

Grassroots Movements and Policy Change

Investing in Grassroots Movements to Build Political Will for Climate Solutions



INTRODUCTION

Over history, human rights have been won through struggles by social movements that successfully influenced political will and policy. Today, grassroots groups are proposing policy solutions worldwide and are uniquely positioned to influence climate-related policy because the climate crisis amplifies pre-existing socially-reproduced inequalities (e.g., racial, economic, gender). Frontline communities are thus moving forward some of the boldest solutions to the climate crisis, with an overarching goal of system change.

Grassroots movements are instrumental in shifting policy, government practices, and political will to better protect the planet and communities. Yet, philanthropy has traditionally poured large investments into more top-down campaigning and lobbying firms, without addressing the root causes of the crisis nor supporting those most impacted by it. Using Outcome Harvesting as a methodology, the CLIMA Fund tracked the impact that grassroots groups have on climate-related policy, law, and governance practices from local to international levels.

Policy can be understood as political space, political will, legal and/or policy documents, and legal and/or policy decisions, such as those that influence government policies and practices. The aim of policy-related change is to reform these processes and/or practices, which may include the less overt shifts or actions that are precursors to policy change (e.g., creating a space for advocacy, bringing to light different ways to collectively imagine and envision what is possible, popularizing new language and narratives).

FINDINGS

Our analysis found that not only are grassroots movements effective in changing policy, but grassroots-driven changes will ensure policies are not reinforcing business-as-usual practices that are incremental, unfair, and/or ineffective.

Grassroots groups are carving out political space, holding governments accountable, winning legal protections against extractive industries, and ensuring Indigenous Peoples' sovereign right to their lands and regenerative ways of living with the Earth. They are directly and successfully influencing government practices, policy, law, and legal precedent with a fraction of the budget large polluters have to lobby policy towards continuing business-as-usual. Below are a few examples of the many ways grassroots movements are creatively changing policy to cool the planet and build resilience, demonstrating the importance of moving and amplifying resources towards these systemic solutions.

Political space refers to the creation of different (physical, auditory, intellectual) spaces for people to interface directly with - and potentially influence - government and/or elected officials, such as within international forums or dialogues in congressional meetings. The Outcomes Harvesting process documented spaces for grassroots to influence advocacy, particularly covering farmers' issues, women's rights, and youth participation, which grew out of initial actions such as organized strikes, protests, and workshops.

Through our Outcome Harvesting process, which entailed analyzing 65 reports between 2015 - 2021, we identified

- **254** outcomes influencing
- **285** actors among
- **19** grassroots groups

In the analysis we identified the following types of outcomes related to political opportunity and upholding rights:

1. **Creating spaces for advocacy and social action** (e.g., protests, strikes, congressional meetings particularly as spaces through which to highlight farmers' issues, women's rights, and youth participation)
2. **Directly influencing policy and/or legal and court changes** (e.g., influencing policy frameworks, Congressional and Appeal Court decisions, regional environmental Agreements, regional court hearings)
3. **Directly influencing shifts in government practices** (e.g., developing city-wide transportation plans, bringing government officials and communities together, government-led consultations with civil society organizations)
4. **Stopping or rolling back an environmentally-destructive project** from proceeding (e.g., the further development of pipeline projects)

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Examples of Grassroots Influences on Policy and Political Will



The following examples highlight grassroots-driven policy wins on key strategies that drawdown emissions and build resilience:



United States: For over three years, the **Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN)** organized Indigenous women, following Indigenous leadership,

to win the Escazu Agreement. The Escazu Agreement is a legally binding agreement and the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) "region's first environmental treaty as well as the world's first agreement with provisions on human rights defenders in environmental matters," while providing a framework for land rights law.



Guatemala: In 2020, the Constitutional Court re-established the rights of 28,500 hectares of land for the Cho'rti' people,

following a provision that was filed by **Bufete de Pueblos Indígenas** to restore the rights and traditional administration of their land. In a separate case, the Justice of Peace also granted a provisional injunction for the right of ancestral ownership of the land, which suspended the threat of eviction against the community Plan Grande. This occurred as a result of legal action in which Bufete de Pueblos Indígenas legally represented Plan Grande to defend their ancestral land.



Nigeria: In 2020, the Minister of State for the Federal Ministry of Environment in Nigeria agreed to collaborate with the **Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOME F)** to create freshwater and marine

protected areas, after HOME F directly advocated to the Minister, released a paper on protected areas, and hosted an online convergence / school of ecology on freshwater and marine ecosystems.



Nepal: In 2020, Biratnagar and the Kathmandu Metropolitan City in Nepal agreed to develop and include a bicycle master plan

within the city's 2020-21 policy and plan, following a series of meetings between the Biratnagar Metropolitan City and the Digo Bikas Institute. The **Digo Bikas Institute** plays a leading role in building connections between youth and local government representatives to secure fossil-free policies in Nepal.



Fiji: The **Pacific Network on Globalization (PANG)**, alongside its allies, contributed to the ratification of the Treaty on the

Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (ratified in July 2020), following their joint submissions on the need for ratification before the Fiji Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense.



Zimbabwe: The Zimbabwean government is revising its Food and Nutrition policy, incorporating some of the approaches to grains used by the **Zimbabwe Smallholder Organic Farmers' Forum (ZIMSOFF)**.

The government also included ZIMSOFF's approach to farmer-managed seed systems to protect Indigenous seeds within its policy discussions, and is currently integrating ZIMSOFF's practices into Pillar 8 (on climate-resilient agriculture) of its overall agricultural policy framework. This is following a number of actions, including an annual Good Food Festival and a consulting team on Pillar 8, organized by ZIMSOFF to promote farmer-led food and seed systems.

The CLIMA Fund is a collaborative composed of four grassroots-focused public foundations. The CLIMA Fund provides financial resources to frontline communities - including Indigenous Peoples, women, peasant farmers, and youth - to implement self-determined solutions that address the root causes of climate change and build local resilience.