



Active
Philanthropy

Funding the Future

How the climate crisis
intersects with your giving



Keep life on earth.

Executive Summary

The last few decades have been marked by incredible progress in social justice and improved living standards due to the tireless work of many, including the global philanthropic community. But a rapidly heating planet puts these hard won gains at risk.

The climate crisis is no distant threat – its effects are already here. Temperature records are regularly broken, the number of violent storms is increasing, and the rate at which the ice caps are melting is accelerating. While these impacts may seem abstract, they have very real effects on the lives and livelihoods of ordinary people around the world.

But not everyone is affected equally. It is the world’s poorest, far less responsible for climate change than their rich counterparts, who bear the brunt. Indeed, the richest 10% of the world have carbon footprints 11 times higher than the poorest 50%, and yet they remain relatively shielded from the worst impacts.

Climate change is already reinforcing existing inequalities and making the grand challenges that societies face harder to solve. This is why philanthropists around the world cannot afford to ignore our heating planet. By only focusing on immediate funding areas, they may miss climate risks that undermine their existing efforts.

Geography and proximity also play a role. European-based philanthropists are one step removed from the coalface of climate impacts in developing countries and might fail to see opportunities for action and cross-cutting benefits. Finally, integrating a climate lens is also a huge opportunity to start addressing problems that will only become more unmanageable the longer they are ignored.

This guide attempts to connect the dots. It illustrates how the climate crisis impacts funding portfolios and highlights where there are co-benefits with taking climate action. It looks at five key areas that we call ‘climate intersections’:

“ I always think not so much of climate change as of climate justice.”



Mary Robinson, President of the Republic of Ireland 1990-1997, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 1997-2002, founder of the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice



Just & democratic societies



Public health



Disadvantaged groups



Education



Nature conservation

The findings and suggestions in this report are meant to shine a light on how you as a funder can increase your impact by applying a climate lens to existing work. You know your portfolio best, and are therefore well placed to think through what these intersections mean for your work. The report is also interspersed with case studies on funders and select NGOs who are already applying this lens to their work.



Just & democratic societies

The decarbonisation of global economies is underway. Done correctly, inclusive and just transitions can uplift regions and economies. Done badly, they can exacerbate existing inequalities or create new ones.

To foster equitable transitions, philanthropists should focus on flashpoints where the poor and working class stand to be negatively affected by the green transition, from the decommissioning of coal mines or power plants, to the implementation of fuel levies and taxes.

Fighting polarisation and populism also needs to be considered. Simplistic arguments and policy solutions offered by populist leaders prevent stakeholders across party lines in building the consensus necessary to drive large-scale reform. At a time where communities, parties and countries desperately need to come together to tackle the climate crisis, populism seeks to divide.

On the ground, the injustice of climate change is that its impacts are felt most by those who have played the smallest role in causing the crisis. This includes the 16.1 million people who were displaced within their own countries in 2018 due to weather-related disasters. Migration is an inevitable response to direct climate impacts. Philanthropic funding should be channelled towards adaptation planning in the global south and decarbonisation of economies in the global north.



Public health

The physical and mental well-being of every person born today depends on rapid climate action.

Air pollution is a poignant example. It goes hand-in-hand with carbon emissions and is already the greatest environmental risk in Europe. It causes millions of premature deaths every year, with levels exceeding WHO guidelines in 83% of the world's cities.

Heat waves affect people's health both in cities where the urban landscape traps heat and in rural areas where temperature control measures are rare. Together with changing precipitation patterns and extreme weather events, high global temperatures also increase the spread and impact of infectious diseases. These already cause 7,000 deaths a year. Heat also causes droughts and a drop in water quality, weakening food security worldwide.

All these aspects contribute towards human displacement and separation, leading to anxiety, trauma and increased interpersonal violence.

“ Climate change poses challenges for prosperous, democratic societies, as it is linked to issues of redistribution and difficult political decisions. Our objective is to pay special attention to the nexus between our topics.”



Sandra Breka,
Robert Bosch Stiftung

“ ...the fact that investing in clean air simultaneously provides an opportunity to tackle multiple other global issues, including health, children's development, equity and climate change, may appeal to funders.”



Bernard Aryeetey,
Clean Air Fund



Disadvantaged groups

Climate change affects everybody – but not everybody is equally prepared to deal with it. Children’s capacity to deal with the hardship of failed harvests, displacement or diseases is limited. And women are hit harder than their male counterparts because they are often responsible for household activities. These include care work or collecting food, fuel and water – tasks made harder by climate change.

With extreme weather events, climate change will not just occasionally affect children, women and other structurally disadvantaged groups in society. It will systematically decrease their ability to help themselves and reinforce dependencies on others. For example, girls are the first to be taken out of school when poor families face hardships, undermining education attainment, which has been shown to be a key driver in bringing down fertility rates.

Philanthropic funding must consider that climate justice and racial justice are inextricably linked, and work to strengthen the voices of disadvantaged groups in decision-making processes.



Education

Climate education is essential if people are to cope in a dramatically hotter and more volatile world. Education enables people of all ages to grasp the complexity of the Earth system beyond the boundaries of different disciplines, to acquire the professional skills needed in the zero carbon economy, and to adapt their values and identities to a changing planet. Only if this education extends from schools to faith-based organisations, community groups, labour organisations, the private sector and other places of learning will transformation be possible.

There is also a need to improve access to education to build the climate resilience of vulnerable groups. In some cases doing so is more effective than building physical infrastructure that protects communities.



Nature conservation

Nature provides innumerable benefits for societies. Healthy ecosystems allow humans to breathe clean air, drink clean water or eat nutritious food.

Environmental protection can also be a cost-effective solution in tackling climate change because wetlands and other ecosystems store high amounts of carbon. Yet only 2% of global financing aimed at addressing climate change is channelled towards nature-based solutions. Philanthropists are well placed to fill this gap.

As this guide illustrates, climate change is already eroding hard won social gains. Yet every one of the outlined intersections are opportunities to increase both the cost-effectiveness and long-term impact of your philanthropic funding. Crucially, supporting these intersections can be explored while still maintaining focus on your core funding area. In the meantime, we encourage any funder to adopt some good operational practices that mitigate climate change such as monitoring your emissions or divesting from fossil industries. We hope this guide will help you see the immense potential of furthering your impact by responding to the greatest issue of our time.

“ More and more strategies to tackle the climate crisis are led by women, but their role as agents of change is often overlooked and they are hugely underfunded.”



Alex Heath & Ursula Miniszewski,
Global Greengrants Fund

“ Climate change ... challenges educators because it focuses on the complex interrelations between ... the environmental, economic and social dimensions of our lives.”



Dr Barbara Filtzinger & Badin Borde,
Siemens Stiftung

“ ...we have to stop thinking of sectors like the environment, education or health as completely separate from climate change, and instead see climate as a cross-cutting issue.”



Marie-Stéphane
Maradeix, Fondation
Daniel & Nina Carasso