



The Spark Fund: Resourcing Climate Justice

Despite contributing nearly three times less per person in carbon emissions compared to the Global North, communities in the Global South have been and continue to be disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change, and it is ultimately children and youth who will bear the brunt of these impacts throughout their lifetime.

Climate change has had dire impacts on already marginalized communities and groups and will continue to worsen without a significant step-up in intentional, coordinated interventions. Largely absent from conversations around how to address climate change, Global Fund for Children (GFC) seeks to platform the voices of children and youth, from the communities that are most directly impacted.

Youth activists around the world are speaking out and defying the complacency that has led to the current state of crisis. Taking action at both the regional and international level, they are not lacking in ideas, knowledge, or awareness of the scale of the issue at hand.

What they lack is access to *resources* – the opportunities, networks, and financial support to drive forward solutions to the climate emergency. A recent report from the Rights and Resources Initiative & Rainforest Foundation Norway¹ found that less than 20% of funding is under the leadership of Indigenous and community organizations, and that most funding is too difficult to access because of strict eligibility and administrative requirements of bilateral and multilateral donors. To address these issues, GFC intends to expand our [Spark Fund](#) initiative – an innovative grant making fund that enables young people to drive transformational change in their communities and beyond – to explicitly focus on resourcing youth-led work around climate justice and resilience. Our Spark Fund climate round will support the development of a representative panel of bold youth activists, along with a cohort of GFC partners chosen by the panel that are working at the grassroots level to develop solutions for a more environmentally equitable world.

About the Spark Fund

At present, young leaders and the groups they represent receive only a tiny fraction of overall philanthropic investment. Inspired by the momentum that young people demonstrated in the early days of the pandemic, the

¹ "Funding with Purpose" A Study to Inform Donor Support for Indigenous and Local Community Rights, Climate, and Conservation at: www.rightsandresources.org

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Spark Fund represents GFC's commitment to resourcing the gap between youth activism and long term funding and investment.

The Spark Fund was launched in late 2021 – it is an entirely youth-led grant making program where young people design and deliver focused funds to advance transformational change. The Fund invests in grassroots groups, providing flexible multi-year funding, opportunities to connect with regional and international partners, and diverse spaces for learning and development.

It offers youth-led and youth-focused groups financial support and capacity development, enabling them to experiment, collaborate, and use innovative digital platforms to build collective movements.

One year from the Spark Fund launch:

- 4 rounds of the Spark Fund have been completed in Latin America, Southern Africa, Eurasia, and South Asia (13 countries represented).
- \$546,000 in flexible funding for 56 groups, with grant sizes ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000 has already been granted by youth to youth.²
- 76% of the 40 Spark Fund youth panelists were new to making funding decisions
- 790 applications received globally, many from community-based organizations that have never received funding before

Our new grantee partners are diverse – working across the fields of climate justice, gender equity, disability rights, LGBTQ+ rights and education among many others – and we are excited about the community level impact that this funding will support. Already, Spark Fund grants are supporting peacebuilding work at the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the fight to end period poverty in Lesotho, building climate resilience in Bangladesh and safeguarding indigenous cultures and communities in Mexico.

Several dynamic grassroots organizations working in the space of climate justice have already been chosen by our Spark Fund Americas and South Asia youth panelists. From young environmental activists who combat food insecurity and strengthen sustainable agricultural practices within urban communities in Mexico to promoting environmental activism and conservation amongst indigenous youth in Pakistan—it is clear that young people have the passion and drive to enact tangible and lasting change.

The Call

Youth panelists in all of our pilot rounds of Spark have identified climate change as a focus area for grantmaking, elaborating that young people in affected communities have a solid understanding of the key factors/drivers of the issue and how funders should be responding.

In particular, they are hoping to support young leaders addressing the following topics in their communities:

- Air pollution

² Each partner is scheduled to receive two-years of funding. The amount listed above includes just the first-year grant.

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- Conservation of, and access to, natural resources and habitats
- Deforestation
- Clean energy sources
- Impact on vulnerable communities
- Climate change resilience

In September 2021, over 400 youth activists from 186 countries convened in Milan to address the most urgent priorities surrounding climate action. As a result, thousands of youth leaders and activists attended the COP26 summit in Glasgow to urge politicians and business leaders to make clear steps to address the climate change emergency.

The concerns of youth are mirrored in UNICEF's findings that almost half of the world's 2.2 billion children are already at "extremely high risk" from the impacts of the climate crisis and pollution.³ This report, , also reveals that only 40% of extremely high-risk countries have mentioned children or youth in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).¹ As one of the largest threats to children and youth, the need for space to advocate for and drive solutions to mitigate climate change is essential.

Spark Fund Climate Investment

GFC's model ensures young leaders can take advantage of the opportunity to take risks, innovate, experiment, and learn if given the proper resources and capacity support to enact positive change within their communities and countries. Through the Spark Fund, financial and organizational investments in young leaders and their initiatives will allow them to seize the opportunity to push for significant change in their communities, while investing in promising youth leaders and their personal development.

The Spark Fund will complete three rounds of grantmaking, standing up decision-making panels of 10-12 young climate-focused leaders in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa. They will lead the Spark Fund grantmaking process in their communities, involved in all stages of the implementation process from setting selection criteria, grant amounts, and ultimately selecting the youth-led groups who receive the funding.

Via this youth-led selection process, the Spark Fund will provide flexible grants ranging from \$5,000-\$20,000 and capacity

Youth Panelists



Khalid holds a colleague's baby while attending a summit in April 2022. © GFC

Youth Panels comprised of 10-12 young people representing their communities were set up to establish grantmaking guidelines and select Spark Fund recipients.

"You have young people that are very smart and energetic, so, it took a lot of time to build the process, because we were looking at, should we have organizations that are registered or not? Should we have youth-led groups or youth-focused groups? We had a debate on that for a long number of days. Should we talk about the [Sustainable Development Goals] or special issues?"

It was tough to agree, but the beautiful thing was, no matter what happened, we had a point to converge, we had a point to be flexible with our ideas to see how we can have a meeting point."

Khalid Ahmad Tamu; Spark Fund Panelist, Sierra Leone

³ UNICEF (2021), The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index.

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development support to 10-15 youth-led (aged 15-29) and youth-focused groups in each region, creating a global cohort of young leaders focused on making positive climate-related changes in their communities.

In addition to flexible funding, GFC will also support the youth leaders through:

1) Global Networking and Convening: Organized and facilitated by GFC's experienced regional staff and trained youth facilitators, Spark Fund partners will have the opportunity to meet and convene with peer organizations at both in person and online convenings hosted by GFC. These shared spaces will provide opportunities for co-learning, collaborations, and network building.

2) Learning and Storytelling: Partners will be encouraged to share lessons learned and build connections within their cohorts to build influence and resiliency.

3) Capacity Building: GFC will provide youth-centered capacity development support to the partners. All youth-led organizations will have access to GFC's full suite of capacity development services.

The flexible grant funding, capacity development, and networking opportunities have and will continue to enable the groups selected by the panelists to innovate and experiment, expand their horizons, and develop new and innovative regional and international partnerships. Throughout the two-year timeframe, GFC will offer leadership development opportunities to all of the young people engaged, with an emphasis on platforming youth from communities historically excluded from philanthropy. Ultimately, we aim to cultivate the growth of a much larger transformation to not only the philanthropic response to climate justice, but to the larger sector itself.

We expect this project to cost \$3M in the first two years, with an ideal length of 3-4 years. This includes two years of grants and capacity development and networking support to each grantee (10-12 per region), costs to support the young grant maker panelists including providing payment stipends for their work, convenings and travel, maintaining the technical voting platform, and programmatic staffing.

The Spark Fund is a funder collaborative and there is room for additional funders to join the collaborative and with portions of the core funding secured, new commitments can be used to launch the participatory grantmaking activities for this project. It is time that youth are given the reigns to drive transformational change in a world that will ultimately be theirs to heal.

About the Global Fund for Children

Global Fund for Children (GFC) is the only global nonprofit dedicated to finding, funding, and empowering grassroots organizations around the world that help children and youth reach their full potential and advance their rights. GFC has invested more than \$51 million in over 900 organizations worldwide, reaching more than 11 million children and youth. With nearly 25 years of experience scouting and vetting high-potential organizations, GFC streamlines the complex process of investing in promising organizations that would otherwise be overlooked because they are too small, remote, or undercapitalized. Fifty-three percent of the time, GFC is the community partners' first funder to provide flexible cash, putting our name and our money behind their ideas, trusting them to determine how to use their resources, and opening doors to new opportunities.