



何鴻毅家族基金
THE ROBERT H. N. HO
FAMILY FOUNDATION

Global Scan of Youth-led Organisations Active on Climate and/or Biodiversity and Youth-supporting Partners

**Research Summary for
The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation**

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Written by Mareike Britten and Danielle Deane-Ryan

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Global Scan of Youth-led and Organisations Active on Climate and/or Biodiversity and Youth-supporting Partners

“We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends”

Dr Mary McLeod Bethune, US educator, stateswoman,
philanthropist, civil rights activist, (1875-1955)

I. Executive Summary

This report provides a high-level scan of the global landscape of youth-led and youth-supporting organisations and programmes active at the intersection of climate and biodiversity, and identifies potential opportunities for investment by funders.

Landscape

Past years have seen grave setbacks for the environmental movement. Despite grand promises during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and more recently the 2015 Paris Climate Summit, governments around the globe have failed to take the bold action necessary to tackle the interlocked challenges of climate crisis and biodiversity loss. However, in response, a dynamic youth movement has surged.

Young people are increasingly demanding their leaders tackle the root causes of environmental, social, racial, and economic injustice that have triggered these crises.

The youth movement ecosystem comprises a wide range of groups with differing approaches and sensibilities. It includes less formalised groups, such as Fridays for Future, that make up a large part of the so-called climate strike movement, as well as more traditional youth-led organisations.

This ecosystem also extends to environmental NGOs that either maintain youth arms or collaborate closely with youth-led or youth-driven organisations.

Meanwhile, social media and collaboration technologies offer new opportunities for both formal and informal partnerships among these organisations, often across borders.

Methodology Note

There are myriad educational and skills-building organisations that focus on young people, but this high-level scan primarily looked for youth-led or youth-driven organisations that are tackling the climate crisis, or biodiversity collapse, and intersections of the two. It also touches on some youth-supporting organisations that are adult-led.

As a high-level scan, this report does not attempt to provide a complete picture of all youth-led, youth-driven organisations, or youth-supporting organisations active on these topics around the world. It captures the organisations and individuals that most surfaced as influential or worthy of note in some way, based on interviews, outreach, and in the US from high-level desk research. As a high-level scan, it is **illustrative, not a complete ecosystem**.

Thirty-five interviews were conducted overall, and 78 organisations captured in the [database](#) complementing the written report.

Geographically, those interviews and organisations comprise:

- 21 interviews conducted with youth from Southeast Asia, East, West and Southern Africa, Europe, and South America, and staff of international environmental NGOs active around climate change and biodiversity globally. In all, 37 organisations are noted in the database
- 14 interviews conducted in the US. In all, 41 organisations are included in the [database](#)

The research has a bias towards organisations with an English-language online presence or staff fluent in English, leaving gaps in Latin America, Asia, and Western Africa. As it is a high-level scan of the field, it does not provide an in-depth picture of the youth-led or youth-driven initiatives on each continent. Once a specific geographic focus is chosen, a more in-depth scan in the chosen area is recommended.

Major Themes

Framing and Priorities: For young people active in youth-led organisations, justice, and environmental issues are two sides of the same coin: they can only be solved together, not in silos.

For decades, scientists have urged action to reverse the worst effects of both climate change and biodiversity loss – profound threats to the future that this generation of young people will inherit.

Youth activists have increasingly reached a consensus of impatience at operating within the bounds of the current environmental discussion. From their perspective, our predicament has been exacerbated by corporate capture of governing bodies and the siloed approach adopted by many of the largest environmental NGOs. They make clear that only a complete shift of our economic, political, and social systems can solve the crises.

These young leaders do not think purely in terms of ecosystems in need of protection, but of the people who will ultimately be impacted. Many initially came to the movement through their love of nature, but have criticised the lack of attention to caring for people that they have seen in traditional conservation frames.

Diversity, Inclusion, Justice, and Governance: Young people do not just want to call for climate justice and system change. They aim to ensure that their own practices walk the talk. They are open to self-reflection and understand that the visible wider movement is still predominantly middle class and white (in North America, Australia, and Europe). They recognise that the voices of youth from the Global South and from historically marginalised groups within many countries remain underrepresented and want to see this change. Many youth groups have succeeded in introducing inclusive democratic practices, but more work remains to be done.

Change Strategies: This scan found that there are three key approaches that youth-led organisations have generally leveraged in creating change: 1) building capacity and skills; 2) advocating for policy change; and 3) building awareness through direct action (such as strikes).

Geographies: The climate strike movement has increased the public visibility of youth-led organisations with entities such as foundations that are working to catalyse change. However, in some geographies (for example, parts of Asia, the Middle East, and regions within Africa), this form of direct action is sometimes seen as counterproductive and elitist.

This does not mean there are no active youth-led organisations in these geographies. However, a lack of access to resources means that youth-led organisations in many African, Asian, and Latin American countries are not as large, not as formalised, and much less visible than those in the Global North.

In the US, organisations representing underserved communities (typically, people of colour-led, rural and/or based in more politically conservative states) are under-resourced by environmental philanthropy.

Black, indigenous, or people of colour (BIPOC) youth leaders struggle to have equal numbers of doors opened to funders and resources. Youth leaders – of all stripes – cited the lack of paid opportunities for internships, fellowships, and engagement as a barrier to establishing the more economically and racially diverse coalitions they desire to build power.

Key Recommendations

Little funding is currently reaching youth-led organisations directly. Despite this challenge, many youth-led organisations have built vast reach and a passionate network of volunteers, proving to be an incredible influence on global and many national public debates. For example, this has led to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres launching a youth advisory group on climate change.¹

Their voice is needed in the coming years more than ever. Based on this high-level scan and interviews, the following needs have surfaced (numbered for reference, not priority):

- **#1** Increase resources to level the playing field for underrepresented, most-impacted communities, both within rich countries, such as the US, and the Global South

¹ Secretary-General Launches Youth Advisory Group, Calling for Swift Action to Tackle Climate Change, Shape COVID-19 Recovery, Confront Injustice. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20190.doc.htm>

- **#2** Scale up cross-country and intersectional, cross-movement collaboration (online and offline) to improve cultural competency and build strong personal connections and strategies
- **#3** Increase wellness support and intergenerational mentorship support to build personal and team resilience to avoid burnout
- **#4** Create longer-term and flexible funding models paired with mentoring
- **#5** Create strong organisations through institutional capacity building, with help needed to enable legal formalisation of organisations or fiscal sponsorships
- **#6** Improve and share best practices on inclusive governance, which are desired by youth organisations
- **#7** Convene with other current and potential youth activism funders to share knowledge and strengthen collaborative approaches to help young people sustain their transformative voice and work
- **#8** US: Improve communications and narrative-shift work to make biodiversity better understood and relevant to climate youth activists (this concern was frequently raised in the US interviews but did not surface in interviews outside the US)

II. Political Context

2020 was supposed to be a “super year” of important international political processes and agreements on tackling the climate emergency and biodiversity collapse.

Country delegations were supposed to agree at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) climate summit COP 26 in Glasgow, UK, how the current, insufficient commitments under the Paris Agreement would be collectively increased and sufficiently financed to give the world any chance to limit a global temperature rise to 1.5C.²

With the UN Decade on Biodiversity coming to an end in 2020, it was also to be the year to develop an ambitious new global biodiversity framework at COP 15 under the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD).³

Both important international decision-making moments were moved to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Civil society organisations do not only regard these gatherings as decisive for the fate of our planet, but also for supporting and scrutinising the actual implementation of any commitments in the coming years at the national and international level.

However, it is critical to note that the CBD has had a much lower profile with youth compared with the UNFCCC, but is slowly gaining more attention.

² <https://unfccc.int/news/2020-is-a-pivotal-year-for-climate-un-chief-and-cop26-president>

³ <https://www.cbd.int/>

The COVID-19 pandemic has led many governments to make huge economic recovery investments. Civil society has been calling for these investments to help transform the economy in line with the Paris Agreement rather than supporting carbon-intensive and unsustainable industries.

In the United States, two important national milestones are in play that could also impact the fate of biodiversity and the climate crisis.

First, the Environmental Justice For All Act, introduced in the US government's House of Representatives (and included in aspects of the Climate Crisis Solutions Act), contains key provisions that could impact biodiversity as part of a "Green New Deal". Second, advocates are fighting for a "green lens" on the economic stimulus bills being enacted in 2020 to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Without such a green focus, additional support and subsidies for the fossil fuel industry make the uphill climb to address the climate and biodiversity crisis steeper.

Against the backdrop of the scientific consensus of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, and the continuous failure of governments to achieve biodiversity and climate targets in line with the science, young people have raised their voices and become an important, highly visible political force over the past two to three years challenging the status quo.

III. Research Findings

Most of the organisations interviewed and mentioned here work at the intersection of climate and biodiversity (more on this framing below). There are several distinctions to be made among the organisational homes of interviewees.

Organisations comprise:

- *Youth-led* organisations focusing on advocacy, capacity building and/or awareness raising through direct action
- *Youth-driven* organisations or programmes primarily focused on advocacy (such as traditional environmental NGOs)
- *Youth-supporting* organisations, focused on mentorship or leadership programmes

1. Youth-led and Youth-supporting Organisational Landscape – Complementary Approaches to Catalysing Change

Youth-engaging organisations can be divided into broadly three categories:

- Less formalised organisations that are part of the strike movement
- More formalised groups (often legally established organisations or youth arms of established NGOs) that are active at the national, regional, and sometimes international level
- International, youth-led networks

1.1 Less formalised youth-led organisations as part of the “strike movement”

There are many organisations, such as Fridays for Future and Youth4Climate, that are led by young people volunteering their time and formed following the inspiration of climate activists, for example, Greta Thunberg. They have been active in mobilising the school strikes that took place in 2019 and 2020.

These are often (but not always) informal organisations – meaning they are not registered legal entities – with many highly outspoken young activists broadly described here as “the strike movement”. Often, the young people who are active are still at school or at university and, in general, the organisations are entirely run by volunteers.

In different countries, organisations that affiliate themselves with the strike movement operate under different names, for example, African Climate Alliance in South Africa, Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines, Singapore Climate Strike, Rise Up Movement Africa in Uganda or Klimastreik Schweiz in Switzerland. Some are set up as legal entities to receive donations, such as UK Youth Climate Coalition. Others have created arrangements with formal NGOs administering bank accounts for them in order to receive donations, such as Fridays for Future Germany with Plant for the Planet or Campact.

The strike movement seems to be particularly strong and well-organised in Europe, the US, Canada, and Australia. There are also robust pockets of activism in the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico. In many countries, these strikes have started to influence policy-making.

For example, in Singapore, strikes organised by students from international universities were among the first of their kind in the country, but gained traction. One interviewee said that while the strikers were first seen as “foreign influence”, they started to impact recent elections when candidates were asked about their youth and climate policies on social media, which led to the opposition winning additional seats.

In Europe, the different national movements from 25 countries came together during several meetings in 2018 and 2019 and planned a joint campaign to make climate change the main focus of the European Parliament elections. In Germany, their efforts have also been credited for the Green Party, which had climate change as a lead issue, winning more seats than ever before in German cities.

In the US, the US Youth Climate Strike Coalition has been a prime organising force, and interviews for this scan have included leaders whose organisations are part of the coalition.

Students at universities have also been key organisers.

However, young people do not regard striking as an effective tool to influence change in all geographies. In some African countries (Ghana, Nigeria) or in the Gulf countries of the Middle East, where youth operate in non-democratic contexts, contexts with limited civic space, or

cultures where change only happens through dialogue rather than through dissent, striking is seen as counterproductive.

It closes rather than opens doors to decision-makers.

Many interviewees also stressed that staying away from school to strike was an avenue afforded only to those from the upper and middle classes. In Brazil, for example, young people would only “strike” in their lunch break as education was too valuable to lose out on.

It is also important to note that some youth-led organisations, for example, the United States-based Future Coalition, comprise groups that are not focused solely on climate, even though climate-focused members form the largest wing.

Coalition members share the desire to change systems that address problematic corporate power that affects all their issues. Organisations that are part of Future Coalition include those focused on gun violence. The steering committee includes members of each of the eight organisations and makes decisions by consensus. Consensus is not always easy but is seen as necessary to making better decisions, ensuring strong coalitions, and building cross-movement power. One interviewee recalled a long, facilitated Zoom call that lasted for a few hours to make a key decision on an important policy platform.

1.2 Formalised youth-led organisations

There are also many formal organisations. Some have existed for a long time, such as Youth Environment Europe, International Young Naturefriends (which came out of the 125-year-old Naturefriends movement), Young Friends of the Earth Europe/Africa, and Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative. Others have formed in the aftermath of international decision-making moments, such as climate summits in Kenya (African Youth Initiative on Climate Change), Bali (Indian Youth Climate Network), Copenhagen (Climate Tracker, Arab Youth Climate Movement, CliMates), Marrakech (The African Youth Climate Hub) or the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Nagoya (Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN)).

In Europe and Latin America, many of these organisations have been participating in school strikes. But all are actively trying to bring the views of young people into national, regional, or international policy processes, such as the UNFCCC or CBD. The young people that are active are often older, especially if they are working as paid members of staff in some of these organisations.

In the United States, the more formally established youth-led organisations frequently cited as influential, and where an interview was secured for this scan, included Zero Hour, Sunrise Movement, One Up Action, Future Coalition, and PowerShift. While some of these organisations do not have, or do not lead with, an official “biodiversity” focus, a critical characteristic of the youth climate movement is that they are working on intersectionality of the root causes of various climate problems that include biodiversity.

Of the US organisations interviewed, Youth4Nature, based in Canada but with US and other international branches, was most focused on international UN biodiversity treaties.

Organisations that were frequently mentioned, but did not end up being interviewed for this high-level scan, included SustainUS (US Youth for Justice and Sustainability), which works on national issues and is engaged in UN climate processes; and One Million of Us. It is important to note that “up and coming” organisations and leaders might not have been seen as currently influential, even though they are noted and admired. Again, this is a high-level rather than comprehensive scan, and organisations mentioned by interviewees or collected from high-level desk research that fall under the scope of this report’s climate/biodiversity focus are included in the database.

Apart from these stand-alone youth-led organisations, there are youth arms of established NGOs that youth-led organisations cited as collaborators.

Established organisations and coalitions such as Indigenous Environmental Network and Climate Justice Alliance have significant youth memberships and activity.

The Sierra Club and many other NGOs, such as Friends of the Earth and WWF, have strong youth programmes in some countries. But, legally, the youth programmes are not stand-alone entities with autonomous decision-making power.

While 350.org is not strictly speaking a youth-led organisation, it started off as one and is frequently cited as a major collaborator with youth-led organisations. 350.org is seen as influential across many countries and viewed as the “teenager”, straddling youth-led and mainstream groups. Youth-led organisations in the US also reported receiving in-kind and mentorship help from 350.org.

1.3 International youth-led networks

In Europe, many formalised youth organisations have come together under the Generation Climate Europe network to influence the decision-making of the EU around the “Green Deal”.

However, participation and coordination beyond the national level is not always possible.

Many organisations and individual young people from the Global South lack resources to participate and advocate in regional or international spaces. Only a few governments, such as Mexico, Thailand, Uganda, Republic of Korea, Belgium, Norway, Netherlands, US, Australia, United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka and Ukraine, include youth representatives in their official delegations – though the number has risen in UN processes.⁴

On the international level, there are two important and influential global networks that have formed to coordinate youth voices in climate and biodiversity-related UN processes: International Youth Climate Network (YOUNGO) and Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN).

⁴ https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2020/05/Youth-Delegates-Guide_May-2020-WEB-1.pdf

Neither network is a legal entity but both have arrangements with other organisations to receive funding. They are open, loose networks that democratically elect their representatives to the UN known as “focal points” for one year. Both networks are open to participation by individuals as well as organisations, are largely volunteer-run, and were described by several interviewees as “powerful” training grounds for young people to understand how to influence politics and policies, and build personal networks. Many interviewees stressed that attendance at intergovernmental meetings increased their credibility and standing with their own government.

While YOUNGO’s main purpose is to coordinate youth in the UNFCCC process, GYBN decided that to be taken seriously inside the smaller CBD process, they had to establish grassroots projects “with feet on the ground”. This way they have been able to show that they could support governments not only during international negotiations but also in the implementation of their targets. For example, it held open consultations around the new post-2020 CBD biodiversity targets with youth around the world and fed the results back to CBD. It strongly focuses on the Global South and has 14 national chapters and 700,000 young people involved.

YOUNGO runs the international Conference of Youth. During these conferences, young people learn how to influence the UNFCCC process, connect with each other, and work out, in deeply democratic ways, strategies and position papers in different working groups around the UNFCCC process. Since 2015, many volunteers have started organising local Conference of Youth gatherings to strengthen local and national networks.⁵ CliMates, African Youth Initiative on Climate Change, and Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative seem highly active with regard to such conferences.

Both GYBN and YOUNGO work closely with each other.

There is a strong exchange and overlap in active individuals between the climate and biodiversity community but also between the strike movement and more formalised organisations, with the latter playing a mutually reinforcing role.

As one interviewee said: *“We have fought for a seat at the table for youth for a long time but only the strikes have shown the world that young people do have a valid voice.”*

2. Movement Relationships: An Interactive Ecosystem

2.1 Relationships between the strike movement and youth-supporting or established NGOs

In some areas (for example, Europe, the US, and the Philippines), global organisations that are part of the strike movement have been supported by more traditional environmental (adult-led) NGOs, and in Europe and the US, for example, are also in close connection with Extinction Rebellion.

⁵ <https://conference-of-youth.org/>

The climate strikers have been supported by 350.org, Greenpeace, Avaaz, WWF, Sierra Club, and Friends of the Earth through “structural” support. They have provided places to meet and prepared strikes, stages, sound systems, stewards and first aid, along with training in non-violence, campaign development, or communications. These NGOs (and many more active on the national level, such as Campact in Germany) have also supported some of the more visible climate activists with small amounts of money to travel, through organising security, or supporting them in coordinating their communications.

In Southeast Asia, Greenpeace has brought different youth leaders together during the COVID-19 pandemic to co-create a “Better Normal” youth agenda, with topics such as holistic health and wellbeing and resilient food systems to present to policy-makers.

As independence is of utmost importance to the strike movement, larger NGOs including Avaaz, Greenpeace, 350.org, GSCC, CAN, and Extinction Rebellion, have – at least in Europe – started to coordinate their support to the movement to avoid co-option.

Many of these more established NGOs regard it as essential to help the movement to move from ad hoc mobilising around specific strike dates to community organising for the longer term.

They believe that ensuring strong trusted relationships across countries and cultures are key for this to happen.

2.2 Relationship between youth-supporting NGOs and youth-led organisations or networks

Internationally, networks such as GYBN or YOUNGO also work closely with established NGOs. GYBN, for example, runs a large training programme around the CBD and how to conduct advocacy in conjunction with WWF. YOUNGO coordinates with and is supported through Climate Action Network International, but also has many exchanges with other NGOs on policy and strategy.

Organisations such as Youth and Environment Europe coordinate with the “Big 10” environmental NGOs on EU climate policy and sit on the board of one of the biggest EU environmental NGO networks, the European Environmental Bureau.

Youth-supporting organisations, such as Greening Youth Foundation (which is US based but has branches in three African countries) and the Alliance for Climate Education, run youth mentorship programmes and help young people find internships in environmental agencies or NGOs.

In Africa, interviewees from formal youth NGOs were more critical of established NGOs. They stressed that a lack of available resources had created an atmosphere of competition rather than collaboration, not only among youth-led organisations but also established NGOs and youth-led organisations. It is also worth noting that many NGOs are led by people under 30 in Africa – even if they are not specifically youth focused.

2.3 Relationship between the strike movement and more formalised youth-led organisations

Many youth-led organisations work closely on content and activities (for example, demonstrations) with more informal groups that constitute the strike movement. There is also a major overlap of young people who are active in the strike movement and more formalised youth-led organisations and networks.

There seems to be a general understanding that the strike movement has been able to reach and mobilise many more youth at the grassroots level, that the noise generated by the strike movement has opened doors to policy processes for more formalised organisations, and that all these types of engagement have a role to play to get adults to tackle the climate crisis now.

However, some interviewees were critical of the lack of more specific solutions that the strike movement was promoting, and the prominence of individuals such as Greta Thunberg and their influence on strategic directions.

3. Priorities: The Interconnectedness of Environmental, Social, and Economic Justice

3.1 Issue focus

Overall, youth-led organisations see it as critical to work in a less siloed way than “established” NGOs, and reflect more openly on their own practices. Most interviewees stressed that a pure environmental focus (for example, a focus solely on wildlife conservation, energy, or deforestation) missed the point of the deep systemic changes needed in our economic system.

Environmental crises are regarded as deeply connected with existing social inequity. They are strongly critical of siloed solutions to climate and biodiversity that do not address root causes of social, racial, and economic injustice causing the climate crisis. Thus, the term climate justice was brought up in many interviews and is at the forefront of most youth-led organisations’ description of their mission on their websites and social media.

Youth also do not make hard distinctions between biodiversity and climate focus as both, again, are seen as connected to the same underlying root causes. Many organisations that are active with GYBN are also active with YOUNGO, such as Engajamundo or Plant for the Planet. Fridays for Future, and many of the more formalised organisations active on climate are also active on biodiversity issues.

GYBN stressed that to break out of silos and reach more young people, it was important to speak about the importance of people and nature rather than using the “fluffy” biodiversity concept.

The term “biodiversity” is seen as problematic and exclusionary by many youth interviewees in the US, given the problematic push by some mainstream NGOs in the past to exclude indigenous communities from “wild” spaces.

Leaders, in sync with goals, framing, and analysis of the problems outlined on their websites, stressed the connections and links between biodiversity and other issues, including unchecked corporate power, social justice and healthy agricultural and animal farming systems, and sustainable livelihoods and communities' sovereignty. Ecosystem health is keeping human beings alive, as one interviewee put it, but for many mainstream groups these links are not at the forefront.

The Canada-based Youth4Nature (which has US and overseas chapters) highlighted that, in response to feedback from frontline partners in the Global South, they are working on better framing that makes the needs of those defending nature clear. Even the framing of "nature-based solutions" is seen as needing to evolve.

Youth biodiversity champions view justice-focused solutions as the ones that will work and last. But they see relatively less appetite from mainstream biodiversity NGOs to work intersectionally, compared with mainstream organisations that focus on the energy/climate change nexus.

In the US, Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) is the hub for established justice-focused organisations accountable to the most impacted communities. CJA includes members of the Indigenous Environmental Network, has youth development arms, summits, and has held successful "frontline climate strikes".⁶

3.2 Increasing diversity and inclusion in youth-led and youth-supporting organisations

There is a desire from youth climate leaders, who see addressing inequity and justice concerns as critical to success, to improve representation of leaders in the movement overall. They are also striving to ensure diversity and inclusion are integrated into their own governance practices.

Youth leaders of colour in the US still view some youth-led/driven organisations – while much better than the older generation of mainstream organisations in naming race and equity concerns and having diverse leadership – as having work to do on diversity and inclusion. This is even though, across the board, the vast majority of youth leaders – of all backgrounds – made clear that they want to do better than mainstream organisations, whose slow approaches to addressing racism and unconscious bias issues have been well documented and are seen as an Achilles heel of the environmental movement.

Class concerns were also raised. Many activist youth leaders spoke of their awareness of the privileged backgrounds of many peer youth leaders. Historically marginalised people are underrepresented and/or less visible in the broader movement. Current leaders view this as a problem if they are to build and sustain their efforts.

It is noteworthy that many youth leaders in the US echo the decades-long critiques of mainstream organisations that have come from the environmental justice movement. It is not clear that all youth leaders understand the full history of the environmental movement (inclusive of the environmental justice movement) and the role that long-standing EJ leaders

⁶ See: 2019 Climate Justice Youth Summit: <https://climatejusticealliance.org/climate-justice-youth-summit/>

have had in bringing justice, inclusion, and “just transition” concerns and solutions to the fore.

Additionally, in the US, the urban-rural divide was named as a challenge to building power. Youth leaders recognised the need for greater engagement beyond cities, which are the strongholds for activities.

Many young people see inclusive practices and working across movements as critical to building power. They are attempting to address this in different ways:

The Young Friends of the Earth Europe Network, for example, developed a toolkit on intersectional movement building⁷ and is working with organisations active against sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc, to bring about systemic change. They are also running a project bringing youth-led climate and social justice organisations together to form positions together on the EU’s Green Deal.

Fridays for Future in Europe aims to proactively establish a safe space for different gender identities.

Engajamundo in Brazil ensures representations of minorities and historically marginalised groups in their decision-making process but also sent a majority indigenous delegation to the last UNFCCC negotiations in 2019, starting a wider discussion about privilege and representation among the youth climate delegates.

The Australian Youth Climate Coalition has helped build Seed, a powerful network supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth across Australia to take climate action.

The Re-Earth Initiative was founded by youth “to make the climate movement accessible to all”. They strive to provide a wide range of avenues for people to participate in the climate movement beyond physical presence, want to break the echo chamber, and bring climate action to the masses, by hosting informational webinars and writing toolkits.

Several interviewees also remarked⁷ that most of the outspoken activists identify as female, which contrasts with established adult-led NGOs, where the most visible positions are still held by cis men.

Zero Hour has been admired for how their leadership and messaging weave critiques about inequality, equity, race, and patriarchy into their efforts.

One interviewee, after being at a well-known youth-led organisation, said he was driven to start a new network in part because the top leaders of even relatively diverse youth-led organisations were “white or white-passing”. Experiences were recounted of colourism, racism, and unconscious bias. A second youth leader started a new network to focus on giving a greater voice to black youth as a complement to her collaborative work with a mainstream youth arm.

⁷ http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/young_foee/toolkit_for_intersectional_movement_building.pdf

In the US, youth leaders see their strongholds as on the coasts and in urban areas, along with relative strength in the Midwest. They would like to see more resources and reach in the southern United States and rural areas. Youth activism in southern, typically more conservative states, such as Kentucky, are an exception that leaders would like to see spread.

3.3 Deep democracy *within* youth-led organisations

Overall, youth-led organisations are intentionally more democratic in their decision-making compared with the largest mainstream organisations. This is viewed as vital to being effective in sustaining engagement and pressing for solutions that reflect the science, and is in line with some academic literature on the links between sustaining movements, level of impact, and decision-making structures. Doug McAdam, Professor of Sociology, Stanford University, has noted:

“But how do we know that these top-down institutional efforts have had little effect? For starters, the failure to achieve any significant legislative or policy breakthroughs on the issue at the federal level has to be seen as a stark rebuke to the institutionalized movement. The empirical portrait of the institutionalized movement that emerges from research is also consistent with the above judgment. For example, Caniglia et al. (2015) paint a rather depressing picture of the institutionalized climate change network. The movement is dominated by the most moderate of reform organizations, and even these nonthreatening groups struggle to gain access to either media or congressional forums, whereas lobbyists for the fossil fuel industry enjoy substantial entree to both.”⁸

There are large differences on democratic governance, depending on how institutionalised an organisation is or where it is based, as the following examples show:

Fridays for Future Germany: each local group elects two delegates, who are involved in national decision-making. They use videoconferencing, Telegram, and other platforms to form working groups through which they create proposals for the organisation. If money is involved, the finance working group has to agree to any proposals. To govern the organisation, all the delegates elect a national decision-making body that uses a majority voting system.

CliMates: this highly effective and completely volunteer-led organisation has a youth-led board and youth-led advisory council. Board members serve for only one term. Anyone with a proposal can come to the board for approval and do their own fundraising, for example, through crowdfunding. The board only checks whether the proposal is in line with the organisation’s values.

YOUNGO and GYBN: two focal points – one from the Global North and one from the Global South – are elected by delegates for one year. YOUNGO uses consensus decision-making with its delegates. Anyone can bring in a proposal, which people can provide comments on for discussion. The proposal, with amendments, then gets voted on. An elected Coordination Team can make logistical decisions, for example, on what social media posts go out.

⁸ <http://acriticalengagement.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Social-Movement-Theory-and-the-Prospects-for-Climate-Change-Activism-in-the-United-States.pdf>

The US Future Coalition interviewee described a Zoom call that lasted several hours to obtain a consensus on an important issue where a public position needed to be taken.

Most of the formalised organisations have more traditional setups while also believing in greater democracy. For example, Young Friends of the Earth Europe has an Annual General Meeting that sets the broad direction of the network and allows staff and working groups to make decisions inside the strategy.

Youth leaders and supporters would like to see the best-resourced environmental organisations in the US not just address diversity when it comes to race, but also to have more inclusive approaches to youth engagement. They would like to see youth have a meaningful say in decision-making rather than having to sit at the “kids’ table” when it comes to decisions.

One interviewee of colour felt the need to start her own organisation but valued the opportunity to be on Appalachian Trail Conservancy Next General Youth Council.

The Sierra Club Youth Coalition, which has five paid staff, is revamping its youth governance and hopes the structure will give more autonomy to youth volunteers to choose campaigns and directions. Currently, the youth director works with youth leaders to develop a workplan and budget (within certain parameters) that then needs to be approved by the adult leadership.

As a final example, SustainUS notes on its website: *“Approximately half of our directors are alumni of SustainUS, using the skills they gained as youth leaders to help guide the organization. The other half bring an outside perspective to keep SustainUS grounded in the challenges and opportunities of a changing world.”*

4. Change Strategies

There are three main change strategies that youth-led organisations and youth leaders employ to build the power to influence change at the scale that the science demands:

- Capacity building
- Policy advocacy
- Direct action

They often work with a mix of all three, or sometimes apply one specific strategy. To a lesser extent, some are also involved in litigation but this work is not youth-led.

4.1 Capacity building and leadership development

Many groups focus on building skills and knowledge of youth to take action and advocate for change in their communities or in policy processes.

Some have dedicated youth leadership programmes, such as the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, which runs a Climate Justice Academy across schools in Australia, or Climate Tracker, which trains youth journalists to cover the climate crisis through new storytelling techniques and participatory media research in over 20 different countries. GYBN, CoalitionWILD, and Youth for Our Planet focus on building skills for young people to run their

own campaigns and influence policies. CliMates runs simulations of, for example, climate negotiations or heat waves as a way to transfer knowledge and skills.

At a national level, many involve young people in running grassroots projects, ranging from plastic pollution (Catholic Youth for Environmental Sustainability Africa) to the circular economy (Green African Youth Organization).

Groups that work internationally (for example, Young Friends of the Earth, GYBN, YOUNGO, CliMates, Youth and Environment Europe, International Young Naturefriends, Generation Climate Europe, Climate Tracker, African Youth Initiative on Climate Change, CoalitionWILD) also focus on building strong networks and enabling international exchanges.

Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative, International Young Naturefriends, and Global Peace Initiative of Women focus on wellbeing and creating personal resilience in the environmental youth movement.

Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative also runs “Choose, Change & Become”, an international programme for developing youth leadership. The programme aims to support young leaders in developing their inner capacity to make values-based choices and decisions that lead to positive, constructive action for their societies and the world.

In the US, organisations such as the Momentum Institute have helped spin off other movement organisations, for example, Sunrise Movement. Additional organisations are listed in the database.

4.2 Policy advocacy

Groups such as CliMates, Young Friends of the Earth, Indian Youth Climate Network, UK Youth Climate Coalition, Arab Youth Climate Movement, Green Africa Youth Organization, Singapore Youth for Climate Action, Brahma Kumaris Environment Initiative, Engajamundo, Youth4Nature, CoalitionWILD, and many others focus on involving young people in influencing international and regional policy processes.

GYBN and YOUNGO coordinate policy positions, share intelligence, and provide spaces for the youth delegates and organisations to strategise.

Youth leaders are not just trying to change specific policies, but the governance structures that will ensure a consistent forum for the youth voice. In many European countries, there are already specific processes for youth to be involved in the policy process, for example, through Youth Councils. But in many other countries, such processes do not exist yet.

In the US, work towards a “Green New Deal” at the federal level (that is, a comprehensive climate crisis draft bill that has been passed by the US government’s House of Representatives) is a focus for youth climate organisations. One interviewee noted he was trying to raise the profile of biodiversity under the umbrella of the Green New Deal.

Below the federal level, One Up Action (which has many chapters internationally) helped initiate the Los Angeles County Youth Climate Commission, a first in the US. Former US Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, Los Angeles County Supervisor at the time of writing this report, noted:

“More than two million LA County residents are youth under the age of 18, and they are far from passive observers when it comes to addressing climate change. I am so proud of our youth who are mobilizing, organizing, and rising up to demand that policymakers act now on climate change.

By inviting a diverse group of youth stakeholders to the table, we are creating an historic opportunity for LA County to become the epicenter of a sustainable revolution. Our youth are an eternal source of hope and motivation. It is through their leadership that we can ensure a healthier, greener world for all.”⁹

The work of indigenous youth to influence policy decisions that locate fossil fuel pipelines on biodiversity-rich land that is considered sacred is described in section 4.3 below on direct action.

Advocacy to ensure youth has a seat at the table has also paid off internationally. In July 2020, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed seven young people to advise him on climate change and COVID-19 recovery.¹⁰

4.3 Building awareness through direct action

Organisations that are part of the strike movement, such as Fridays for Future, Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines, Singapore Climate Rally, Youth4Climate, and African Climate Alliance, focus mainly on online and offline mobilisation around global strike days and amplifying youth voices to build pressure on decision-makers. As noted earlier, the more formalised organisations as well as established environmental NGOs support them in this.

Social media channels have democratised outreach to youth, and allowed for more autonomy as a result of distributed organising. But youth leaders also prize in-person connections. Youth leaders maximise the power of virtual organising and engagement through social media platforms, such as Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Facebook, to help with mobilisation and recruitment, and as a public campaign tool. They equally stress the importance of in-person relationship-building and local projects. One interviewee said their group has lasted while some peer organisations have not because of the attention paid to community-building.

The COVID-19 pandemic has damaged momentum for youth climate-focused organising, even though events such as the 50th anniversary of Earth Day were successfully held virtually.

However, because of their cross-movement approach and relationships, youth leaders have been out in support of the historic Black Lives Matter protests that started in the US and swept across the globe.

⁹ Full statement of LA County Supervisor Hilda Solis on creation of Youth Climate Commission [here](#).

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/jul/28/un-calls-on-youth-activists-to-advise-on-climate-crisis-and-covid-19-recovery>

Preceding the climate strike movement in the US, one of the biggest efforts that employed both direct action and policy advocacy in the fight for biodiversity and climate was the Dakota Access Pipeline fight, led by indigenous organisations and started by young people from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

The fight drew supporters from around the world. Mainstream environmental organisations, such as the Center for Biological Diversity and formal support from over 200 scientists highlighted the threat posed by the oil industry-backed pipeline to biodiversity and clean water.¹¹

The tribal coalition's direct action included massive protests at the site as well as action, including a relay-style run of around 2,000 miles to Washington, DC, to bring those concerns directly to federal officials and draw more national attention to the issue.

While the current US administration reversed policy success under the previous administration, youth leaders described the experience and training as transformational. As one outlet reported:

"...for the small group of often overlooked native youth who started the movement, the experience was transformational. 'This has changed my life completely,' said Jasilyn Charger, 20, of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, who first helped organise the protest. 'I will never be the same girl I was when I first came to camp. ... My people gave me courage. And I'm going to continue this fight.'"

Although the pipeline was completed, a judge ordered that it be shut down in July 2020 due to a review of violations of the US National Environmental Protection Act.

Similar campaigns with large youth involvement have been run by the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and Seed to prevent the building of the world's largest coal mine on land traditionally owned by the Wangan and Jagalingou people in Australia. Their struggle at the time of writing is on-going.

4.4 Litigation as a new tool

Complementary to direct action, another powerful tool that youth and other communities are discovering is litigation. Amazon Frontlines has noted a strengthening in the force of international law in recent years, enabling indigenous tribes to have greater legal standing in battling to save their biodiversity-rich homelands from corporate polluters. Amazon Frontlines, formally a registered US non-profit organisation, is based in Ecuador, and led by an American-born activist who has worked in Ecuador for many years in partnership with organisations such as the Ceibo Alliance. The work engages indigenous youth in combining traditional knowledge with modern tracking technologies to raise visibility internationally and at key international fora of the ecosystem damage being done. The Ceibo Alliance is an indigenous-led Ecuadorian non-profit organisation, comprising members of the Kofan, Siona, Secoya and Waorani peoples in a first-of-its-kind alliance.

In Colombia, Canada, the US, Pakistan, among others, youth leaders – often in strong cooperation with NGOs – use the intergenerational justice argument to force their

¹¹ Society for Conservation Biology, *More than 220 Scientists Say Dakota Access Pipeline*

governments to act.¹² Active organisations include Our Children’s Trust, David Suzuki Foundation, Client Earth, among many others. The costs and long nature of court cases mean that this tool is not yet a dominant focus for youth-led organisations.

5. Narrative: Justice, Urgency and Systems Change

Young leaders have brought social justice as a strong and defining component to debates about climate change and biodiversity. They have moved the issues from environmental debates to the mainstream, injected urgency, and framed biodiversity collapse and the climate crisis as existential threats that the current generation has neglected to tackle seriously.

They portray themselves as agents of change, guided by scientific evidence and speaking on behalf of future generations. But they also stress that it will be too late by the time that they have enough power (for example, to run politics or vote) or resources.

A recent study on the narratives of the youth climate movement offered the following perspective:

“The villains—adults, politicians, the media, extractive industries—failed to act in response to a deepening climate crisis and passed the burden of addressing the problem to future generations, who are the victims. Faced with the gross inaction and negligence of the villains, the victims will not remain mere victims. The heroes will mobilize themselves in a collective action to obtain justice for the damaged earth, its biosphere, and the people who have suffered under the gross inaction and negligence of the villains. Young people will hold the villains accountable by monitoring what they do and pressuring them for systemic transformation. The movement participants also warned that they would penalize state leaders by voting them out in years to come. Thus, the narrative suggested that world leaders should recognize their responsibility and act in response to climate change. (...) The moral was that climate change should be understood from an interstate and intergenerational justice perspective. The activists maintained that richer countries need to get to zero emissions much faster and help poorer countries do the same so that people in less fortunate parts of the world can raise their standard of living. The lesson was that climate change should be addressed in terms of justice for and the rights of disadvantaged social groups and states that are less powerful and resourceful and thus more vulnerable.”¹³

Table 2. Narrative of Youth Climate Activists.

Narrative Elements	Summary
Setting	Growing youth awareness of the climate change issue through the acquisition of scientific information Greater youth exposure to the negative consequences of climate change Incongruence between deepening climate crisis and global inaction
Characters	Victims The earth, the ecosystem, younger generations, marginalized groups, and weak states
	Villains Older generations, the fossil fuel industry, states and their leaders, the media
	Heroes Younger generations, climate science, and states (if they reform)
Plot	Overarching transformation to stop climate change via the activism of heroes and changes on the part of the villains under pressure from the heroes
Moral	Climate change as the greatest existential threat to the earth and to human beings Urgency of action and systemic change on a global scale The need to understand the global climate emergency from a rights and justice perspective

¹² <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/environment-and-conservation/2019/06/kids-suing-governments-about-climate-its-global-trend>

¹³ Heejin Han and Sang Wuk Ahn (2020): Youth Mobilization to Stop Global Climate Change: Narratives and Impact. Sustainability. May 2020

For young people, it is not just ecosystems that need protecting but that the people dependent on biodiverse regions need to be resourced to take care of their land/oceans and benefit economically from sustainable practices. Meanwhile, the people impacted hardest need to be at the forefront of the demanded change.

As previously noted, youth leaders cannot be seen in isolation but are embedded in an ecosystem of movement, networks, youth-led and youth-supporting organisations, and NGOs. Thus, this narrative shift, and especially the justice elements, can be seen in the wider narrative of more established NGOs towards “Justice for People and Planet”.

In the US and in many countries around the world, youth climate leaders were highly active in the historic Black Lives Matter protests. They firmly believe that the siloed approach of the mainstream environmental movement is part of the problem, and that underlying systems common to multiple social problems need to be addressed.

As Nadia Nazar from Zero Hour put it in a media interview: “Together, the youth are shaking the systems that have supported the climate crisis, including racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism.”¹⁴

6. Cultural and Resourcing Differences Impacting Geographic Strengths

At first glance, North America, Europe, and Australia seem to be the regions with the most visible youth movements, due to the public attention given to climate strikes, with pockets of youth activism in many other regions of the world.

However, it is important to understand the massive difference in how much young people are considered a legitimate voice in the political debate and how much access to resources differs.

6.1 Difference in legitimacy of youth-driven/youth-led organisations

Whereas climate strikes have opened political doors to young people in Europe, in many African and Asian countries, for example, young people are asked by decision-makers: “What do you have to offer without any life experience?”

Interviewees stressed the importance of being able to offer technical expertise and skills. GYBN, for example, found that they were only taken seriously once they could offer governments support in implementation through their national chapters.

One interviewee said: “*You don’t just earn a seat at the table because it is your future they are talking about.*” Another commented: “*Traditionally, as a young person, you wouldn’t question the older generation in many Asian countries. However, many people study abroad and bring new ideas back. Things are slowly changing.*”

Furthermore, in many countries, it is essential to be registered as a not-for-profit organisation to appear a credible discussion partner to policy-makers. This means having audited accounts, a functioning board, and paying lawyers for the legal set-up.

¹⁴ <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/10/11/20904791/young-climate-activists-of-color>

For many youth-led organisations, these pose high financial hurdles that often cannot be met through project funds.

In some countries with limited civic space, it is not only unaffordable but also almost impossible for organisations that do not have the right political connections to register.

6.2 Difference in access to resources

In Europe, the EU (for example, Erasmus+) and many governments have youth-focused funds. Resources and therefore visibility are much more difficult to come by in many African, Asian, and Latin American countries, where it is also much harder for young people to volunteer their time unpaid.

In the US, the less wealthy, rural and southern (typically more politically conservative) states are under-resourced. Leaders of colour are less likely to have doors opened for them to funders and resources. Young people named the lack of paid opportunities to intern and engage as a barrier to building more diverse coalitions.

7. Existing Funders or Funder Networks at Youth/Biodiversity/Climate Nexus

Most organisations said there was extremely little funding available. However, there were large geographical differences:

Europe

- The strike movement – at least in Europe – seems to receive a lot of in-kind funding or smaller sums from established NGOs, who are in turn often supported through, for example, the Oak Foundation
- Generation Climate Europe was set up with support from the European Climate Foundation but only for one year
- More institutionalised organisations or those with specific funding arrangements with other organisations (for example, GYBN) in the EU have access to EU funds, such as Erasmus+ or are supported through government youth funding (for example, German government support for GYBN, French government support for CliMates in the run-up to Paris climate summit)

Africa, Asia, Latin America

- Many concrete projects are run through accessing small funds from embassies, accessing the Global Green Grants Fund, Pollination Project, or working closely with governments and UN programmes
- Local businesses (Telekom companies, etc) sometimes sponsor specific events or projects, but this can also be controversial if these companies are related to, for example, the fossil fuel industry
- The Mohammed Six Foundation has enabled the setting up of the African Climate Hub
- In Brazil, Engajamundo has been supported by the Oak Foundation

Crowdfunding also seems to be a highly popular option around the world.

United States

Youth organisations interviewed cited the following funders for support of youth efforts:

- Wallace Global Fund
- The Solutions Project
- The Kandeda Fund
- Mertz Gilmore Foundation
- Hewlett Foundation
- The Bullitt Foundation
- ClimateWorks Foundation
- Pisces Foundation
- Erol Foundation
- REI (for getting youth outdoors)
- CIFF (UK)
- Rockefeller Brothers Fund
- V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation
- The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation
- Regranting, in-kind support, received through NGOs such as 350.org, World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, MARCH ON

Funders interested in learning more about this scan’s findings, and connecting with other funders to explore how to support youth efforts, include:

- Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (in 2020 launched the Building a More Inclusive Conservation Movement Program), Resources Legacy Fund
- Argosy Foundation

Funder networks that are potential resources for follow-up include (illustrative):

- [Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing](#) (which published [Youth Leading The Way To A Sustainable Planet](#) in 2011)
- [Native Americans in Philanthropy](#)
- [Building Equity & Alignment for Impact Fund](#)
- [Biodiversity Funders Group](#)

8. Organisational Needs and Investment Opportunities

Problematically, little direct funding seems to be reaching youth-led organisations. Despite this, young people have proved an incredible influence on public debate because many have vast reach (in part because of skilful use of social media), a passionate network of volunteers, and in-kind support from youth-supporting organisations.

But reliance on vast volunteer energy and in-kind support from youth-supporting organisations is a red flag for the sustained effort needed to overcome entrenched interests. One interviewee said: *“We have to think about the next five years and ensure that we continue to recruit younger members since as youth get older, they have less time to volunteer.”*

In the interviews, the following needs emerged:

#1 Increase resources to level the playing field for underrepresented, most impacted communities, both within rich countries, such as the US, and the Global South

Many interviewees stressed that the current biodiversity and climate movement is still dominated by youth with middle-class backgrounds from the Global North and that groups led by and/or accountable to underrepresented groups are underfunded.

The World Bank has noted that: “While Indigenous Peoples own, occupy, or use a quarter of the world’s surface area, they safeguard 80 percent of the world’s remaining biodiversity.”¹⁵

Support is therefore recommended for:

- a) Organisations led by and accountable to underrepresented groups. A recently released study by the Tishman Environment and Design Center at The New School in New York City, found that only 1.3% of the grants from 12 of the largest US climate funders goes to environmental justice groups.¹⁶
- b) Leadership programmes and paid internships that specifically target non middle-class and historically marginalised youth from the Global North and Global South
- c) Travel funds that enable these young people to engage in international political processes (for example, through GYBN, YOUNGO) and regional/national home country convenings.

Illustrative organisations with established mechanisms and programmes for receiving funds are given below. However, this is a high-level scan, **and it is critical to note that a deeper scan is needed to determine which organisations, especially in the Global South, also have class diversity, given the concerns raised about equity and marginalised youth within countries.**

In the US, the underfunding of indigenous groups, in particular by philanthropy, has been well documented.¹⁷ Organisations, such as the Indigenous Environmental Network and International Indigenous Youth Council have a deeper knowledge of indigenous groups working on issues that include climate and biodiversity.

Examples of non-EU and US-based organisations led by or with some focus on underrepresented youth, and/or facilitating paid internships, include: Engajamundo (Brazil), Seed (Australia’s first indigenous youth climate network), Green Africa Youth Organization, International Indigenous Youth Council, Indigenous Environmental Network, Climate Justice Alliance, One Up Action, Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples, Ceibo Alliance/Amazon Frontlines partnership, Greening Youth Foundation (US, with chapters in Lesotho, Ghana, and South Africa), Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program.

Global leadership (not specifically focusing on non middle-class and historically marginalised youth): Youth Climate Leaders, CliMates, GYBN with WWF, Plant for the Planet, Climate Reality Project, Climate Tracker.

¹⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples>

¹⁶ [Environmental Justice and Philanthropy: Challenges and Opportunities for Alignment](#) (2020)- New School Tishman Environment and Design Center

¹⁷ Investing in Native Communities - [New Report and Website highlights Underfunding of Native American Communities](#)

Travel funds: GYBN, YOUNGO

See Section 7 for an initial scan of funders or regranting organisations highlighted in youth leaders' interviews and with a climate or youth focus that overlaps with biodiversity

Again, **these examples are illustrative rather than comprehensive**, given this high-level scan. Visit the [database](#) for a longer list of organisations.

#2 Scale up cross-country and intersectional, cross-movement collaboration (online and offline) to improve cultural competency and build strong personal connections and strategies

Funding is needed for increased coordination between organisations and movements to strategise together for the long term, get to know each other, and build trusted personal networks not only in their countries but also across countries to have strong global efforts.

Young people have expressed the need to bring justice and climate/biodiversity-focused movements together for cross-movement collaboration.

Many interviewees stressed the power of face-to-face collaboration spaces. **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, innovative virtual platforms, and good access to them, are now even more critical to sustain connections and organising.**

For example, young people in the Global South often struggle to access Zoom calls due to expensive and limited internet access.

Interviewees stressed the importance for dominant voices in the youth climate movement (youth from the Global North) to better understand the realities and cultures in the Global South. This would help increase empathy and understanding. One interviewee said: *“Young people in Europe speak on international stages about what China should do on climate policies but they don't understand the local realities.”*

In the US, there is the desire to do better at being inclusive and intersectional than the older generations of mainstream environmentalists. Needs cited ranged from translation services for documents and conference calls to facilitators to improve cultural competency. They were self-aware that cultural barriers have been a concern and want to be intentional about best practices for cross-cultural collaboration.

While there are some coordination efforts, for example, in Europe, that can be strengthened, there is an even greater need to extend these spaces across Africa, Latin America, and Asia, where organisations are more dispersed and have even less resources.

Organisations that could help fill gaps if resourced or scaled up (again, **these are not comprehensive given this high-level scan**):

Intersectionality and inclusion: Young Friends of the Earth Europe, Climate Cardinals (seeks to equalise access to information between English and non-English speakers by translating materials into multiple languages).

Providing regional spaces to connect: Generation Climate Europe and its members, for example, International Young Naturefriends, Youth and Environment Europe; African Youth

Initiative on Climate Change, CliC! (Latin American Youth Climate Network), 350.org with their powershift programme, Global Youth Biodiversity Network through its chapters, YOUNGO through their vast global Conferences of Youth and members who organise local and national youth conferences

Recent online conferences that engaged youth included:

Greening Youth Foundation, American Conservation Coalition and Audubon [2020 Youth Environment Summit](#)

#3 Increase wellness and intergenerational mentorship support to build personal/team resilience to avoid burnout

Youth leaders are highly driven and full of energy, often juggling a full school load with their activism. But the work takes a mental toll. Youth leaders often feel the weight of the world on their shoulders as they watch the yawning gap between what the science says we need to do to avert catastrophe, and the politics and corporations blocking the path to solutions. As one interviewee stated: *“I am not an ‘activist’, I am fighting for my survival.”*

Another noted: *“Meditation saved me.”*

Youth leaders’ closest friends are often the people they work with, so personal and professional lives are intertwined. Interviewees frequently described the pain of seeing friends burning out.

Adults from NGOs supporting the climate strike movement and working with young people stressed the importance of ensuring that young people active in the strike movement, who mobilise and strike every week, do not burn out. They said that it was important to enable these groups to learn how to move from community mobilising to organising, for example, 350.org and its campus-based divestment campaigns, to have “wins” in their communities that keep up the momentum. *“This is a long fight with few clear wins and we need to keep the energy.”*

Or as another interviewee said: *“Young activists are expected to be invincible and social media reinforces that, but they face so much doubt by adults. Also, online communication can be toxic. What is needed is to establish a culture of care.”*

A further interviewee pointed out that members spent time “front-loading” their launch by building community and a group culture, not only talking about strategy, and how this approach had prevented them from flagging when other youth efforts have done so.

There is also a desire from youth leaders to have opportunities to connect and learn from long-term leaders in the movement who have had to navigate the ups and downs of social movements. But youth leaders want to make sure it is a two-way street, and that elders want to hear them, not just preach.

Amazon Frontlines (in Ecuador), which partners with the CEIBO Alliance, also stressed the vital need to take the time to build connections with youth, not just share policy or organising goals.

One interviewee mentioned hearing about a Psychologists for Future group in the EU that supported Fridays For Future and wondered if the US might try to replicate it.

The aforementioned Standing Rock mass mobilisation in the US took special care to have a wellness director, which was critical because of police violence in trying to break up the protests.

Resources are thus recommended to:

- a) Support retreats or initiatives focusing on self-care, community care, and resilience strategies for young people
- b) Focus on training to move young people from ad hoc mobilising to more sustainable community organising, for example, through community or other joint projects
- c) Support intergenerational mentorship programmes

It cannot be emphasised enough how investment in mental health needs is seen as critical by both youth-led and youth-supporting organisations.

Examples of organisations that could support youth groups:

- Moving from mobilising to long-term community organising: Young Friends of the Earth, 350.org
- Culture of care: Global Peace Initiative of Women, International Young Naturefriends, Brahma Kumaris, Psychologists for Future
- Mentorship: Greening Youth Foundation, Youth Climate Leadership

#4 Create longer-term and flexible funding models paired with mentoring

If funds are available for youth-led organisations, they are often short term (for example, six months to one year) and based around safe and predictable outcomes collected in logical frameworks, such as planting a specific number of trees. Interviewees stressed the need to have the opportunity to go beyond these predictable outcomes and youth organisations to be allowed to focus on long-term and transformational system change (three-five years).

On the other hand, youth leaders would also like to see more attention and flexible funding for local efforts, such as community-led projects, which are essential for recruiting youth leaders. Youth leaders see themselves as the best recruiters for the generation coming up behind them. They think local efforts (for instance, community gardening) are looked down on by some funders when looking at biodiversity. But youth leaders invariably noted that these local efforts often spark knowledge about connections to larger efforts and systems, and are the base for greater engagement.

Young people strongly emphasised that any grants should have a) integrated coaching components, and b) include capacity building in monitoring and evaluation for youth to be able to make change visible.

- Interesting funding models for small grants: <https://thepollinationproject.org/>
- Climate Emergency Fund, flexible but short term: <https://climateemergencyfund.org/>
- Solutions Project, rapid response grants: <https://thesolutionsproject.org/>

More research is needed to identify which funders already implement similar funding models and learn from their experience.

#5 Create strong organisations through institutional capacity building, with help needed to enable legal formalisation of organisations or fiscal sponsorships

Many interviewees raised the issue that a focus on project grants alone does not allow them to strengthen their own institutional processes. However, strong institutional setups are also often a condition to access funding. For some, the solution lies in obtaining fiscal sponsorship through an established NGO. For others, this does not work.

Youth want independence from mainstream organisations, which they worry will try to water down their science-based demands if they become just a “youth arm”. But young leaders find much time being drained by the administrative demands of managing a legal entity, and want creative approaches to getting support while remaining independent.

Fiscal sponsorship is one approach that has worked for some. Zero Hour in the US, for instance, is fiscally sponsored by [MARCH ON](#)

In many countries in the Global South, youth-led or youth-driven organisations would increase their legitimacy and political power through registering as a legal entity with solid internal governance processes rather than being sponsored by an NGO. However, the financial hurdles for registering are often too large to handle. Even where this is possible and project funding is accessible, there are never enough funds to strengthen organisational processes and capacities.

As one interviewee said: *“If many organisations could just pay an accountant to do their finances, it would free up so much capacity from the leadership, that we could achieve so much more.”*

Thus, it is suggested that funders could:

- a) Invest in organisational development through core/structural grants where fiscal sponsorship is not possible or desirable
- b) Support fiscal sponsorship, where this is the best option

#6 Improve and share best practices on inclusive governance, which are desired by youth organisations

Youth leaders are innovating, and proud of their efforts to use, inclusive rather than top-down governance approaches. They see this approach as being a key ingredient to their success. They are proud of having created coalitions where different theories of change co-exist.

As organisations become more successful and grow, inclusive governance can become more of a challenge. It would yield dividends to invest in forums and research for sharing best practice models for inclusive governance.

#7 Convene with other current and potential youth activism funders to share knowledge and strengthen collaborative approaches to help young people sustain their transformative voice and work

Youth leaders recognise that funders have different risk appetites and internal capacity. Some are willing to invest in fledgling organisations that could be future bright lights. The Wallace Global Fund, for example, was an early investor in Sunrise Movement, one of the organisations incubated by the Momentum Institute.

Other funders support organisations after they have gained traction, or youth arms of long-established NGOs.

Overall, given the need to significantly scale up youth funding, it could be valuable for funders interested in the biodiversity/climate intersection and on different parts of the risk spectrum to compare lessons, get a more comprehensive view of the ecosystem in collaboration with youth leaders, and potentially collaborate to boost support. (This is not to suggest the “one size fits all” approach of pooling funds.)

Funder networks could also be useful for further advice. This high-level scan did not include interviewing funders.

Collaboration among funders would be especially helpful to drive resources to indigenous groups and youth organisations active in the Global South that are severely underfunded as they battle to save ancestral lands from climate polluters. The belief is that regular funder gatherings that would allow for pooled support, funder learning, and attract new dollars would be transformative.

#8 US: Improve communications and narrative-shift work to make biodiversity better understood and relevant to climate youth activists (this concern was frequently raised in US interviews but did not surface in interviews outside the US)

Passionate US youth leaders working at the intersection of biodiversity and climate are struggling – compared with peers focused on energy – to get traction for nature/biodiversity among their peers and in the media. Part of the reason may be that, with the exception of Native American/Indigenous youth leaders, the most active youth climate leaders in the US are in cities.

For youth leaders already energised about biodiversity/climate, and those that are not, it appears that the term “biodiversity” has an image problem.

Youth climate leaders place a high value on addressing systemic change, people’s needs, injustice, racism, and intersectionality. One interviewee of colour said, while he was happy to see the mainstream movement course correcting to centre people in the biodiversity conversation, there was a danger of losing the critical need to address land, water, and other biodiversity issues in tandem with people’s needs. Indigenous communities were important

for a historical, intertwined, balanced approach of seeing and protecting nature as sacred and also tending to communities' needs.

Young people focused on the energy side of the climate equation are not as deeply informed of biodiversity movers and shakers and opportunities for change. One interviewee goal was to help to clarify how biodiversity matters under the Green New Deal narrative frame that dominates current climate discourse.

Youth climate leaders, who grew up loving nature and recalled memories of forgoing video games to be outdoors or indoors watching National Geographic, see the links. But one leader pointed out: *"Looking back, I realized when I watched National Geographic, I didn't see many people."*

Resources to enable youth leaders to collaborate and strategise with narrative and communications specialists are needed. There are a range of narrative-focused organisations, from the Center for Story-based Strategy to Climate Nexus to Solutions Project (and others), that would be good sources of advice.

IV. Conclusion

An excerpt from a recent article on 2020's 50th anniversary of Earth Day stated:

"The first Earth Day [which was largely youth-led] brought together 20 million people – 10% of the US population at the time – as they took to college campuses, auditoriums and streets to demand change. That Earth Day spread across America to shake citizens out of complacency and unite millions in a shared call for action.

The legislation that followed — the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency — was a testament to the power of a nationwide movement organized...

Today, young people around the world are looking for similar transformative legislation. They're looking for real commitments, not broken promises. And they're hoping this movement can capture that."¹⁸

¹⁸ Inside the Youth Climate Strike Movement <https://www.earthday.org/inside-youth-climate-strike-movement/>

V. Appendix

Appendix 1: [List of Organisations Represented in the Interviews](#)

Appendix 2: Visualisation of Organisations Landscape; Organisational Relationships and Characteristics

- a) [Snapshot of the Ecosystem of Youth-led and Youth-supporting Organisations Resulting From Global Scan \(US not included\)](#)
- b) [US Landscape Table](#)

Appendix 3: [Database of Organisations Collated From Interviews, Outreach, and Desk Research](#)

VI. About the Authors

- Mareike Britten -

Mareike Britten is a passionate and creative social change strategy consultant who has worked over the last 15 years as campaigner, trainer and facilitator in the not for profit sector. She has been working with organisations all over the world ranging from small volunteer led initiatives to international NGOs, foundations and networks such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International, WWF, Friends of the Earth, TechSoup etc. Before running her own company, she led the campaign for a “Just Transition to 100% Renewable Energy” in the run up to the Paris Climate Summit as Head of Global Campaign Coordination of Climate Action Network International and worked as Team Leader and Senior Climate & Energy Campaigner with Greenpeace’s 34 offices on effective global strategies to combat the climate crisis and change the energy system. Through her work in Europe, Africa and Asia she has gained a deep understanding of the interlinkages of social justice and environmental issues such as the climate crisis and biodiversity loss and built a strong international network of social change makers. She holds a Magister Artrium (Masters) in Politics, Sociology and Communication Science of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster.

- Danielle Deane-Ryan -

Danielle Deane-Ryan has devoted her career to her passion for forging strategic and equitable climate crisis solutions. She serves as senior advisor to foundations including the Libra Foundation and the Donors of Color Network, and is a member of the [National Academies of Science Deep Decarbonization Committee](#). Interviews, articles and op-eds related to her work to help drive policies that deliver resources for underserved communities and strengthen the environmental movement have been featured in outlets including *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *GRIST*, *NBC*, *The New York Beacon*, *New America Media*, *Stanford Innovation Review*, *Think Progress*, *Politic365*, *American Sustainable Business Council* and *Inside Philanthropy*. Danielle has held senior leadership positions at The Nathan Cummings Foundation; within the Obama Administration at the Department of Energy’s Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy; at Green 2.0; the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; and the Hewlett Foundation. She serves on the boards of [Resource Media](#) and the [Clean Energy States Alliance](#). She has an M.Sc. from the London School of Economics in Environment and Development, and a B.A. from Williams College in Political Economy with an Environmental Studies Concentration. Danielle was awarded the Williams College Bicentennial Medal in 2019 for her work on Environmental Justice.