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RESPONSIVE PHILANTHROPY

LISTENING TO EXPERTS: REDIRECTING CLIMATE JUSTICE TO A JUST TRANSITION



The experts with the climate solutions, leading the way to a just transition, aren't Silicon Valley billionaires.

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A message from the President and CEO

Dear Reader,

NCRP's commitment to climate justice predates this appeal to invest in social movements. The devastation of a rapidly heating planet has been an ongoing concern; the question has always been how philanthropy should address climate change, not whether it should.

The clarion call to invest in movements is heightened when movements intersect with environmental injustices: as Indigenous communities fight corporations to protect their land and water, as migrants are forced to leave homes devastated by climate change and pollution, and as communities that have been underserved and marginalized build mutual aid to replace extractive economic models.

The same disturbances surfaced in climate justice work that we saw in other movement spaces. The needs, experiences, and expertise of communities directly affected by climate change and environmental injustice were discounted in favor of a few influential funders. Billionaires styled themselves as experts and saviors, but the push to “move fast and break things” doesn't work for the climate crisis.

Though climate change is an existential threat to everyone, organizations on the front lines have been coming to terms with the shift and have been finding real solutions. To responsibly invest in the climate justice movement is to invest in a just transition. As our board member Farhad Ebrahimi describes as he reflects on the Chorus Foundation, “What does it look like to support the kind of infrastructure at the community level that credibly makes them that much less dependent on outside philanthropic or investment organizations such as our own?”

The way that we address climate change has the ability to change the planet. And the ways that funders specifically support a movement of Indigenous people and people of color fighting to protect their water, air, and community has the ability to reshape the sector entirely. The just transition model has been saving communities directly impacted by pollution, disasters, and climate change. This model could be a paradigm shift in the practice of philanthropy – if we let it.

The stakes have never been higher, and the path has never been clearer.



Be Bold,
Aaron Dorfman
NCRP PRESIDENT AND CEO

Displaced on repeat: Black Americans and climate forced migration

By Jacqueline Patterson

From the Trans-Atlantic human trafficking massacre to the impacts of the current climate crisis, a consistent thread in the story of Black people in America is displacement and forced migration. These are not disparate incidents but directly interconnected actions rooted in systemic racism.

In the same way as we view the inextricable historic underpinnings of the plight of Black Americans, we must see the systemic roots of climate change through the same lens as a continuum from the drivers of climate change to the impacts being experienced today.

As such, a review of the relationship between displacement/migration and climate change includes the abuse of the environment that also harms Black communities and encompasses the disproportionate impacts on Black communities when the earth fights back, as manifested through catastrophic climate change.

THE ELUSIVENESS OF "HOME" HAS CHARACTERIZED BLACK EXISTENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

From the time we were taken from our lands, our homes, our families, our culture, and what would have been our generational wealth, to then become the generational wealth of settler colonialists and their progeny, we have lived an existence with displacement at its foundation. Post emancipation the properties that were available to us were the land that was hardest to farm. And we were not provided the land grants that White Americans had access to in the



Jacqueline Patterson

1860s and beyond, such as the Morill and Homestead Acts. From anticipation onward, Black communities had extreme housing and land insecurity and substandard quality. By design.

Subsequently, the pattern of vulnerability, risk, and insecurity persisted over the centuries through myriad institutionalized mechanisms. Redlining meant that Black people were only able to buy property in certain areas which were often characterized by municipal under-bounding wherein municipalities refused to annex lower income neighborhoods. This combined with the fact that property values are lower in areas with significant Black populations, particularly with the proliferation of renters in Black communities due to the systematic barriers to land and home ownership. These communities are more likely to lack access to the commons— quality health care, education, nutritious foods, uncontaminated water and soil, affordable, reliable and safe transportation and reliable and affordable energy. The areas where Black Americans

live are most likely to be located next to pollution through roadways, train lines, or shipping channels, as well as toxic facilities such as coal plants, oil refineries, waste incinerators, landfills or manufacturing factories. Our communities are also more likely to be located in floodplains and less likely to have protective infrastructure such as effective levees and other stormwater management mechanisms.

The institutionalized carceral system and its targeting of Black people means that lack of opportunity, lack of mental health services to address the repeated trauma we face, combine with racial profiling, criminalization, and disproportionate incarceration to result in the displacement of people from their families, not just through confinement, but also often removing people from the state and any access to family and home. And the privatization of prisons combined with the growing multimillion dollar prison labor industry means that the system profits from incarcerating people.

Furthermore, exacerbating impacts and limiting choices are the constraints of deep socioeconomic disparities that have brought us to the point where White American household at \$171,000 average wealth have 10 times the average wealth level of Black American households at \$17,000, while Black women headed households have average wealth of \$200. These differentials worsen housing and land insecurity for Black people rendering us more vulnerable to displacement.

Finally, the differential impacts based on gender means that Black women have compounded vulnerability and a higher

level of land and housing insecurity, resulting in a greater likelihood of displacement. Relatedly, the compounded stressors faced by the bodies, minds, and spirits of Black women mean that we, as the first home for new life, are 50% less likely to carry our babies to term. So we as Black people, for generations have been displaced from our first home, are subjected to forced migration from the womb into a world that does not want us... a world that does not value our lives. And that is for those of us who are fortunate enough to have lungs and bodies that have developed enough to survive the premature ejection. And so, a life begins where survival is the first goal and thriving is far from promised.

It is on this foundation, of pre-existing circumstances, that renders Black people and communities exceedingly vulnerable to deepening impacts from displacement due to the same system that drives climate change.

BLACK HOUSEHOLDS FACE A DELUGE OF DRIVERS OF DISPLACEMENT THROUGHOUT THE CLIMATE CONTINUUM

Pollution is a direct driver of both climate change and Black displacement.

Greenhouse gas emissions, driven by energy production and manufacturing industries that are more concerned about profits than people and planet, are responsible for the climate crisis. At last count, 71% of Black Americans lived in counties in violation of federal air pollution standards and an African American family with household earnings of \$50,000 was more likely to live next to a toxic facility than a white American family with earnings of \$15,000. As a result, Black Americans are more likely to breathe contaminated air, live on toxic soil, drink poisoned water, and be displaced from unlivable conditions.

1. **Mossville, Louisiana** is located in the area that has come to be known as “Cancer Alley”. Over many years, Mossville has been inundated with industrial activity and its accompanying extreme pollution. This has resulted in cancer of epidemic proportions and eventually, a buyout of this community, at a egregiously unfair rate for the Black residents, and the creation of a “ghost town”.
2. Historic soil contamination spanning decades in **East Chicago, Indiana** resulted in the forced relocation of over 1200 people after the soil in the community found to have lead levels upwards of 30x allowable levels and the blood tests of 31% of the children in the community revealed concerning levels of lead.
3. After the poisoning of the **Flint, Michigan** river by manufacturing industries and the subsequent poisoning of the Flint water supply, the city’s population has dropped 21% and reached its lowest point in more than 100 years, according to the results of the 2020 U.S. Census.

As Black People, we continue to be forced from our native lands due to greed via climate impacts

From the images of Haitian people being chased by US border patrol agents who used their reins as whips to the images of immigrants from various African nations stuck in Mexico in substandard conditions, one can glean the desperation that drives people from disaster stricken, drought ravaged, or otherwise uninhabitable circumstances to seek refuge in the United States. Seven of the nations most vulnerable to climate impacts are countries inhabited primarily by Black people. The United States is 4 percent of the global population yet it’s responsible for 25% of the emissions that drive climate change. Yet when it comes to offering sanctuary in this land of plenty,

we have some distance to follow to live up to the value implied in “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses...”

At the Holding Institute in Laredo Texas, which provides services to hundreds of immigrants per day, the director, Pastor Mike, shares that the majority of people who come into their care have left their countries due to the drying of the breadbasket due to climate change. The people crossing the Mexico border are not only from Latin America, but also include people who emigrated from nations in Sub Saharan Africa because it is easier to enter the US through the Mexico border.

Marie and her sister Jean live in Maryland. They are originally from Cameroon. Marie speaks with great sadness of how her sister came to be in the United States. When Jean’s farm dried up due to climate change driven drought, and she was unable to earn a livelihood and feed her family, she engaged in a risky border crossing. While crossing the border she was sexually assaulted and became HIV positive. Eventually she made it to the United States, but the path was one of trauma and tragedy. The uncertainty she faces as someone who is undocumented means that insecurity and vulnerability persist.

“No one puts their child in a boat, unless the water is safer than the land,” Excerpted from “Home” a poem by Warsan Shire, a Kenyan Born Somali Poet.

Black Farmers Have Lost 90% of Land We Owned in 1910—And Now, Climate Change

By 1997, Black farmers lost more than 90 percent of the 16 million acres they owned in 1910, due to lack of access to financing. Black American farmers lost roughly \$326 billion worth of acreage during the 20th century, according to the first study to quantify the present-



New Orleans underwater after Hurricane Katrina

day value of that loss. At this point, only 2% of farmland, across the entire United States, is owned by Black Americans. And climate change is further deepening risk for farmers. “Global warming does not discriminate, but the system that prepares farmers for it does.”

Outside of Birmingham Alabama, Denise, a Black farmer, fears for the future of farming along the Black Belt as she and her fellow growers do not have the means to install complex irrigation systems or take other measures necessary to mitigate the impact of climate change on their crops.

The Seas Are Rising. The Lands Are Becoming Inundated. Black Communities Are Being Displaced.

Black Americans are more likely to live in coastal states and cities. Though Black households are less likely to be waterfront properties, they are more likely to be in low lying areas that are prone to flooding. As these communities face chronic flooding, neighborhoods are being displaced. And those who are fortunate enough to live in areas that aren't being flooded, are being displaced as owners of waterfront properties are moving inland to escape inundation by the rising seas. Besides often being deprived of stormwater management infrastructure, Black communities also face inundation

when development hampers natural protections such as wetlands.

“That oil refinery shouldn't be here. That road shouldn't be here. My house shouldn't be here. Mother Nature is mad, and she has come to reclaim her land.” Resident of Port Arthur, Texas as she looked out over the floodwaters and the ravages of Hurricane Harvey.

A housing complex in an area in Lee County Florida that is dubbed, “Little Haiti” because of the proliferation of Haitian residents, was severely damaged by Hurricane Michael. Unlike other communities that received help, this housing complex were provided little assistance. Local leaders were convinced that it was because there was an intention to starve people out of that land as it was prime real estate. Near the water but not flood prone. They were convinced that the aim was to provide no assistance to this community in hopes that people will leave, paving the way for take over and redevelopment of the property at a hefty profit.

Spoken word artists and survivors of Super Storm Sandy, Naima Penniman and Alixia Garcia of Climbing Poe Tree in speaking of sea level rise, disaster capitalism, and displacement asserted, “They are selling the rain. They are leasing the rivers. They are auctioning off the ocean to the highest bidders. As giant

chunks of ice dislodge from the North Pole. There is disaster profiteering from the torrential storms and the wrath of global warming. Who gets paid to rebuild? And who will they rebuild for?”

In the Eye of The Storm: Black Communities Are Caught in the Climate Driven Disasters' Crosshairs

Due primarily to compromised housing stock, storms tend to cause greater damage and loss in Black Communities. Displacement happens when access to resources, such as homeowners' insurance, is lacking and recovery resources are insufficient for filling the gap, thereby rendering people unable to garner the means to re-establish themselves. Lower-income Black populations are also more likely to be renters and lack the financial resources to rebuild in places where disasters strike, making them more likely than white people to be displaced from their homes.

Disaster driven displacement of people can also lead to gentrification when displaced residents are unable to return to their homes or neighborhoods and are replaced by higher-income residents. Disasters can also accelerate the process of gentrification by creating opportunities for real estate speculation and development. After a disaster, developers may be attracted to areas with lower

property values, leading to an influx of investment and higher housing costs that displace existing residents.

Climate Action: When Purportedly Good Intentions Backfire for Black Communities.

Urban Renewal programs dating back to the 80s were derisively dubbed “Negro removal” as these projects resulted in displacement of Black communities. Similarly, efforts including the community development block grants ended up being a windfall for developers but losses for communities. Without centering community driven planning and decision making for climate action planning, Black communities face similar risks, given the myriad vulnerabilities already detailed here.

“In Brooklyn, New York, various sustainability projects, including park cleanups, riverbank restorations, and the transformation of a toxic industrial canal into the “Venice of Brooklyn,” have all sought to improve the quality of life and environmental health of communities in the densely populated borough. But these environmental improvements have helped fuel affordability challenges. Rental prices have increased disproportionately around Prospect Park, which underwent a \$10 million restoration beginning in the 1980s. A recent geospatial analysis found that housing around community gardens in Brooklyn catered primarily to higher-income residents.”

Another illustrative example is the unintended harm that can be caused by programs such as FEMA Flood Risk Mapping, which is ostensibly intended to identify areas of risk and provide resources to ensure that communities located in flood plains can relocate to safety. In the case of Sandbranch, Texas, a predominantly Black community 14 miles south of Dallas, FEMA declared the community to be in a 1% flood zone. The community has never been flooded since

its inception in 1865. This designation has been used to displace residents in this unincorporated area after county officials have denied the community access to basic resources to make the community livable, including running water and trash pick-up. As a result, reportedly, after assessing the property values, which are exceedingly low given lack of basic services, and subtracting an assessed amount for demolition the homes on the property, community members have been offered checks for \$350 for their properties. Out of desperation after suffering under such conditions, some have taken the offer and, in effect been forced out by making their community unlivable. Meanwhile, after the sale, when one reviews property values, in some cases they have quadrupled, leading to speculation that there are other plans afoot for the land the community occupies.

DISPLACEMENT LEADS TO RIPPLE EFFECTS FOR IMPACTED BLACK COMMUNITIES:

Socio-Cultural Erosion

Displacement driven by gentrification or otherwise disrupts the familiar and established ties of a place, creating a disorienting new locale. For people displaced as the neighborhood becomes unaffordable, this is more than just nostalgia or discomfort with the unfamiliar. Often, they must accept longer commutes and separation from the support structures provided by old neighbors and family.

Violence Against Women

Post disaster displacement and the relief and family unification systems can put women who have escaped their abusers at renewed risk. Crowded living conditions in temporary shelters in the aftermath of a disaster can result in women and girls being forced to live with strangers in relatively insecure settings, which can increase the risk of violence and sexual assault. Post disaster increase in stress and trauma can exacerbate existing

tensions and conflicts within households and communities, leading to an increase in violence against women as a way of exerting power and control. Loss of livelihoods and economic insecurity can also increase the risk of violence against women as they are forced to rely on men for financial support or engage in transactional sex to meet basic needs, putting them at greater risk of exploitation and abuse.

Redistricting and Gerrymandering

Displacement due to disasters impacts redistricting resulting from the shifts in population distribution. As population numbers change, some take advantage and, in a bid to institutionalize compromised democracy, they will redraw district boundaries to consolidate power. This practice, called gerrymandering, exacerbates the already existing political marginalization of frontline communities. Even the distribution of disaster recovery resources can be impacted as communities are compromised in their ability to advocate for fair and equitable distribution.

SYSTEMIC, INTERSECTIONAL CHALLENGES, ROOTED IN RACISM, REQUIRE MULTI-SOLVING MODELS

Any tactic that occurs within the context of a racist, extractive economy will be a band aid at best because it will be happening in a system that is designed to continue to harm, objectify, instrumentalize, and displace Black communities. As such, the only real solution is complete systems change, shifting from an extractive economy to a regenerative/living/solidarity/caring economy.

Jacqueline Patterson is the Founder and Executive Director of the Chisholm Legacy Project.

The community at the center: The interplay between the ICWA decision and environmental justice

A personal reflection by Dawn Knickerbocker (Anishinaabe)

Forty-five years ago, Congress passed a pivotal law. Recognized as the Indian Child Welfare Act, or ICWA, this law is connected to Tribal sovereignty, and holds a deeply personal significance for my own family.

It is unfathomably painful to comprehend the reality endured by so many Native Americans during the time of child removal, and yet it continues to shape our present-day experiences. If you are not familiar—the federal government, through the Child Welfare League of America, allocated funds primarily to churches to remove Native children from their homes, placing them in white households. The scars of this injustice linger, etched upon our collective memory, and serve as a stark reminder of the ongoing struggle for healing and justice.

“At the same time as the removal of our children, there was an effort to remove our land.”

Thirty years before the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was passed, my father and his siblings were swept up in the colonial project and government policy of assimilation designed to make Indians forget who they are, and forget their culture, language, and community. When my dad was about ten years old, he and one of his sisters were taken away—put into the state foster care system. He

recounts that time in his life very rarely, and nearly always with sadness. “We were sent to the wolves,” he would say.

Some of his siblings were “lucky,” and were put into foster homes with caring people and were eventually reunited with our Tribe and relatives. My father and his sister were adopted by a family who were abusive and severed all ties with our Native culture, traditions, and Tribe. It was only after my dad was emancipated at the age of sixteen that he began to try to find his way back. With court records sealed and with no support, it took him years to locate a sibling.

When my father finally found one sibling, then several others, and eventually his mother, father, grandparents, and aunts and uncles, the land was gone—and the community was fractured and many of

our relatives in crisis.

To this day, we are on a healing journey. While some of my dad’s siblings did not survive, my dad lives on to tell his story and to work to make us whole.

Against all odds, all has not been lost. I am proud to come

from a very long line of Anishinaabe farmers and caretakers of the land. As young children, my siblings and I were taught how to sow seeds, how to plant and harvest with the seasons. Along with the knowledge of how to care for the land, is the connection to our language and stories that hold the instructions to our way of life. In my estimation, it is a miracle that I have this knowledge today



Dawn Knickerbocker (Anishinaabe)

and pass teachings to my own children. In every generation, there has been an attack on the wholeness of my family. Our family continues to heal from the policies of the past.

After ICWA passed in 1978, we became a foster family. Several of my cousins who were lost to the system found their way into our home. This practice of healing in my family has continued and two of my siblings are now social workers, and our family has now adopted and are raising three children who we would not have known if it had not been for ICWA.

ICWA came to pass after a big national survey found that about a third of Native children had been removed from their family and their Tribes. For my own reservation, White Earth Nation, many recall the pain of removal and estimate that over 25 percent of the children and placed into non-Native/ white foster and adoptive houses.

Native families were told that adoption was the only option if they were to survive, others, like in my family, were a

part of church-sponsored programs that facilitated Indian children working in families' homes –like live-in domestics– while purposefully stripping away their culture and identities in place of a colonized identity. This very racist thinking is hard to fathom today. However, this is the living, breathing reality and present-day experiences of Native Americans.

At the same time as the removal of our children, there was an effort to remove our land. In my band, White Earth—85 percent of the land is held by non-Native landholders, including the federal, state and county governments. One of the essential elements of Native culture is the profound connection and sense of reciprocity that the people of this continent maintain with their lands and connection to the Mother Earth. As this land's stewards, we have intimate knowledge of the caretaking and protection of the ecosystem, the biodiversity, and the relationships with the water, air, and animals.

Woven deep within our family and the Anishinaabe People, is the memories of the caretakers of the land since time immemorial. My ancestors have observed glaciers come and go, the dance of countless species, the nurturing of seeds passed down through generations, and the rise and fall of Nations upon our sacred homeland. Against the relentless tides of change, our sovereignty and culture have endured, resilient and unyielding. The sacred lessons and the gifts of the wisdom of my ancestors—on how to care for the land—remain intact.

WHEN ICWA FACED THE SUPREME COURT

There is a small group of people who claim ICWA is a bad law. The chief complaint is that this law prevents white people from adopting whomever they wish. There exists a small contingent of individuals who express criticism towards ICWA, arguing that it is a flawed



law. Their main concern centers around the perception that this legislation unfairly restricts white individuals from adopting children without limitations.

The focal point of a recent Supreme Court case revolves around a toddler of Navajo and Cherokee descent. During his infancy, a white couple residing in the suburbs of Dallas expressed a desire to adopt him. However, federal law mandated that Tribal involvement was necessary for the adoption to proceed. Initially, the Brackeens' case appeared to be a typical adoption dispute. However, the situation took an unexpected turn when one of the most influential corporate law firms in the United States took up the couple's cause, assisting them in launching a federal lawsuit. The repercussions of this case extend far beyond the fate of one child or the future of a single law. Rather, they pose a genuine threat to the entire legal framework that safeguards the rights of Native American communities.

Amidst this contentious landscape, it is important to note the resolute support that ICWA receives from a diverse range of advocates. Child welfare champions, constitutional scholars, bipartisan elected leaders, and Tribal Nations across the country stand united in their endorsement of ICWA. They recognize it as the benchmark for child welfare legislation, setting the standard for protecting the safety, well-being, and health of children. The Justices' decision to take up this crucial law harkens back to a distressing era when Native children were disproportionately separated from their families.

The significance of ICWA stretches beyond mere adoption preferences. It symbolizes a commitment to justice, resilience, and rectifying historical injustices. The law embodies our collective determination to protect the rights and well-being of Native children, safeguarding their cultural heritage and forging a path towards a more equitable and inclusive future.



ICWA set the standard for protecting children’s well-being.

CONNECTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

We are living at a time when resistance to the progress we have been making on racial equity is heightened, with books being banned in our schools and African American and Native American studies courses are altered or removed. There are concerted efforts to ban even conversations about race in our classrooms, workplaces and government.

In the courts, we are facing attacks on tools used to address unjust patterns of racial discrimination and exclusion. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on a series of cases that could determine whether race can be acknowledged and factored in voting rights, tribal sovereignty and the Indian Child Welfare Act, and affirmative action in higher education.

Collectively, these movements to separate us from reality are meant to silence the truth and connection to this land. My people’s land was stolen, acre by acre. The case against ICWA seeks to redefine Tribal membership as a racial rather than a uniquely political designation, as a steward of this land, contending that it puts white foster parents at a disadvantage when attempting to adopt Native children. The fact that white foster parents were supported with the best lawyers petro dollars can afford reveals the new strategy to steal land, child by child.

Rebecca Nagel, the host of *This Land* podcast, writes “It’s sinister...but when you understand history, using the children of Native nations to attack Tribal sovereignty is sadly something the U.S. has been doing for generations.”

For funders that are interested in taking the next step but are not sure where to start, we suggest four commitments to strengthen partnerships with Native organizations and communities:

- Learn about Native peoples and their history.
- Evaluate your organization’s practices.
- Build relationships with Native communities and nonprofits and with peer funders that have relationships in Indian Country.
- Begin funding.

We can speak for ourselves, and you have to actually look at people who are your colleagues who are serving. When we are at the table, the conversations change. [Click here](#) for a list of resources for Native families interacting with the child welfare system from the National Indian Child Welfare Association.

For the purposes of this article, the terms Native, Native American, and Indigenous are used interchangeably. The term “Indian,” “Indian Tribe,” and “Indian Country” are legal terms referring to US Federal Indian laws and policies (see, e.g., Title 25 of the US Code, titled Indians).

Dawn Knickerbocker (Anishinaabe) is Vice President of Communications and External Affairs for Native Americans in Philanthropy.



A child from the Colorado River Indian Tribe surrounded by her people.

Philanthropy must jumpstart just transitions to a regenerative economy

By Marion Gee

The Detroit Food Commons, a \$22 million community project that will house shared use kitchens, a community meeting space, offices, outdoor vendor booths, and The Detroit People's Food Co-op (a Black-led, community owned grocery store) broke ground in April 2022. Spearheaded by our member Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), the Detroit Food Commons is located on Detroit's main street, Woodward Avenue in the historic North End neighborhood.

Although Detroit's population is more than 80 percent Black, before this year, the city hasn't had a Black-owned grocery store since 2014. (The Detroit People's Food Co-op is in development and the Linwood Fresh Market, a 1,200 square foot Black-owned grocery store opened earlier this year.)

The Detroit People's Food Co-op provides Detroit's majority African American population with a chance to own a share of a grocery store. By building their own neighborhood's food supply chain and marketplace, DBCFSN is creating a Just Transition, moving away from business models that extract wealth and toward a local living regenerative economy that supports thriving human ecosystems, addresses injustices, and builds community in ways that are sustainable for people and the planet.

"In Detroit, as in most Black communities across the United States, the retail food economy functions in an extractive way. The stores are owned by other ethnic groups or large corporate interests. The wealth that is needed to build strong, healthy, resilient communities is stripped



Marion Gee

away to enrich others. We are striving to contribute to a more circular economy," said Malik Yakini, Executive Director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network.

For 13 years, DBCFSN has worked in the community and with partners like Develop Detroit Inc., a non-profit

developer, to raise the \$22 million necessary to begin construction. Yet a \$1 million gap remains to secure its opening.

Despite the compelling nature of their work and the apparent need, why did it take a Black-led project within a majority Black city over a decade to raise seed funding?

We hear stories of disinvestment like this from Climate Justice Alliance's 89 member organizations and others in the movement who are building climate justice solutions all across the country. The excuses to not fund our work run the gamut (and come from investors and funders alike); they rely on myths that claim that community-led projects are not "ready" for financing or "financially viable,



The Detroit Food Commons, under construction.



When the sector commits to building wealth in marginalized communities, everyone can transition to a regenerative economy.

or that they are “too risky” or “too small in scale.” None of these myths account for the historic disenfranchisement, extraction, and marginalization that have made building wealth disproportionately challenging in frontline communities.

Alarming, with the influx of Inflation Reduction Act and other federal monies funding towards “climate solutions”, we are concerned that the same myths will cause similar patterns of disinvestment in environmental justice communities as well as allocation to harmful technologies, like hydrogen and carbon capture and storage, if strong guidelines and accountability structures are not in place to ensure justice, equity, and reparation of past harms.

Ten years since the Climate Justice Alliance formed, we built the infrastructure for an economy that decentralizes wealth and power, developed our capacity to mobilize resources, and channeled those resources to frontline environmental justice communities that are building real solutions to the climate crisis. In April, we were able to invest \$500,000 in DBCFSN’s Detroit Food Commons, through the Our Power Loan Fund, a collectively governed non-extractive revolving loan fund with 0% interest rates and flexible repayment terms. In total, we’ve been able to allocate \$1.5 million towards six community climate solutions so far this year.

But we need philanthropy to implement their values with us and jumpstart the new economy.

Of the roughly \$93 trillion flowing throughout global financial markets in 2020, nearly \$1.2 trillion of that came from U.S. based philanthropic investments. During that year, those same foundations gave out \$88.6 billion in grants. This means that philanthropic institutions in the U.S contributed over 13 times the amount of money to extractive global stock markets as they did to all of their focus areas, of which solutions to the climate crisis are consistently one of the least funded issues.

Then of the limited grant funding towards climate solutions, an even smaller amount goes towards environmental and climate justice solutions. A recent study of environmental grantmakers found that environmental justice organizations in total received less funding than the value of a single grant to a single mainstream environmental organization. NCRP’s own report in 2009 found “only 11 percent of environmental grant dollars were reported as advancing social justice.”

How can we begin to address the climate crisis with bold shifts when philanthropic institutions’ endowments and grantmaking are still heavily invested in top down strategies, techno-

fixes, and the dig, burn, dump economy even as they purport to support systemic change?

CJA’s Our Power Loan Fund, established in 2017, is just one part of a burgeoning new regenerative economy bolstered by incubators and community-governed loan funds like Seed Commons, Kheprw Integrated Fund, and more. And just as important as channeling the resources, these financial vehicles put communities, people, and relationships first, building wealth in ways that support us, not deplete us.

For Earthbound, a Black-owned sustainable materials construction cooperative based in rural Maryland, it was more than just the loan. While the loan allowed them to make a capital investment (buying a truck) that was able to help scale their business to the right size, it was about changing the way we engage with one another.

“The conversations with traditional banks were immediately one-sided in their favor. With Our Power Loan Fund, there was reciprocity, shared trust, interest in us and us being the best we could be. It was an opportunity for our small coop to get a truck and trailer, but more importantly, to engage with capital and loans and finance without [the process] feeling so extractive,” said Dom Hosack, Earthbound co-owner and a steward of the Our Power Loan Fund.

Our loan terms are co-created with the folks we lend to, and financial decisions are made by a governing committee composed of CJA members. When the loan is repaid, together, we reinvest the money into another project that needs capital to scale its impact.

CJA's Reinvest in Our Power Campaign is making a bold ask of philanthropy – move \$100 million into movement accountable financial vehicles to ensure your investment practices match your values. This year alone the OPLF has \$10 million in projects ready to be implemented. This is an opportunity for foundations to align their investments with their grant-making and their values while seeding the regenerative economy.

Last year, Hidden Leaf Foundation made its largest-ever direct investment into a fund of community control, investing \$500,000 in the Our Power Loan Fund, expecting a 0% financial return.

We need more philanthropic institutions like Hidden Leaf Foundation to meaningfully invest in climate solutions that center equity and justice, people and our planet.

As Supriya Pillai, Executive Director of Hidden Leaf Foundation, wrote: “We know that for many, including ourselves, funding big can feel like a stretch, but just imagine what climate solutions are going to cost us in a decade. We know it’s smarter to invest big now rather than down the road, when the resources it will take to reach real solutions may be out of reach, the sacrifices too great, and worse yet, the time not enough.”

Marion Gee is the Co-Executive Director of the Climate Justice Alliance.

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Annie E. Casey Foundation
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Chorus Foundation retrospective: A Q&A with founder and chair Farhad Ebrahimi

By Senowa Mize-Fox and Farhad Ebrahimi

NCRP: Farhad, I wanted to meet with you to essentially talk about the story of Chorus Foundation that you, you know, have some involvement in [laughs]. And Chorus is still sunsetting at the end of this year, is that correct?

FE: Yeah, yeah, this is our final year.

NCRP: Final year. How are you feeling about, overall, about the final year?

FE: Pretty good. I think that the personal, closing a big chapter, “what am I going to do next” stuff? I think that’s one of those things where that hasn’t really hit me emotionally yet. I’m in that space where I’m feeling a way that I’m not feeling a way yet, if that makes sense. But, as far as what we’ve done, and what, hopefully that sets up for other folks to do and things like that. I’m feeling pretty great about it.

an example of a family philanthropy or individual donor activity, where the idea was, this is not going to be like an intergenerational thing, this is not going to be in perpetuity. And I think the initial ideas were twofold: One was my not wanting to create some sort of thing that then is handed off to my kids or to nibblings, but something that like accomplishes a job of redistributing resources, and doesn’t exist any longer than it needs to, to do that.

But that evolved over time I think, compelled by the urgency of the work that our grantees were doing around climate. But you know, there were other tipping points as well, around economic inequality, about, you know, our democracy, that it just made more sense to move the resources now rather than later. That’s really when we shifted from

being like a vague gesture, at sunset within my lifetime, to let’s have a strategic planned spend down over 10 years.

But then the final phase of thinking about it was really around thinking about a just transition as

applied to the philanthropic sector. As we proceeded into our spend down, we really started thinking that what we’re doing is we’re decommissioning an organization. There’s an argument elsewhere in philanthropy that organizations like this need to exist in perpetuity, because people are dependent on them. And so if we’re decommissioning something that other folks might feel like people are dependent on, what does it look like



Farhad Ebrahimi

to support the kind of infrastructure at the community level that credibly makes them that much less dependent on outside philanthropic or investment organizations such as our own? That really has become our ultimate reason for thinking about spending down, but these are each additive, right? Like each of these reasons sort of reinforced the ones before it.

NCRP: I’m wondering, along those lines, what does it mean to be informed by movements? You talked about how the state of the world, and your conversations with movements have kind of like led you to spend down. And so, I want to know, what does that mean for you?

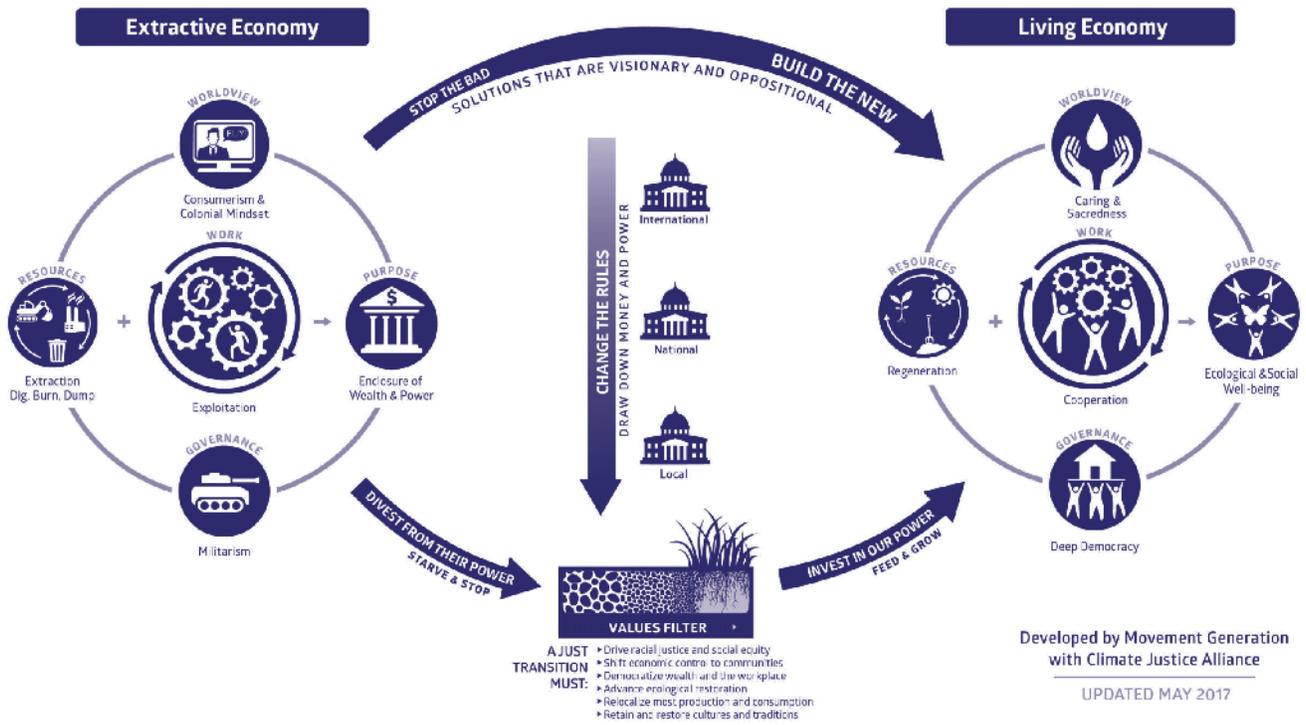
FE: I mean, I think it starts with being really as relational as possible and approaching our work with a radical humility. In philanthropy we can talk a lot about processes and structures: how do we get those exactly right? How do we make decisions about who to fund if we’re making the decisions? Or how do we create processes for democratic

“We see ourselves as instruments of movements. And to do so, we need to be flexible, we need to be emergent, we need to be relational.”

NCRP: Yeah, that’s, that’s awesome. And I definitely I resonate with that feeling. I think before big milestones, I’m always like, why is it not hitting me that I’m graduating, I’m leaving this thing? That’s a very real, real, real feeling. And so, I’m wondering what led to the decision to sunset Chorus.

FE: It was always the idea for Chorus to sunset within my lifetime. It was always

A STRATEGY FRAMEWORK FOR JUST TRANSITION



The story of Chorus Foundation is the story of a single-issue funder that chose to be led by movement groups' Just Transition framework.

decision making, if it's community members making those decisions? How do we structure collaborations between funders? Things like that.

Don't get me wrong, process and structure are legitimate areas of inquiry. It's really important that we try to learn from past efforts and really get them right. And also, to me to what it means to be informed by and accountable to movements is that those processes and structures are ultimately only as important, or only as useful, as our willingness to change them or scrap them entirely if the movement leadership and community leadership that we're in relationship with informs us that these structures are not working for the folks that they're supposed to be working for. Part of it is how we show up.

We see ourselves as an instrument of movements. And to do so we need to be flexible, we need to be emergent, we need

to be relational, we need to be the kind of folks that people can reach out to easily without fear of it being like, a whole thing, reaching out to a funder. We're receptive and ready to respond if there's anything that we could be doing differently, or if there's anything that we need to do because of something another funder did. And maybe it's not even our fault, but we're in a position to help folks deal with it. To me, being informed by movements has to do with how we take our leadership from movement folks. Not that we say what we're going to do, and we get everything right. It's that we're in constant conversation. And are always willing to do things differently. And relatively quickly, and with relatively few asks of our grantee partners, for us to have what we need to be able to do things differently.

NCRP: Thank you! So, there's a two-part question here: who were the groups that first led you to this concept of Just

Transition and thinking about it in the way you do? And what were the next steps in terms of ceding power kind of under that framework?

I'm really fascinated with what you said about a Just Transition framework in terms of shifting power in the philanthropic sector, but also, Just Transition, means something in the world as well, in terms of climate justice and making sure that frontline communities are supported as we shift from a more carbon-focused economy.

FE: And I mean, they're directly connected to each other. I have a deep love and respect for Climate Justice Alliance, Movement Generation, specific place-based organizations like Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Center for Story-based Strategy. These are all folks that engaged with Chorus. You know, they invested in our leadership.

They didn't just try to connect with us because they thought we would be more pleasant people to fundraise from than some of the other foundations they knew. I would like to think we were more pleasant folks right to have that side of the conversation! But it was also very much about their, you know, being interested in us as people, as an organization. They wanted to see, what are we up to? What are we doing? How are we engaging with our peers in philanthropy? And part of what was in that conversation with these groups was, the clarity that they had around how climate is an on ramp to just transition as a frame and just transition as a frame is bigger than just climate.

I think the story of Chorus, in many ways, is the story of a family foundation that started with this issue, focusing on climate. And through no small ways, just transition as a frame broke out of that single-issue approach, into a multi-issue approach towards thinking of systemic change, that really centered questions of equity and power, which is a way of describing what we learned from just transition. You know, you can't have systems change if you're not thinking deeply about equity and power. And this discovery was at the same time that a lot of folks in climate philanthropy were scratching at the surface of like, oh, this is this is a big systemic thing, right? This isn't just about one issue.

So those organizations, I think, were trying to talk to a lot of folks about expanding, they're thinking about what effective climate work really needs to look like. And they were not only having that influence on us, but inviting us into that process of reaching out to others in philanthropy. And then, something interesting was happening, where there's this appetite in philanthropy, to hear about how movements are thinking about just transition and how the movements for climate and environmental justice are, you know,

very clearly about more than just climate and environmental justice, right? That for those of us who had been in relation with these movements to see them show up talking about housing, or talking about policing, and mass incarceration or talking about, migration or talking about any number of other things, that it just made sense, whether there was climate in the group's name or not. So, the question became how do we how do we talk to more funders about this?

NCRP: I am curious. If you had to give a speech to these foundations that are at this inflection point, wondering, "Should we sunset? What's the point?" and they're kind of struggling with this, what would you say to them? And don't hold back, please?

FE: Something I'm really interested in is how to help folks see that this process of going from holding power accountably to finding ways to share power to ultimately try to find ways to hand over power entirely, is a liberating process.... We're actually deeply asking people to show up as protagonists and agents, just in a way that's very different from what they've been encouraged to do. And I think it's a shift in "protagonism." It's not saying, you don't get to be a protagonist anymore, people don't value your input anymore. It's about saying, there are ways in which people deeply

need you to show up and leadership and want to hear your wisdom, and your expertise and things like that. But it's not about deciding where money goes in other people's communities. That idea that like everybody who currently sits right in some structure of power and privilege can find their own version of like, what their influence can be, in a way that's transformative and regenerative. It's tremendously liberating to realize that, you know, you can still be a hero, just not the kind of hero the current system has shaped you to be.

For Chorus as part of our spend down, this one of the concrete examples we can point to: this is what we mean by us being the training wheels for our grantees, for community organizations and for community members to build their own infrastructure for making decisions about how money gets allocated in their own community.

NCRP: That's such a wonderful note to end on!

Senowa Mize-Fox is the Senior Movement Engagement Associate for Climate Justice at NCRP. Farhad Ebrahimi is the Founder and President of the Chorus Foundation and an NCRP Board Member.



Kentuckians for the Commonwealth protest ahead of I Love Mountains Day 2011.

Putting justice in climate justice philanthropy

By Laura Garcia, Chung-Wha Hong, Kate Kroeger, and Solomé Lemma

The climate crisis is everywhere we look with record heatwaves, extreme cold snaps, floods, wildfires, droughts, and storms. Natural disasters continue to increase in frequency and scale, with hundreds of once-in-a-lifetime crises occurring with alarming frequency. The climate crisis is driven by and is vastly amplifying injustices, and philanthropy has the opportunity to act.

The climate crisis disregards borders, yet borders divide how impacts are experienced and how communities are resourced to respond. For the past few years, the Global North has contributed to 92 percent of total global emissions, with per capita emissions triple those in the Global South. Yet, Global South communities living on the margins shoulder the burden of impact while holding the least responsibility for the crisis. In the past decade, extreme weather events have displaced an average of 20 million people annually, mostly in the Global South, and displacement is only expected to worsen.

Importantly, the wealthiest 1-10 percent in each country now emit more than the remaining 90 percent of a country's population. The disparity in emissions between countries and now even more so within countries reflects a stark legacy of colonialism and global extractivism. And frontline communities, such as Black and Indigenous peoples, other communities of color, cis and trans women and girls, people living with disabilities, and queer and gender non-conforming people are often hit hardest by climate-related disasters as they lack access to resources, systems, and structures to respond to and recover from crises.

THE STATE OF CLIMATE PHILANTHROPY AND SHIFTING POWER

Grassroots social justice movements are leading meaningful, ambitious, and equitable solutions to the climate crisis.



Laura Garcia



Chung-Wha Hong



Kate Kroeger



Solomé Lemma

Grassroots-led climate action mobilizes communities to resist and reduce fossil fuel emissions, hold polluters responsible, and create sustainable and regenerative food and energy systems. However, even as grassroots movements lower emissions and cool the planet, they are woefully under-resourced. Indigenous resistance to fossil fuel projects has avoided at least 25% of annual US and Canadian greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, Indigenous Peoples have the least access to funding. They only receive 0.03% of funding in the U.S. and 1.2% of international funding. Women's environmental initiatives receive less than 0.02% of funding. And less than 1% of international funding to grassroots organizations is unrestricted, highlighting how grantmaking practices undermine communities' sovereignty and self-determination.

When only 2% of philanthropic funding goes to climate mitigation, philanthropy has a clear mandate: dramatically increase investment in frontline-led grassroots movements that are building the post-carbon regenerative economies and communities we need to survive.

For philanthropy to make a relevant impact in this political moment, it must shift power. Many funders have the agency and resources to set the parameters around what and where to give, and prospective grantees position their projects within those confines. Grantmaking decisions are often based on the funder's strategic priorities. Restricted calls for proposals are based on a 'hypothesis' or theory of change that funders believe. Yet often funders fail to recognize this as

merely a hypothesis and, consequently, the calls for proposals and evaluation processes demand that grantees ‘prove’ the funders’ hypotheses. Instead, funders can shift towards practices that are more democratic, just, and trust-based. This includes recognizing the interdependence of people and the planet, and not separating ‘equity’ grants from all other grant-making.

We are the Executive Directors of the four public foundations that make up the CLIMA Fund. The CLIMA Fund enables large funders to make ‘big bets’ on bold and effective grassroots movements. We support tens of thousands of grassroots climate justice movements in 150+ countries and we use a justice framework to resource those that address the primary drivers of climate change, namely, extractivism, colonialism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy. The CLIMA Fund, as a collaboration based on global solidarity, is itself resisting the prevailing power norms in philanthropy, and we are committed to continual devolution of power from the Global North to the Global South.

SPOTLIGHT: GENDER-SENSITIVE GRANTMAKING

Women are critical first responders to climate impacts and are on the frontlines of ambitious efforts to draw down emissions. Women-led movements are protecting land, territory, and waterways in every corner of the globe, yet receive disproportionately low funding because of philanthropy’s biases. Philanthropy has the responsibility to ensure that women leaders have the resources they need to make decisions at local, national, and international levels.

The CLIMA Fund has supported the Articulación de Mujeres de La Vía Campesina, the women’s delegation of the 200 million-strong, international peasant movement. This grassroots formation recognizes that women do the majority of peasant farming and are at the helm of creative climate solutions. The group’s work in centering care and integrating a zero-tolerance policy for violence against women across the global La Vía Campesina network has resulted in an increase in the number of women in decision-making roles on organizational boards.

The group also advocates for gender-sensitive policymaking at the national and international levels. It drafted a Comprehensive Law on Violence against Women for submission to the Honduran National Congress and presented to a United Nations Human Rights Council Working Group on the discrimination faced by women in rural areas. Its Access to Solidarity Credit program also promotes women’s economic independence and dignity. Funding the Articulación de Mujeres de La Vía Campesina’s work is a lesson for funders to look beyond grantmaking silos and resource movements as they respond to short-term crises and achieve long-term systemic change.

APPLYING A JUSTICE LENS TO OUR GRANTMAKING

Funding grassroots climate justice movements requires changing norms, practices, and beliefs across philanthropy. We share here some recommendations, in part, from our most recent report, *Soil to Sky: Climate Solutions That Transform*:

- **Move funding globally.** The climate crisis does not end at nation-state borders, neither should well-funded, effective climate action. Most grassroots movements are advancing transformative action outside U.S. borders and our funding can support frontline groups globally, particularly in the Global South.
- **Provide unrestricted, long-term funding.** Flexible funding allows grassroots groups to be nimble, responsive, and self-determined. It allows funders’ own hypotheses to be questioned and provides space for grassroots movements to bring forward their expertise of what to prioritize, how to convene, or how to track their success. Unrestricted funding shifts power to grantees and supports the experimentation and creativity necessary to meet the uncertainty of this ecological moment.



The cover of CLIMA Fund’s *Soil to Sky* report.

- **Acknowledge the inherent conflicts of interest** present in the sector where philanthropy has benefitted from inequity. We must examine how our biases, norms, and assumptions show up in our theories of change, strategies, criteria, and evaluation, with an intent to shift toward greater equity. We also have the opportunity to shift away from traditional, top-down agenda-setting and give decision-making power to the communities our work serves. Embedding a power-conscious and reflexive lens into funding decisions means recognizing that our work is not apolitical and changing grantmaking practice is part of achieving our stated hopes of climate justice.
- **Provide holistic support.** Funders can provide non-financial support to grassroots movements by supporting movement connectivity and movement actors' access to other funders, media, and policymakers. Funders can also be open to examining prevalent biases, simplifying application and reporting processes, and receiving feedback.
- **Stop funding** false solutions and other top-down climate projects that undermine effective climate action and cause harm. In addition, divest endowments in extractive, polluting industries, which undermine the work of millions of grassroots actors around the world.
- **Resist Western models of success.** Funders have an opportunity to redefine what success looks like. Funders can emphasize collective organizing over single campaigns or individual climate actors, and systems change over technical measurements of emissions reductions. As funders expand definitions of success, greater recognition of climate injustices and calls for accountability would also be seen as victories.

Unequal power dynamics in society are reflected in inequitable funding practices, ultimately determining what kind of climate action receives support. Philanthropy can become much more impactful when it is able to step into the discomfort of examining prevalent assumptions within our practices and cultures. We may find that our grantmaking has a more significant impact when we lead with humility and trust.

The climate crisis is centuries in the making and will require a long-term response that centers justice and equity, instead of quick fixes. It will require transforming the systems at the root of the crisis: systems that harm people and treat the Earth as other (e.g., as separate from humankind or as a commodity). This work requires supporting movement ecosystems that advance communities and solutions commensurate with the scale of the challenge. The most innovative approach lies in trusting those who are working every day to address the crisis and holding harmful actors accountable to help us find our way through it.

Laura Garcia, Chung-Wha Hong, Kate Kroeger, and Solomé Lemma make up the Leadership Committee of the CLIMA Fund.

Select Publications

Building an Uncompromising Movement for Abortion Access

June 2023

A year out from the Dobbs decision, journalists and researchers and pundits everywhere are attempting to quantify the damage. Some 14 states have banned abortion, leaving tens of millions of people of reproductive age and capacity without legal access to abortion.

Remembering Ambassador

James A. Joseph

March 2023

He was the Ambassador to South Africa during the end of Apartheid, but later I would come to realize his indelible mark on our field of philanthropy. For instance, about a year after graduating – and from third parties – I learned how he helped create, lead, or elevate such organizations as the Association of Black Foundation Executives, Council on Foundations, and National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy.

visit: www.ncrp.org/publications

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