energy, is always on the verge of praying, or entering any river of movement

—Natalie Díaz, Mojave water protector at Standing Rock

Through this reflection, FRIDA identified the pearls, or the highlights and best practices of funding young feminists working towards climate and environmental justice. These findings inform [FRIDA's 2020-2025 Strategic Framework](#).

● **Grantmaking that reflects the integrality of groups' experience**

The 2017 Special Climate & Environmental Justice Grantmaking Round welcomed the first cohort of grantee partners whose feminist work intersects with climate and environmental justice to the FRIDA community. We learned that while this special

grantmaking round was the first effort to reach out to these activists, this way of grantmaking separated groups that worked on this thematic from those that have other priority issues. This meant that our attempt still boxed grantee partners into categories that did not make sense for the real organizing on the ground. We continue learning that priorities for groups can change and it is our responsibility as a fund to adapt to their context and not expect the opposite.

After receiving feedback from young feminist groups and FRIDA staff, instead of doing separate thematic

grantmaking calls – one for young feminists in climate and environmental justice work and another for other feminist struggles – FRIDA now makes more visible the fact that we support activists whose feminist, ecological and climate justice battles are one and the same. As a result, in the 2020 grantmaking cycle, we noticed more applications from groups working at this intersection. With the addition of new partners, our current cohort of grantee partners working in the Climate and Environmental thematic area is now made up of 20 groups.

● **Recognising diversity and trusting the abilities of young feminists**

Young feminists' activism is as diverse as they are themselves. Young climate and environmental feminist activists are just as likely to organise a climate youth strike as they are to build city food hubs or open up healing justice spaces for community members. Their work is responsive to context, and by tackling one

social issue they often transform other struggles.

Reflecting on the Community Resilience Grant that FRIDA offered to grantees at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we noted a shift in priorities and visions from grantee partners who previously had not worked on climate and environmental justice. Given the current challenges that COVID-19 poses to food security and the ways in which the pandemic has increased surveillance of environmental and land defenders while lowering environmental policy standards, more young feminist groups are now intersecting their feminist work with land defense, food sovereignty, environmental policy, and climate resilience work. FRIDA grantee partners are joining existing networks, building their capacity to respond to these new challenges and are creating their own autonomous spaces to transform their contexts. As funders, our role is to provide these activists with

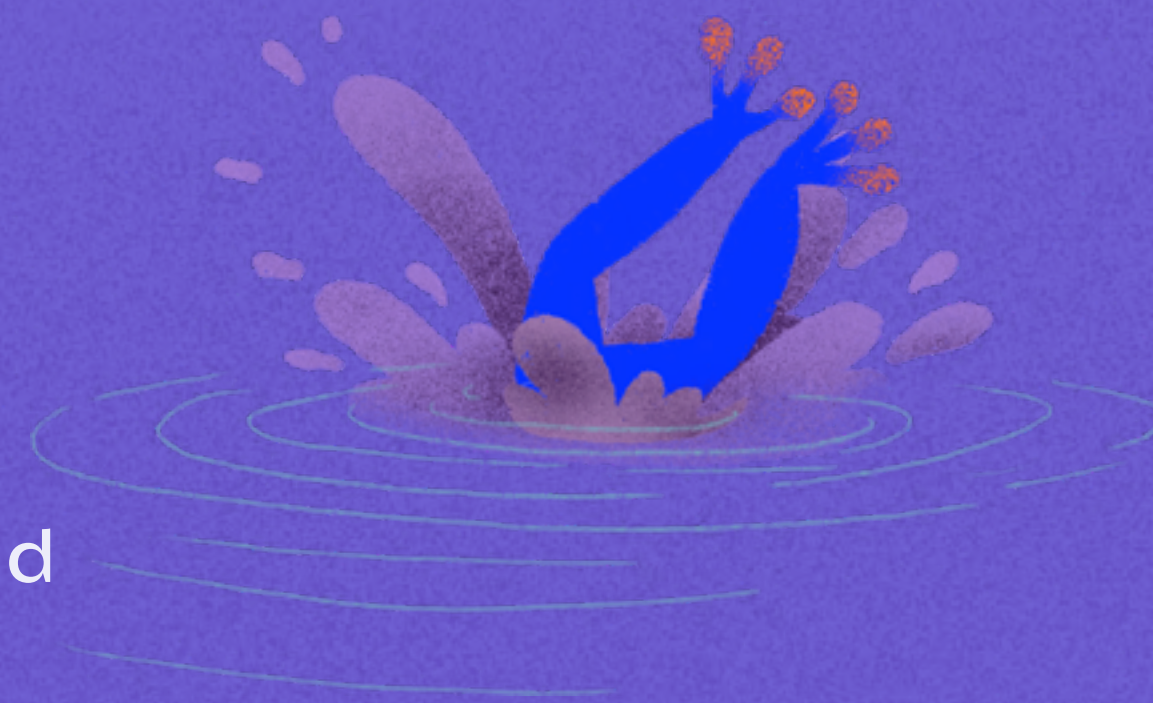
flexible, sustained core resources so that they can lead the efforts they believe are effective in each moment, as they also build autonomy and independence.

● Getting support and resources to the frontlines

FRIDA's participatory grantmaking process grants young feminists themselves the power to decide their priorities and collectively choose where resources go. As experts on their own realities, we trust that collective organising is responsive to what is most pressing in their particular contexts. Flexible core funding and accessing collaborative special grants also strengthen the decision-making power of these groups who face emerging challenges.

FRIDA currently nurtures a community of 232 young feminist groups in over 85 countries, supported through a variety of funding and capacity building opportunities throughout the year, with over 90 new grantee partners joining in 2020's grantmaking round. In 2019, FRIDA awarded over US\$2.5 Million in direct grantmaking to new and existing grantee-partners, including US\$1,002,000 in renewal core support grants; US\$552,000 in flexible funding to new grantee-partners for core support, and \$981,009 in special grants. FRIDA's special grants supplement the flexible, core grants awarded to young feminists in the global south in order to support grantee partners with capacity strengthening, collaboration, and travel.

In 2019 FRIDA awarded US\$95,000 in renewal and capacity-strengthening grants to 11 grantee partners focusing on climate and environmental justice, and \$54,000 in new grants to 9 new grantee partners



focused on environmental justice and land rights. Renewal grants from FRIDA supported grantee partners in deepening their ongoing intersectional work. For instance, for FRIDA grantee partner Corporación Sihyta, renewal core support meant their community garden initiatives in the city of Bogotá, Colombia, grew into a network of urban gardens and a 100 tree greenhouse in one of the city's last wetlands. With renewal support from FRIDA, another grantee partner, Rise Up!, in Papua New Guinea, led community research on the environmental and gender-based impacts of industrial tuna fisheries, leading to the launching of a women associations' training to enable women to transform local policy decisions.

The newly welcomed nine grantee groups from the 2020 grantmaking cycle work with rural and indigenous women and girls, including migrant women, and youth climate strikers, to name a few. Their tactics are varied

and include enhancing environmental justice literacy in their communities, drawing ancestral knowledge to guide land defense strategies, creating local economies to strengthen food sovereignty efforts, resource protection, and strengthening alternatives to the extractive development model.

In 2020, FRIDA also awarded US\$39,529 in special grants to the existing cohort of CEJ partners; these grants supported collaboration, travel, strategic planning, consultations and COVID-19 responses. In addition to this, with regards to special grants, FRIDA also awarded an additional seven grantee partners whose collaborative project focuses on CEJ with \$39,700 in collaborative grants. This points to new dynamic joint work within young feminist movements whereby young feminists are expanding into CEJ work even if it was never their primary focus. This demonstrates an intersectional approach. **The Nomzamo Club, in South Africa, for example,**

which focuses on raising awareness of girls regarding the Sustainable Development Goals is using their collaborative grant this year to partner with a youth group in Mozambique to launch a new project, “Eco Feminist”, which lies at the intersection of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, climate justice and the industry of wasteful clothing fashion. This collaboration plans to host dialogues through which they will explore the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women.

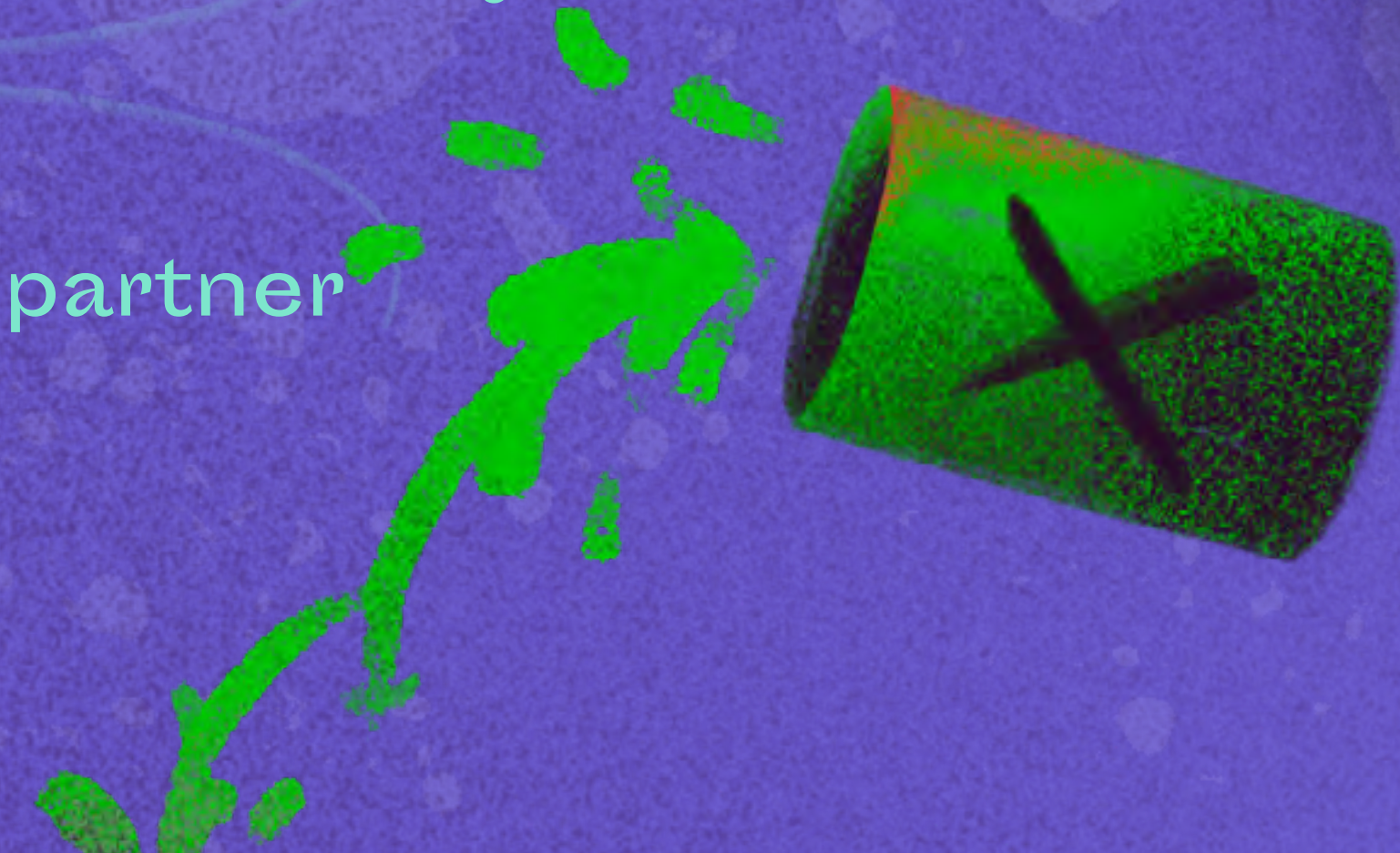
● Building strategic thematic bridges

During this reflection, it became clear that the intersectional work FRIDA supports must be reflected in our organisational structure. FRIDA’s climate and environmental justice advocacy efforts, grantmaking, and programmatic support throughout a grantee partner’s journey need to reflect the dynamism and specificities of groups doing intersectional work. We realized that it is key that the advocacy team collaborates more closely with the programs team’s work to align the accompaniment provided to CEJ grantee partners. To fill this gap, FRIDA hired a new Program Associate whose role is partly to strengthen the visibility of climate and environmental justice criteria in future grantmaking calls and to accompany current grantee partners in cross-team collaboration with FRIDA’s Climate & Environmental Justice Advocacy Officer.



This is an oil region. Rain doesn't come. The land is dry. This is why we are planting trees in every home and teaching people the importance of returning nature to our homes. There are no longer fish in the lake, this used to be our main food. The biggest oil rig is in the middle of the lake, it contaminates the water and alters its level. People's homes have been lost. We have no drinking water, people get sick (...) We would like to train more younger women with income-generating activities while taking care of our environment. We are still living in an environment where men are still dominant, they take the lead and when they see women leading, they don't like it.

—Kaiso Women's Group | Uganda ● FRIDA grantee partner



The complexity of feminist organising often goes unseen or untold in mainstream media. At FRIDA, we believe that if we want these realities to be understood more widely and take up the space they deserve in the media, it's necessary to make intersectionality more visible in our narratives.

As such, we actively seek more ways to amplify the voices and stories of grantee partners and young activists whose work on environmental and climate justice also tackles multiple economic, social, and political issues. We strive to show how intersectionality is actually experienced on the ground.

By shedding light on these interconnected experiences, we also step away from the "single hero activist" narrative overrepresented in mainstream media and re-center power in collective and community organising. These are some of the media and communication projects that FRIDA has conducted and collaborated in, with a focus on the power of narrative building and young feminist media making.

✦ **STORYTELLING** allows us to remember where we come from, to be seen in our complexities, and to show the diversity of young feminist activism

Launched in 2017, **Rising Currents, Stronger Movements** is the first fanzine project born out of conversations that young women and young feminists had at the Women and Gender Constituency at the UN climate talks in 2015. Young feminists shared stories of constantly sitting in the minority within the climate movement, and what that experience felt like. This fanzine collects stories of young climate activists from different regions expressing their challenges, views and feelings on ecofeminism and sustainable futures.



● Illustration by Perrin

Rooted in Care, Sustaining Movements, the second fanzine, launched in 2019, engaged storytellers in articulating the meanings and practices of self and collective care for young activists. There was a call for external submissions, which received more than 40 submissions from different parts of the world. The project was presented at the UN climate talks in Warsaw, Poland, during a self-care workshop held by FRIDA in collaboration with other young climate activists.

Both storytelling projects were done in collaboration with the self-organized [Young Feminists for Climate Justice Network](#), founded at COP21 Paris, and with extra funding from the [Sierra Club](#).

✧ Climate & Environmental Justice Media Fellowship

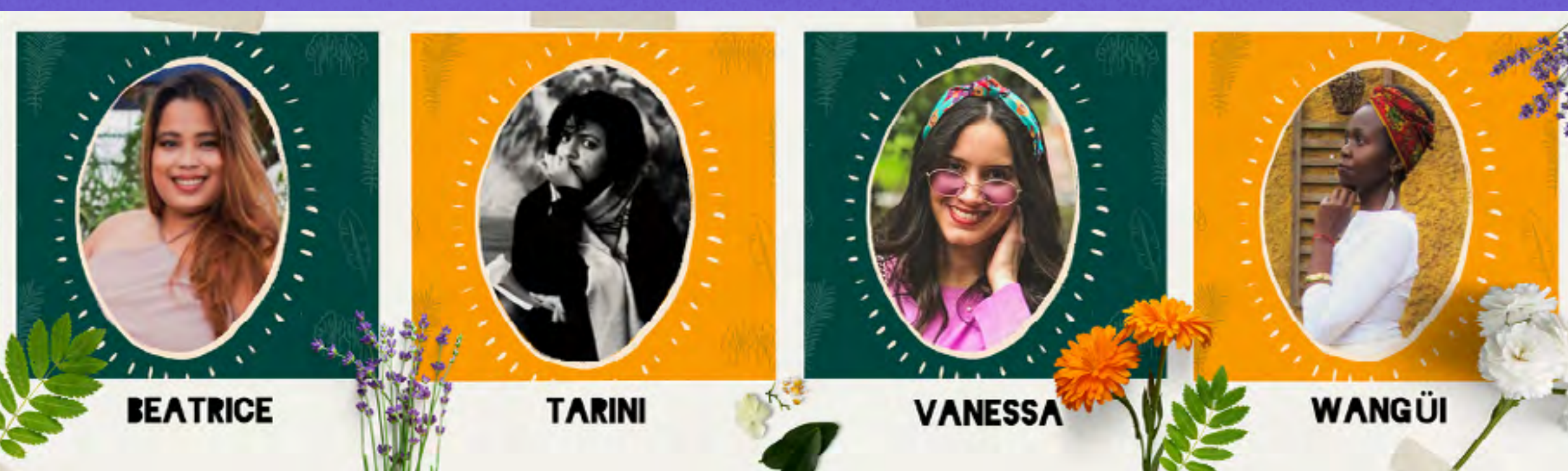
Today, mainstream media focuses on covering climate change issues in a way that brings disproportionate attention to individualised “heroic” characters as the sole actors leading us out of the climate crisis. To counter this narrative, in 2019, FRIDA launched the Climate & Environmental Justice Media Fellowship in partnership with the international human rights media platform OpenGlobalRights. The Media fellowship aimed to create space for alternative perspectives to the climate and ecological crisis, geared towards feminist solutions and community-based organizing.

The Media Fellowship built on other Young Media Fellowships trialled by FRIDA as a way to support independent media in a context of corporatisation and of the funding crisis for journalism.



The Media Fellowships centre the importance of amplifying young feminist perspectives and the transformational work that they're doing.

The fellows –Beatrice Tulagan, Tarini Manchanda, Vanessa Daza, and Wangüi wa Kamonji– were selected from dozens of activists for their commitment to raising issues that affect youth in their local contexts. From the Philippines, India, Colombia and Kenya respectively, the fellows published a series of articles that show youth action in their local communities. This work was published on the OpenGlobalRights online platform and each piece translated into three relevant languages.



Check out their articles:

- ✿ "Our house is on fire": the Asian climate emergency by Beatrice Tulagan
- ✿ Colombian activists use music and art to call for climate action and Waorani women resist Ecuador's extractive agenda in the Amazon by Vanessa Daza
- ✿ Indigenous women in Kenya rebuild resilience amidst an eco-cultural crisis and Challenging the oil industry through community action in Western Uganda by Wangüi wa Kamonji
- ✿ Learning from Dalit women fighting for land rights in Punjab and Inaction on ecological contamination finds a market by Tarini Manchan

This Fellowship shows the complexity of intersectional work. Even as a FRIDA-led program, this is the type of work that helps us –as a global alliance of funders and movements– to strengthen our collective analysis, arguments and narratives about the crucial importance of young feminist leadership towards climate justice

—Maite Smet, Coordinator at Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action · a global network that supports FRIDA's climate justice work

● Striving for young feminist participation

We have witnessed civil society participation in international and regional policy spaces shrink in the past years. This worrying fact, together with the neoliberalism, capitalism, racism and patriarchy inherent to these spaces, directly affects the capacity of young women and trans youth environmental defenders to effectively advocate for their rights and their ecosystem's wellbeing. In philanthropic spaces and funders' dialogues, youth's participation is often tokenized. FRIDA has been pushing these boundaries and centring young feminists' experiences and insights in decision making, especially when the decisions made directly impact their present and future. By pushing for advocacy spaces in international events and supporting activists to attend local or regional gatherings, we have been able to show that the local-regional-international scales are interconnected realities, even when influencing these spaces might not always be a priority for groups on the ground.

✦ UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS

FRIDA has taken part in the UN climate negotiations on several occasions by joining the [Women & Gender Constituency](#), and global coalitions like the [Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice](#) and [GAGGA](#). In different years, FRIDA has organized storytelling workshops with other activist youth, held young feminist circles, ran press conferences, panels and joined many civil society mobilizations.

While we realize that this particular UN space is flawed with power imbalances between governments and a lack of true action towards climate justice, young people's involvement in international advocacy spaces like this is crucial if we want to shine a light on young people's leadership

and the current intersectional alternatives that they are leading all around the world. Even though we also realize that these intergovernmental spaces require extensive preparation for a meaningful engagement and large budgets for participation, these are often also spaces where movement-building happens for the global climate justice movement.



Additional Resources:

GreenGrants Fund. Closing Civil Society Space:
What Environmental Funders Need to Know





“FRIDA has been smart at understanding that in this particular intersection of gender, climate and environmental justice, visibility is one of the major issues as many people still cannot see the interconnections (...) this journey shows us an example of how we have identified a need and gone from the most general, like the first storytelling fanzine project, to something deeper like the Climate & Environmental Justice Media Fellowship. We are building a space to contain those of us that inhabit this intersection

—Majandra Rodríguez ● FRIDA’s Co-Executive Director

● **Building advocacy allyships**

The challenges of actually building a livable, equal future are continuously increased by the climate crisis and its compounded social, political, economical and sanitary upheavals. At FRIDA, we realize that this global climate emergency requires a major collective effort - a systemic change - to redefine society’s

relationship with our ecosystems. It's necessary to commit from all sides: governments, corporations, individuals, civil society, and funders. Since 2017, FRIDA has built bridges with other organizations and funds to direct more resources and opportunities to young climate feminists, and to support more connections between the feminist and climate movements.

✦ FRIDA'S PARTNERSHIPS along the journey

In 2017, FRIDA joined the [Global Alliance for Green & Gender Action \(GAGGA\)](#), a global platform of funders, NGOs and grassroots groups working together to raise the power of women and environmental justice movements around the world. Under GAGGA, FRIDA has been able to mobilize further resources to grantee partners and work on regional initiatives like the [Women & Water Campaign](#).

FRIDA has collaborated on multiple occasions with networks like [EDGE Funders](#), [Ariadne Network](#), and the [Funders Learning Community for Women and the Environment](#) to advocate amongst the philanthropic community for more and better resources for young climate feminists.

Partnerships with [Women's Environment & Development Organization](#), [Sierra Club](#), and [GenderCC](#) have also been key to learning how to navigate climate change negotiations at the international level and how



to link gender and environmental policy together with grassroots activism.

[OpenGlobalRights](#), as a global media platform, is a key partner to raise attention to the young feminist voices and alternatives that building a more equitable and sustainable world.

On several occasions, FRIDA has partnered up with the [Association for Progressive Communications](#) to deepen the analysis on the interconnection of feminist internet infrastructures, feminist technology and ecological transformations.

● **Being accountable of our position of power as funders**

At FRIDA we are in constant reflection of our limitations and the positions of power we occupy in relation to the young feminists' movements we support. As both the feminist and climate justice

movements grow globally, we recognise that we as a young feminist fund stand in a position of power. **As a youth-led organization, FRIDA can often count on the political safety to stand by our beliefs and advocate for more and better resources to those same marginal communities which are currently enduring the overlapping crises that 2020-21 is making evident: a global pandemic, a climate crisis, structural racism, gender-based violence and the closing up of political space, particularly as authoritarian governments continue rise up in all parts of the world.** FRIDA has undergone multiple transformations in order to be better enablers of change instead of gatekeepers of resources for young feminists and climate activists. This has included the search for constant feedback, participation and consultation from young feminist groups themselves on how FRIDA mobilizes resources, accompanies groups on the ground, and implements its advocacy strategy in order to prevent falling into the trap of speaking on behalf of young feminist.

What The Water Brings

STORIES

challenges and tensions in the course

"From these islands
we ask for solutions.
From these islands
we ask
we demand that the world see beyond
SUV's, ac's, their pre-packaged convenience
their oil-slicked dreams, beyond the belief
that tomorrow will never happen, that this
is merely an inconvenient truth.
Let me bring my home to yours.
Let's watch as Miami, New York,
Shanghai, Amsterdam, London,
Rio de Janeiro, and Osaka
try to breathe underwater.
You think you have decades
before your homes fall beneath tides?
We have years.
We have months
before you sacrifice us again

before you watch from your tv and computer
screens waiting
to see if we will still be breathing
while you do nothing.



My sister,
From one island to another
I give to you these rocks
as a reminder
that our lives matter more than their power
that life in all forms demands
the same respect we all give to money
that these issues affect each and everyone of us
None of us is immune
And that each and everyone of us has to decide
if we
will
Rise

—Excerpt from "**Rise: From One Island to Another**" by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner
(poet of Marshallese ancestry) & Aka Niviâna (Inuk writer). Credits to 350.
org and the team that made this beautiful art possible.

This reflection gave us the chance to identify the challenges and tensions that, just like swirling waters, have made FRIDA's journey in funding climate and environmental justice work in the past three years more turbulent. **As an experimental and new journey, we acknowledge the difficulties we have encountered. This reflection is an effort to be accountable, to lay a solid ground for further experimental work in other thematic areas, to create space to strengthen our own practices, and to inspire deeper collaboration amongst the social and environmental justice funders community. Here are the 'swirls' we have collectively identified:**

- **Emergent systems can be chaotic**

When FRIDA began to support climate and environmental intersectional work, there was not a clear organizational structure in place that could respond to the rising needs. While the 2017 Climate & Environmental Justice Special Grantmaking Round set FRIDA on a path of supporting

young climate activists in feminist movements and collectives, our outreach capacity during the call for applications and the availability of accompaniment for the new grantee partners was limited. At first, we needed to navigate the geographic restrictions applied by the first group donors that supported FRIDA in embarking on this journey. Through the years, we have been able to fundraise financial support from a wider diversity of donors which has given us more space to manoeuvre barriers that particular donors may have.

- **Outreach and accompaniment must work for grantee partners**

Funding young feminist climate and environmental justice is challenging, and FRIDA has identified that we need a more inclusive and accessible grantmaking call for proposals that reaches **frontline environmental and climate youth defenders in indigenous and rural communities**. Funders must rethink how to be more inclusive of people

whose ways of communicating are not centred on social media, internet availability, and the colonial languages often used in application forms or reporting. For example, funders could invest resources to fill in these gaps by providing internet access, translation of forms into indigenous languages, and other non-traditional forms of support that frontline communities need in order to access funding. Grantee partner accompaniment must always be in response to the needs and wants of grantee partners.

We also see the need to strengthen our indicators of success to better reflect the complex and always changing realities of young feminists organizers. As the climate crisis increases and exacerbates other pre-existing vulnerabilities in marginalized communities, the consultation process indicates to us the need to anticipate more groups needing to tackle emerging issues around land and water rights, digital and physical safety – especially for environmental

defenders, disaster relief and climate migration rights-based approaches. For this, FRIDA might strengthen its own knowledge building spaces and advocacy capacities through more strategic collaboration amongst the Programs, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning and Advocacy Teams as well as the Advisory Committee.

● **The need for intersectional advocacy priorities and capacities**

FRIDA's advocacy is rooted in the leadership of young feminists and the diverse issues they uphold. Our capacities have allowed us to zoom into the work on climate and environmental rights and girl-led activism as interconnected feminist issues, though these are not always the priority for young feminists on the ground. **While it is certainly complex to focus on every intersection, the improvement of FRIDA's climate and environmental lens is making us envision how to strategically integrate other lenses in FRIDA's ongoing focused efforts. A first step to this can be**

to recruit specialist advocacy officers who can lead this intersectional work.

We also realize that FRIDA's communication content on climate and environmental justice has not always been consistent and as intersectional as it could be. With higher and more active moments of engagement throughout the years, we have lacked capacity to keep up a public narrative that centres the interconnections between climate justice, feminism, or anti-racism. We also identify the need to produce content in multiple languages readily accessible on our website and social media channels. We are also challenged to effectively connect and accompany grantee partners with relevant advocacy opportunities both in relation to the environmental movement and philanthropy sector.

● **The need to be responsive to urgent and strategic demands**

At FRIDA we see how young climate feminists and environmental defenders face challenges such as increasing physical and digital harassment

amongst other safety and security threats. This reflection showed us that there is an urgent need to provide young climate feminist groups with more support to navigate these threats. **FRIDA does not always have the institutional mechanisms and infrastructure to support urgent and emergency funding. However, we do coexist in an ecosystem of funds and organizations that can establish collaborations in order to provide more accurate responses to these issues.** This reflection encourages FRIDA to seek partnerships that align with our core principles of inclusive participation and flexibility in order to be more responsive to urgent demands for support.

At FRIDA we want to meaningfully bridge the gap between young feminists activists and spaces of environmental activism. We realise that the climate justice movement is made up of diverse individuals and networks that organise at regional and local levels. Often, these individuals and networks

awaken in particular events and moments such as UN climate negotiations, climate camps, youth climate strikes, non-violent direct actions and different domestic and regional fora. Our challenge is to find ways to support emerging feminist collective actions even when they are not formalised as collectives or have continuous ways of collaborating.



What The Water Brings

AMP RIBIANS

FRIDA as an activist fund in Climate &
Environmental Justice Philanthropy

What The Water Brings allows us to see our role in the climate and environmental justice philanthropy as one akin to being an amphibian. This means that –just like amphibians that are born in an element like water and can also thrive in another element like earth– FRIDA is both composed of young feminists activists who come from grassroots movements, while also still being a player in the philanthropic sector. Our role in philanthropy is to advocate for more and better resources for young feminists movements, while we also lead by listening to activists' perspectives, needs and demands. Our 'amphibian' identity allows us to break the access barriers to resources that young feminists often have and bring resources closer to movements on the ground.

● **Coming from movements, activism is at the heart of FRIDA's mission**

FRIDA's mission is rooted in Global South young feminist movements to whom we are primarily accountable. Many of us at FRIDA are activists

ourselves and are involved in a range of feminists struggles. In spaces where we interact with environmental funders on women's rights, we strive to invite young feminists themselves to bring their experiences and demands on the table. In other moments when activists cannot be present, FRIDA amplifies the lessons that their activism provides. For example, we often bring up the fact that young climate feminists' work is not static and does not necessarily need to look like "mainstream environmentalism". Often intersectional activism shows up in different ways: from community mobilizations to community gardens to healing ceremonies that pay respects to land and ancestry. All of these are radical young feminists alternatives to the climate and ecological crises, but not often welcomed in this way to the philanthropic world.

FRIDA is committed to unboxing young feminist climate activism in an effort to steer traditional philanthropy away from the tokenisation of young people, the creation of single-hero narratives, and the assumptions that

activism and/or change are linear, organized and neat occurrences. In these spaces, we aim to make visible the diverse work that Global South feminists and communities have been doing for decades in the defense, care and protection of self and collective bodies and territories. FRIDA's donors see the organization as being closely aligned to young feminists movements, while escaping being labeled as either an environmental rights fund or a women's rights fund.

● **FRIDA is still as a player within the capitalist project of philanthropy**

At FRIDA, we recognize that even as we bring critical analysis and praxis to philanthropy, we are still players within the same capitalist system of funding that is a creation and often a reproduction of colonial and capitalist structures. Until the role of funders becomes obsolete, we are still complicit with the unequal distribution of world resources. FRIDA is committed to participatory grantmaking as an important mechanism to shift power back to

movements themselves: activists on the ground are the experts of their own reality and know best where resources are most needed.

FRIDA's advocacy presence is growing in philanthropic spaces like **Prospera International Network of Women's Fund**, the **Human Rights Funders Network**, **EDGE Funders Alliance**, **Climate Justice Resilience Fund**, the **Women & Environment Funders Learning Community**, and the **Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action**. In these spaces, we have become allied with other environmental and women's rights funders. We keep advocating to show that responding to the climate and environmental crisis is not about merely implementing a green economy and gender-based responses that reproduce patterns of colonialism, patriarchy and violence. To respond to the climate and environmental crises we need to transform larger economic systems based on extractivism of nature and humans, and this work must be intersectional. We must keep advocating for the amplification of the power of young feminists that are both resisting the impacts

of climate change and ecological exploitation and leading the way forward to change and alternatives.

Our approach is to continue to work closely and strategically with environmental and climate change donors who have not funded intersectional feminist and gender justice before. We want to mobilize more resources to this intersection, but also mobilize them in a way that centers the power and agency of young feminists themselves. As communal land rights, economic sovereignty, and holistic wellbeing rise up as crucial aspects of territorial defenses for young feminists, we spotlight these claims and bring them forth to institutional and individual donors.



What The Water Brings

AS WATER FLOWS:

five recommendations for funding feminist youth
at the centre of climate and environmental
justice transformations

What the Water Brings shares FRIDA's journey with funding feminist and climate justice youth-led work and provides an opportunity to share recommendations with other funders on how best to do this. We offer five recommendations to funders that want to support the young feminist climate and environmental leaders, groups and movements with better and more resources. Our hope is that these recommendations stir timely conversations amongst funders in the last decade of urgent climate action and strengthen the philanthropic commitment to fight climate change as the real emergency that it is.

1. Reflect the multidimensional priorities of activists in your grantmaking

Those on the frontline of the impacts of climate change are also leading the solutions to it. Young feminist groups already work at the core intersections of gender, climate and environmental justice and challenge patriarchal, extractivist and colonial norms. Young people are constantly building solutions as their work responds to their specific contexts and can change according to emergent issues. This means that often by tackling one social issue they are also advancing related other struggles. Funders must therefore respond to the diverse and evolving activism by young feminists with grantmaking criteria that reflects the intersectionality of young feminists and that does not prioritize funders' own conceptions of what is important. Grantmaking criteria that adequately covers a wide range of social, political, economic and environmental justice work being done by young feminists activists. Young changemakers should see their priorities in a funder's grantmaking criteria from the onset, without feeling pressured to alter their priorities in order to increase their chances of accessing funding.

2. Activists need core, flexible and sustained funding

The funder's role is to provide young feminist climate activists with flexible, sustained core resources so that they can lead the efforts they believe are more effective at any moment in time. A participatory grantmaking process allows activists themselves to decide their priorities and collectively choose where resources go. As experts on their own realities, funders should trust that activists organizing on the ground know what is most pressing in their particular contexts and know best where to direct their resources. Also, funders must be ready to support activists for the long haul. The global ecosystemic transformations that we need will take some time to be settled, and activists and movements need to be supported in a sustained effort that allows them to build their resilience, autonomy and independence.

3. The outside world must be mirrored inside funding organizations

Intersectional funding for youth requires an organizational and structural shift in funding organizations. This means we need more diverse and inclusive teams that can co-create more effective intersectional programming and advocacy for the groups they support. This translates into having staff from underrepresented regions and identities, young staff who are activists themselves and who have direct ways of communication with groups on the ground, particularly groups at the frontline of the impacts of environmental and climate change such as young people in indigenous and rural communities. New work systems and habits take time to build. Funders should make sure there are ample resources, dedicated people, and a flexible timeline to get these needed changes integrated within your organization.

4. Boldness in philanthropy: increasing collaboration with other funders to support activists emerging challenges

Young climate feminists and environmental defenders face multiple and intersecting challenges. Their resistance and the alternatives they innovate are chronically underfunded. Yet we see their actions rise and increase the potential for global transformation. As funders, increased collaboration across the sector will provide more flexible, core and context-responsive support to young people at the frontlines. Moreover, we invite the philanthropic sector to be bold and join us in being activist funders that push traditional and patriarchal power dynamics to become more inclusive and responsive to social and environmental movements. If we put our heads, best practices and resources together, we could see major transformations in the unequal structures that have led to the current compounded crises and build a better future where those at the margins no longer survive but thrive.



5. Building transformational feminist climate infrastructures

The climate crisis is not a technical mistake, and thus, solutions solely based on technology or the markets will always be insufficient. To attend to the root causes, young feminists are calling on us to pay attention to how the climate crisis is also an issue of collective care where everyone's well being – the people's and the planet's – should be at the centre. As funders we are called to mobilize resources to initiatives that strengthen the economic, social and political safety nets for the main carers of our societies: women and the youth.

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WHAT THE WATER BRINGS

Lessons on funding young feminist activism on climate and environmental justice

2017 to 2021

