



THE FUTURE IS MADE OF CORAL

Building an Economy of Liberation Reef through
Reparative Climate Finance

MARCH 2026



TAPROOT EARTH

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU

This paper is Taproot Earth’s contribution to the conversations on the intersection of climate finance and climate reparations. Throughout this report, we cite many experts and practitioners in these fields, and we encourage readers to become familiar with their work.

Taproot Earth appreciates our partners, leaders, and community members whose collective ideas and vision directly shaped this work. This paper is an outcome of our organizational strategy to “document and replicate” and integrate our values of transparency and accountability to the movement.

Taproot Earth acknowledges and honors:

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Peace,



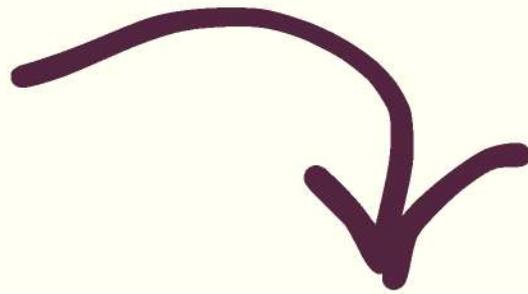
METHODOLOGY

HOW THIS REPORT WAS MADE

This report is a result of a four-year synthesis and analysis of ideas and insights focused on the intersections of economy, climate, and financial systems that have emerged from Taproot Earth convenings. While our convenings—intentional spaces where frontline leaders can vision, find joy, and share ideas and strategies to meet difficult challenges—are rooted in broader conversations about Black liberation, Indigenous sovereignty, and community stewardship, finance has been a consistent thread woven into the fabric of our convening and model-building work. A few key spaces of facilitation where participants and partners have named solutions include:



Photo: Kenya GCR Governance Assembly 2024



- Movement formations to build three community-controlled funds: the Gulf South Rising, Gulf South for a Green New Deal, and Gulf South to Appalachia from 2015 to present;
- Six virtual and hybrid convenings on climate finance, climate reparations, and community governance with more than 80 frontline and aligned leaders from nearly 20 countries between 2022 and 2023;
- Our 2024 Global Climate Reparations Movement Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, which included more than 225 frontline leaders from 25 countries;
- Strategy sessions with Climate Action Network-International (CAN-I), U.S. Climate Action Network (USCAN), and other community leaders at COP 26 (Scotland), COP 27 (Egypt), COP 29 (Azerbaijan);
- The Frontline Peoples Jubilee Convening on Global Climate Reparations with 100 frontline and aligned leaders from 27 countries in March 2025 in Rome, Italy;
- Two climate finance strategy sessions in London and New York with more than 30 frontline and aligned leaders in the summer of 2025.
- A co-facilitated session with [CIDSE](#) at the COP 30 People's Summit in Belem, Brazil on Building a Climate Finance System Rooted in Global Climate Reparations with 50 leaders from North and South America.

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Photo: The GCR Jubilee Convening





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Climate finance” is a familiar yet slippery term in climate conversations. The concept dates back to 1992, when the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was formed at the Rio Earth Summit. There, world leaders recognized that Global South countries will need additional resources to mitigate climate change. Over the years, the concept evolved beyond mitigation to include adaptation efforts.

Today, the UNFCCC defines climate finance as “local, national, or transnational financing—drawn from public, private, and alternative sources of financing—that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change.” According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), climate finance refers to financial resources delivered through various mechanisms such as grants and loans from bilateral, multilateral, and private sources mobilized from wealthy countries to support low- and middle-income countries.

There are different schools of thought about the purpose and nature of climate finance. We draw on the UNFCCC and IPCC definitions, even as we argue that they are incomplete. A comprehensive understanding of climate finance from the frontlines is needed to shape policy and resource mobilization at national and international levels. We propose a bold reinterpretation of climate finance as a set of instruments that is rooted in reparative action; invests in frontline, Indigenous and Black communities; and is grounded in relationships based on trust, reducing harm, and preventing indebtedness.

While climate finance often uses complicated mechanisms and schemes to move resources, at its core it is a question of power. Over the last few decades, the international community has answered that question by concentrating authority in the hands of the few, but what would happen if we moved that power to the people at the frontlines of the climate crisis? What would happen if we used it as a tool to repair, rather than to extract?

THE PROBLEM WITH THE STATUS QUO OF CLIMATE FINANCE

Today, climate finance is rooted in exploitation, debt, and profiteering that continues to advance the benefit and betterment of Global North countries and institutions. Climate finance moves money to the Global South through loans, debt, or charity. The system fails to support community decision-making, power, and collective self-determination.

In general, international finance is built on risk assessment and return on investment. It is rooted in racialized capitalism, extraction, and colonialism. Capital markets, wealthholders, and Global North countries also currently control the mechanisms of most climate finance, which includes private finance, investments in specific technologies, and UN-brokered initiatives like the Loss and Damage Fund. Initial assessments of these efforts show that the values of climate finance are not rooted in repair. At best, they embody charitable giving. At worst, they continue to advance capital wealth flows to the Global North in exchange for “green” investments and solely market-based solutions in the Global South.

The climate crisis and debt crisis mutually reinforce and entrench an unsustainable global economic system. In fact, at least two-thirds of total climate finance takes the form of loans.

Often, international climate finance is geared to financialize nature—to quantify and maximize assets and profit in a risk-centric system. Even among philanthropic investments, most funders are not directly concerned with social impact, and they assess risk in conventional ways, seeking a return on climate solutions.

Less than 8 percent of philanthropic donations (more than \$1.2 trillion) reaches communities. Instead, the majority of this funding sits in capital markets and extractive investments that harm frontline people of color, Indigenous, and working class communities.

THE VISION OF REPARATIVE CLIMATE FINANCE

Without the transformation of international climate finance, developing countries will remain unable to repay loans, rebuild their homes and infrastructure, and invest in social well-being and economic development.

Reparative climate finance is rooted in transparency, accountability, and spirit that advances community-governed mechanisms to distribute restitution and direct the flow of investment toward solutions from the frontlines. It seeks to balance our relationship with each other and the earth.

A reparative system of climate finance demands a commitment to decolonize economic and energy systems rooted in centuries-old forms of indebtedness. Drawing on the notion of “constructive reparations”, this kind of transformation enacts systemic repair. Reparations—imagined as the redistribution of global wealth following struggles for political independence and centuries of colonial oppression—are distinct from aid or charity. The objective is to “reshape the world order rather than simply manage its consequences,” as Olúfemi O. Táíwò argues.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE STATUS QUO OF CLIMATE FINANCE

To achieve this vision of a reparative climate finance system, we need to reimagine our value system, abolish debt, and embrace diverse cultural practices. We also need to move from a primarily loan-based system to one based on grants. This means moving to a place of abundance rather than scarcity.

SHIFTING THE PARADIGM

Today's economy of extraction thrives on continued indebtedness, extraction, and profound inequalities in the frontline communities from the Gulf South to the Global South. At the same time, a global rise in authoritarianism is making it even harder to imagine a global climate finance system rooted in reparation. Yet, this is what justice demands.

We do not have to accept a trade-off between well-being and ecology. Researchers argue that Global South communities can achieve “good social indicators,” even while generating less overall economic production. Overconsumption—when humans consume more resources than we produce, fueling resource extraction and increased warming—always exacts costs for the Earth and the most marginalized people, often posing as a pathway to economic growth. We cannot simply consume our way to climate justice.

Instead, we need to move away from an economy of extraction toward an economy of liberation. **An economy of liberation is a system that frees us from economic oppression, labor exploitation, and extraction of nature. It advances a practice of liberation and freedom where the rights and dignity of people and nature move in collective balance, stewardship, and care.**

Frontline community leaders are already leading the way. In fact, in many cases, the frontlines are practicing this type of economy in local and powerful ways, redefining what society deems critical resources. Many Black and Indigenous frontline communities are advancing efforts for land back and land rematriation by supporting ecological education or providing a safe haven and passage during climate migration. Others are modeling local resource sharing, from financial distribution to collective stewardship, providing material support—healthy food, clean water, and natural medicines—to protect those who are vulnerable.

To create the system we need, we can learn from one of Earth's most prolific, and endangered ecosystems: the coral reef. **Though they occupy less than 1 percent of the ocean floor, coral reefs sustain nearly 25 percent of all marine life.** Reefs provide shelter, protect, nourish, filter water, and connect tens of thousands of species of organisms. They are living systems built through collective processes, symbiotic relationships, and adaptive design. **As we work to build a more equitable and reparative climate finance system, we can draw upon this natural wisdom of mutual care and interdependence.** 1 percent of the anticipated \$124 trillion intergenerational wealth transfer (\$1.2 trillion—or four times the amount of the unmet climate finance commitments made through the Paris Agreement) would support nearly 25 percent of the climate finance needs of the Global South economies in 2026. Now imagine the impact if this transfer of resources from older to younger generations was both reparative and at the scale required. Just 10 percent would transform the world for the better.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE STATUS QUO OF CLIMATE FINANCE

Taproot Earth recognizes the enormous potential for change in capital markets and calls for climate finance to play a bridging role, allowing frontline movements to connect and take risks. Reparative climate finance requires a new model for community governance that engenders a patchwork of ideas and strategies—much like a coral that takes root on the surface and connects to other corals to create a diverse reef. We need a dynamic and collective approach that values self-determination, embraces spirit and Indigenous wisdom, and is flexible enough to meet varying contexts and challenges.



Photo: Gulf South 4 a Green New Deal

FIGURE 1.1 STATUS QUO CLIMATE FINANCE VS REPARATIVE CLIMATE FINANCE

ELEMENT	EXTRACTION ECONOMY	LIBERATION ECONOMY
What is Valued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power, unfettered expansion, and large-scale growth • Wealth accumulation • Technocratic and professional class • Global North supremacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirit and Truth • Decolonization, re-indigenization, • Repair, collective care, community stewardship • Collective self-determination. • Interconnection with each other and the earth • Transparency and accountability
Who is Valued & Trusted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wealth and asset managers and wealth holders • Corporate stakeholders and leaders • Business class • Neo-liberal scientists, academics, and philanthropists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global South frontlines • Communities, poor and working-class people, and migrants and displaced communities. Black feminists, workers, and LGBTQIA communities. • Community-rooted scientists, academics, and philanthropists
Priority Investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological solutions, carbon markets and unjust energy transition, mineral mining of Global South for Global North consumption, privatization of public infrastructure, militarized "security" • Asset class priorities (venture, real estate, private equity) • Financialization of nature: carbon offsets, carbon capture and storage, geo-engineering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological justice, including models of collective stewardship of water, energy & land • Just transition programs, housing for all • Community protection, governance, and human needs • Documenting stories, lessons, and models for replication and collective education • Regeneration, healing work

ELEMENT	EXTRACTION ECONOMY	LIBERATION ECONOMY
Decision Makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global North/Developed Nations • People in privileged positions of power • Investor Class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline communities • Women-, nature- and future generation-led communities • Communities with a commitment to move in symbiotic • Relationships with each other and nature • Spirit
Who Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The investor class and those who have access to capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All peoples and ecosystems - including nature and future generations.
Who Pays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline communities - Global South, poor peoples, individuals through consumptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who have benefited most and have amassed wealth at the expense of frontline communities and nature.
View on Public Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replaced by or diverted into private corporate climate investments that seek to limit the risks of wealthholders from climate impacts • Shielding and hiding dollars from public taxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dollars should be transparent and accountable. Capital should move directly to communities • Redistribution of resources through public taxes or public commitments to frontline communities
Root Cause Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on carbon emissions leading to false solutions such as offsets and geoengineering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extraction, privatization, enclosure of land, water, and energy. • Colonialism and global Anti-Blackness
Political Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apolitical, ahistorical, and avoids power analysis and redistribution. • One-dimensional focus on carbon reduction. • Free market and neoliberal paradigm rooted in dominion over nature and others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political and acknowledges the historic and current harms of extractive systems. Focuses on redistribution of resources and power • Intersectional and multi-dimensional • Challenges free market systems and advances commons and care for a common home.
Guiding Narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarcity: The need to privatize and control resources in order to secure the future a focus on “green growth” to benefit those who can pay for it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abundance: Resources should be collectively held or stewarded. The transition from an extractive global economy to one rooted in liberation must be governed by communities on the frontlines.
System Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Militarized Violence • Debt and Loans • Using public dollars to invest and subsidize private markets • Division of people from nature • Devaluing and exploitation of people • Prioritizing competition at the expense of collective wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship-model of decision-making that incorporates people, Spirit, & nature • Grants as compensation not charity • Governed by frontline communities in a democratized, co-created, transparent, and accountable manner • Legally robust system that allows for integrated systems that can reach broader possibilities • Indigenous knowledge

Figure 1.2 Status Quo Climate Finance vs Reparative Climate Finance



Photo: The GCR Jubilee Convening

INTRODUCTION

On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon drilling disaster, caused by the multinational energy company BP, spilled approximately 134 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, devastating the US Gulf South. In the aftermath, BP agreed to a \$4.5 billion criminal settlement and established a \$20 billion fund to “pay back” the damages. Hailed as one of the largest settlements in United States history, many lauded BP’s “accountability” as a corporate act of repair.

Yet, the structures of power did not change, payments were slow and application processes cumbersome, and many frontline workers and communities never received full, fair, and just compensation. Questions over “who was worthy” or “who could prove” economic losses as a result of the disaster hindered justice. Further, how funds were distributed and who made decisions were guided not by those most affected, but rather by

lawyers, accountants, and marketing executives using a series of formulas that only made sense to actuarial science, but lacked the soul and lived realities of impact. Frontline experiences in the aftermath of the historic drilling disaster raised questions about what fair and effective climate reparations might look like. The persistent reality of environmental degradation and corporate abuse has been a daily experience across the global frontlines. From oil drilling disasters in the Niger delta, to mine collapses in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Brazil, from sea level rise giving way to saltwater intrusions in The Gambia, to land loss in Tuvalu and wildfires in Peru and Southern Italy, frontline communities are left footing the bill—financially, emotionally, and culturally.

Extractive industries, as well as the financiers and the government institutions that shield them, often get away without paying any restitution or compensation for harm. Those who do pay typically move resources through complicated schemes and statutes that fail to reach those most impacted.

It is not surprising, then, that decisionmakers (government actors, financial institutions, and multilateral organizations) struggle to create equitable mechanisms for climate finance. The same challenges generated by BP's payments—in particular, a lack of accountability and trust—exist within international financing vehicles like the Loss and Damage Fund. Every year, frontline communities fight to have their voices heard at global climate negotiations, financing summits, and more. Leaders and participants engage in conversations over how much money should be moved for compensation. It is an important and critical fight that requires solidarity and commitment to frontline calls to move more than \$1 trillion annually. But without transformation of how the system works, pledged resources will not reach the communities that are in need of repair.

This report draws on ten years of facilitating community-controlled funds and four years of facilitating multiple convenings, strategy sessions, and governance assemblies related to the question of climate finance and resource stewardship. At these convenings, more than 500 frontline leaders from the Gulf South, Appalachia, and the Global South Black diaspora, hailing from nearly 35 countries, have articulated elements of a vision for reparative climate finance. The report serves as a synthesis of frontline perspectives on climate finance rooted in a commitment to Black liberation, Indigenous sovereignty, and freedom for all peoples.

Photo: The GCR Jubilee Convening

The Future is Made of Coral

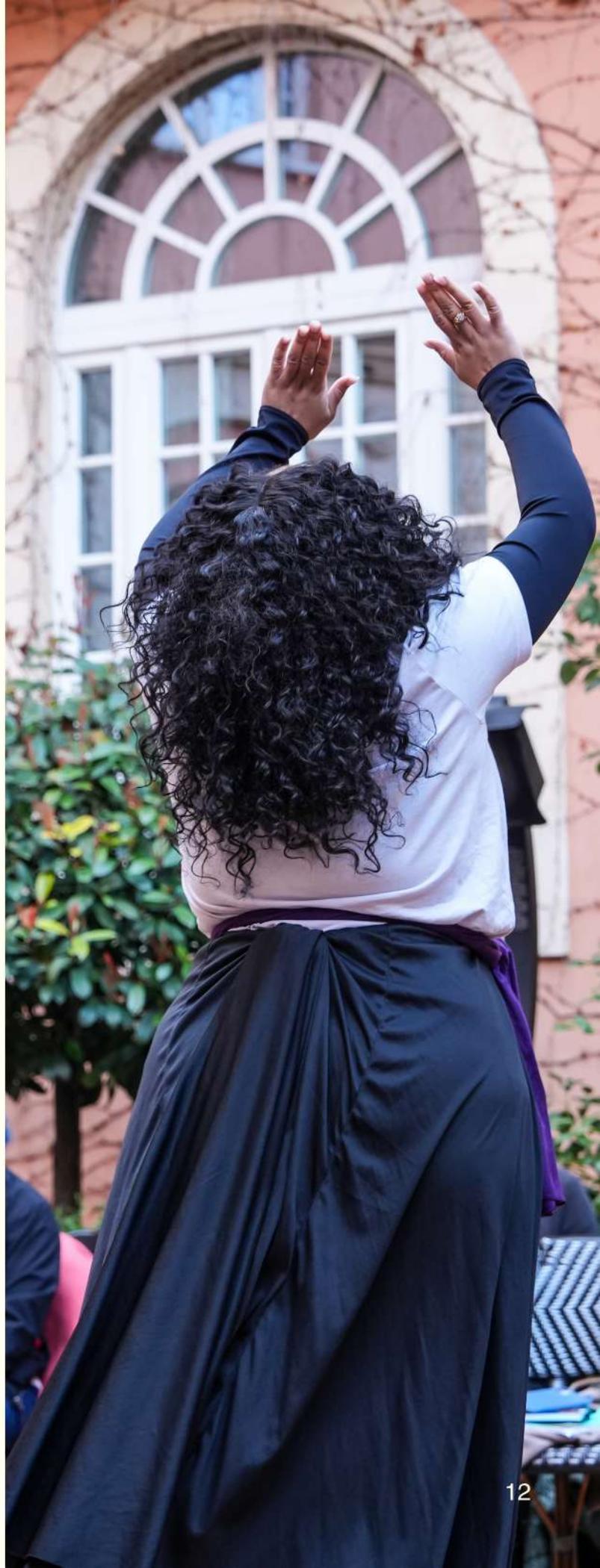




Photo: COP26, Scotland

DEFINING CLIMATE FINANCE

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reparative action; invests in frontline, Indigenous, and Black communities; and is grounded in relationships based on trust, reducing harm, and preventing indebtedness.

While climate finance often uses complicated mechanisms and schemes to move resources, at its core it is a question of power. Over the last few decades, the international community has answered that question by concentrating authority in the hands of the few, but what would happen if we moved that power to the people at the frontlines of the climate crisis? What would happen if we used it as a tool to repair, rather than to extract?

ROOTS OF CLIMATE FINANCE WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS

The concept of “climate finance” has its origins in The United Nations. In 2009, through the non-binding Copenhagen Agreement negotiated at

the annual UN-led Conference of the Parties (COP15), developed countries committed to raising \$100 billion annually by 2020 to support developing countries in their mitigation and adaptation efforts. The idea was to strengthen the global response to climate change and poverty “by making finance flows consistent with the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development”. Since COP15, negotiators have regularly reaffirmed their commitments. At COP26 in Scotland, commitments to adaptation finance were made at \$40 billion. At COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan in 2024, developed states established a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), which increased climate finance to \$300 billion. And at COP30 in Belem, negotiators agreed to quadruple the adaptation finance to \$120 billion. Unfortunately, these commitments have not seen action.

In parallel to raising funds to finance climate action, many negotiators in Copenhagen in 2009 aimed at a controversial target: setting emissions targets. Deep divisions between developing and developed countries on reducing emissions meant that negotiators could not agree on an equitable path to keeping the global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius. Climate conferences remain plagued by questions around historical responsibility for emissions and the kinds of decarbonizing steps developing countries should take.

Climate finance is recognized as important for meeting all global climate targets, including the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement’s goal of limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Article 9 of the Paris Agreement focuses on financing developing countries so that they can implement solutions. Funding is essential for national and local-level climate action.

LOSS AND DAMAGE FUND

A lack of consensus and clarity about who is responsible for paying into climate finance funding pervades the annual UNFCCC COP negotiations. The work of climate finance mostly plays out in the narrow scope of development assistance funds or as part of funds allocated to the Loss and Damage Fund. This financial mechanism, established in 2022 in Egypt (COP27), was designed to provide critical support to vulnerable states facing the worst adversities caused by climate change.

“Loss and damage” refers to the adverse consequences brought about by changing temperatures, resulting in different impacts, including loss of human lives, damage to infrastructure, loss of property and crops, and the deterioration of ecosystems. To be clear, a Loss and Damage Fund is critical for the compensation and restitution of loss of culture, land, and life among the frontlines.

The Loss and Damage Fund’s main trustee is the World Bank, a public-private entity that relies heavily on loans and debt programs for development, often accountable to Global North wealthholders and not the frontlines of the Global South. The Fund is currently reliant on voluntary contributions from developed countries, which limits its sustainability and effectiveness as a direct source of reliable funding for vulnerable countries. Developed countries have not recognized or institutionalized the obligation to provide funding for loss and damage. Moreover, the nature of the Fund’s concessional financing—a range of below-market rate financial products such as loans, grants, and equity investments—may compound efforts by countries reeling from extreme weather to move away from debt and toward sustainable repair of damages to key economic sectors like agriculture and tourism.

Most country negotiators and global green advocacy groups perceive ‘loss and damage’ as a specific type of climate finance. But it’s ambiguous scope and lagging support from funders have not successfully produced compensation for island states and climate-vulnerable societies. Little progress has been made toward allocating funds through negotiations, and no common framework exists to track progress on climate finance and whether and how it is aligned with specific climate policy goals.

GREEN CLIMATE FUND

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) was established in Cancun, Mexico in 2011 as the “largest global fund” dedicated to fighting climate change. The GCF focuses investments on the built environment, energy and industry transitions, human security, and land-based ecosystems. The GCF distributes loans, grants, and equity to developing country governments and institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, and private sector entities. It emphasizes its “risk-inclined” approach to investment and the importance of private sector finance for “low-emission and climate resilient investments in developing countries”.

The GCF offers an opportunity to move significant resources into just transitions. Yet, similar to the Loss and Damage program, the current structure is not yet at the level of repair required. Its obstacles include delays in accreditation of civil society organizations and community-based organizations seeking to apply for funding. It also requires these organizations to establish connections with national governments, which may be difficult or fraught with risks. Until 2024, the GCF often took nearly 1,200 days from the receipt of an application to the dispersal of GCF financing. However, recent changes have aimed to improve approval times

within one year. While the timing has improved, access to GCF funds remains a critical challenge for community organizations. This means that even if frontline communities manage to complete the process, they are relying on overburdened bureaucracies. The GCF has historically lacked a specific mechanism for Indigenous groups to access funding for climate work, and compliance exercises make this process burdensome, causing delays in implementation. While this model provides significant resources to communities, the lack of community governance and the competitive nature rooted in scarcity replicates the competitive and risk-centric character of our current system.

CLIMATE FINANCE IS ULTIMATELY A QUESTION OF POWER

Among all of these mechanisms and definitions, climate finance is best understood as a tool of power to further an economic paradigm and determine who gets to decide how resources are moved. Frontline analyses of how decisions are made and who governs financial resources are essential. Various frameworks have addressed questions of power, including: Just Transition frameworks, ideas on how finance can be used to build a living and regenerative economy by movement leaders in the United States, and domestic and global calls for reparations.

Simply put, climate finance is about:

- **How** is value defined, determined, and measured?
- **Who** determines how resources are distributed?
- **How** and **where** are resources raised and wealth built?
- **What** are the legal conditions and frameworks in place to determine the rules?

The current understanding of climate finance sits within extractivism. Even when financial resources move toward the frontlines, if they are couched within the current system, they enable cycles of harm. An example of such a solution is a nature-for-debt swap, in which communities lose governance of their land to investment in rare-earth mineral mining to build and support renewable energy opportunities in the Global North. This approach to “debt cancellation” is rooted in an imbalance of power. It comes at the expense of the health, rights, and labor of frontline communities. True debt cancellation would simply erase any debt one nation owes another without any pretense or exchange of sovereign resources.

UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE FINANCE BY GROUNDING IN CLIMATE REPARATIONS

In 2022, Taproot Earth began convening frontline communities and allied technical leaders to shape an understanding of global climate reparations and the role of climate finance within this framework. Throughout these processes, frontline communities established a global climate reparations working statement, laid out a critique of the current financial systems, and envisioned critical shifts necessary for a more reparative climate finance approach that is essential for frontline solutions to take root and build an economy of liberation.

“Climate Reparations is the restoration of healthy and balanced relationships with all that comprise a shared global ecosystem. Reparative action begins with those who benefit most from historic and current systems of oppression.

It requires the abolition of debt, restitution for injustice and the establishment of accountable systems rooted in Black and Indigenous Liberation for all oppressed people and future generations.”

**Working statement created and affirmed at the Global Climate Reparations Governance Assembly in Kenya, August 2024*

This working statement demands the restoration of healthy and balanced relationships with each other and the Earth and a holistic process of debt abolition, restitution of harm, and profound attention to historical experiences of marginalized communities.

We know that climate reparations involve far more than money and will involve spiritual work to repair our relationships with nature and each other. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that climate reparations and reparative climate finance will necessarily involve a massive transfer of wealth from rich nations to poor nations and from rich people to poor people.

UNDERSTANDING OUR CONTEXT: COMPETING PARADIGMS FOR OUR COLLECTIVE FUTURE

OUR CLIMATE FUTURE

The climate is now warmer than any time in the last 125,000 years. In 2024, Earth reached temperatures about 2.65 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the late-19th century preindustrial average. The ten most recent years have continuously broken the record as the warmest on record. Destruction and degradation of natural ecosystems are the primary causes of declines in global biodiversity. The change in climate is shifting the distribution of species and rearranging the composition of ecological communities.

Intensifying temperatures and more frequent extreme weather events are causing people to lose their homes and livelihoods, and we know that communities in vulnerable ecosystems experience the consequences of climate change more intensely than wealthier states and societies. Poor communities in the Global South disproportionately experience indebtedness, displacement, and

stability. This splintering of the social and ecological fabric demands social, economic, political, and environmental changes.

Our ability to survive and move through emergencies require the constant practice of being in community with each other, collectively stewarding resources, and creating a culture of belonging and stewardship. We must ask ourselves what we value and how we hold, share, and defend the resources that depend on our care. What must change for a more just and connected world?

OUR CURRENT PARADIGM: AN ECONOMY OF EXTRACTION

An economy of extraction thrives on continued indebtedness and profound inequalities in the frontline communities from the Gulf South and Appalachia to the Global South. In recent years, a global rise in authoritarianism has trampled political and environmental rights, making it even harder to create a global climate finance system rooted in repair. First, we must understand our economic reality and how it impacts the climate crisis.

The climate emergency is not a carbon crisis, as prevailing policy debates and investment trends frequently suggest. Instead, today's disasters result from broken relationships, starting with the rupture between humans and the Earth and then among people, specifically across race, class, and gender, often playing out in the legacy of colonialism.

An extractive economy requires consumption to survive. The constant need to consume by many in the Global North, but specifically the top 5 percent of the Global wealthy, leads to deeper extraction of minerals and resources (fossil and renewable alike), mostly from the Global South but also in poorer and majority Black Global North

communities. This extraction leads to greater land appropriation, resource exploitation, and deforestation. The degradation of the earth and burning of fossil fuels leads to a warming planet with fewer ecological systems in place to adapt. These patterns lead to more intense disasters that create humanitarian emergencies and climate-induced migration, demonstrating the intensity of collective suffering and shortcomings of current policies and perspectives.

We cannot simply consume our way to climate justice. We cannot be naive enough to think that swapping out oil, coal, and gas with wind and solar will save us because the power dynamics of who benefits and who pays does not change within this "energy transition."

We do not have to accept a trade-off between well-being and ecology. Researchers argue that Global South communities can achieve "good social indicators" even while generating lower overall economic production. In other words, while wealthy countries have laid out a high-productivity, high-consumption path to economic wellbeing, Global South countries do not have to mimic it. Instead, tailored development strategies fit for countries' energy needs, capacities, and natural environments and bolstered by public spending will help meet basic human needs without pursuing purely capitalist growth in the Global South.

To make this vision a reality, wealthy countries need to make significant commitments to shift not only their consumption but also rethink how they value nature. When society emphasizes the value of meeting human needs and respect for nature as a critical step toward equitable and self-determined development, this opens space to focus on well-being over nationalist and corporate enrichment.

Failure by the richest countries to recognize this change and take action to curb their consumption and reduce emissions and mitigate climate change

will lead to the kinds of social dislocations that could worsen poverty and living conditions for the global majority. We recognize the importance of facilitating Global South countries' unique paths toward food security and economic stability. But to respond to the most immediate needs of poor and vulnerable populations, we need a different orientation toward the common good that joins the interests of people and nature.

AN ECONOMY OF EXTRACTION IS ROOTED IN GLOBAL ANTI-BLACKNESS

From stolen people forced into slavery to build the U.S. economy to continued exploitation of Black communities by mining, oil, and other industries, global anti-Blackness has been a constant driver of the extractivist paradigm. Global racialized capitalism has facilitated the "justification" of an economy of extraction for over 600 years. Additionally, white colonial powers have used malicious interpretations of Biblical text to justify slavery and embrace a concept of dominion over the Earth, without regard for nature and spirit.

The combination of these ideas has manifested in environmental racism, a term coined by activist and former NAACP director Benjamin Chavis in 1982. Environmental racism refers to the systemic siting of polluting industries in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods. Racialized harm shapes housing, health, and land use, increasing rates of cancer, asthma, and birth defects. Residents suffer from weak enforcement of environmental laws and disproportionate exposure to industrial hazards. In addition, existing legal frameworks criminalize environmental defenders and mutual aid systems that are rooted in Black Reconstruction of the U.S. South.

BUILDING TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM: AN ECONOMY OF LIBERATION

An economy of liberation is, at its core, a system that frees us from economic oppression, labor exploitation, and extraction of nature. It advances a politics and practice of freedom where the rights and dignity of people and nature move in collective balance through mutual care. Over the last few years, Taproot Earth's convenings have elucidated a few core elements of an economy of liberation expressed by frontline leaders, including:

- Frontline governance and community-centered decision-making
- Centering the wisdom of ancestors while holding space for future generations
- Practicing stewardship with nature
- Transparency, healing, and spiritual alignment
- Dignity and cooperation with others to share collective resources
- Reparative funding mechanisms based on historical accountability, not charity
- Commitment to Black liberation and Indigenous land sovereignty, meaning an economic system cannot oppress or take land or bodies for its own profit and gain

CLIMATE FINANCE WITHIN THESE PARADIGMS: CRITIQUE AND OPPORTUNITY

Global North countries have an obligation to mobilize their resources to fund mechanisms of climate finance that are governed and decided by the frontlines. A reparative strategy emphasizes historical responsibility for emissions and extraction and shifts the burden to those responsible for exorbitant emissions and the exploitation of frontline peoples. A focus not only on outcomes but on changes in perceptions and relationships is central to Taproot's vision of reparative climate finance.

CLIMATE FINANCE AS DEFINED IN OUR CURRENT ECONOMY

Climate finance in an economy of extraction is a system rooted in exploitation, debt, and profiteering that continues to advance the benefit and betterment of Global North and West countries and institutions. Today's system of climate finance moves money to the Global South through loans, debt, or charity, but not with an intention to support community decision-making, power, or collective self-determination.

International finance is built on risk assessment and return on investment. From the start, it has been rooted in racialized capitalism, extraction, and colonialism. This logic is contrary to the demands of reparative climate finance. Today, stocks, bonds, and cash fuel the climate crisis. Yet the majority of finance managers are not attuned to climate and social impacts. Almost three quarters of total climate finance takes the form of loans, while 29 percent are grants. The debt crisis remains a massive obstacle to moving the needle on social spending on health and education in developing countries during a global energy transition. In 2023, almost half the world's population—3.3 billion people—lived in countries that spend more on debt service than health.

At the same time, developing nations face considerably higher borrowing costs than they faced ten years ago. Developing economies often appear riskier to creditors than they are because of an insufficient global financial safety net. This perceived higher risk means that Global South countries are spending five times more on debt payments to external creditors than they are on addressing the climate emergency. Further, some Global South countries have begun to rely on fossil

fuel and critical minerals exports in order to make debt payments. These decisions on economic production and resource exploitation are made under pressure to meet debt obligations and at the recommendations of IFIs and multilateral development banks.

Climate finance embodies traditional capitalist principles in an economy of extraction

Capital markets, wealth holders, and Global North countries currently control the mechanisms of most climate finance. These mechanisms include private finance, investments in specific technologies, and UN-brokered initiatives like the Loss and Damage Fund. Initial assessments of these efforts show that the values of climate finance are not rooted in repair. At best, they embody charitable giving, and at worst they continue to advance capital wealth flows to the Global North in exchange for “green” investments and market-based solutions in the Global South.

In many situations, international finance is geared to value the financialization of nature and quantify and maximize assets and profit in a risk-centric system. Even among philanthropic investments, most funders are not directly concerned with social impact, and they assess risk in conventional ways, seeking a market return on climate solutions. Only 3 percent of climate funding from 50 influential U.S. foundations is designated for grassroots climate justice groups. The majority of it sits in capital markets and extractive investments that may harm frontline people of color, Indigenous, and working class communities.

This imbalance is not new. In fact, the history of imperial wealth is rife with troubling relationships between state power and the owners of capital. The English East India Company (EIC) was a joint-

stock company whose operations spanned three centuries and involved territorial control of much of South Asia and many global trade markets. This kind of “hybrid sovereignty” allowed the EIC and other colonial-era ventures to challenge state rule (often through negotiated contracts), enforce their authority through violence, and maintain their own access to resources and legitimacy.

Colonial Legacy and Sovereign Debt

Because of accumulated interest on loan-based climate finance, Global South countries are now paying more back to wealthy countries for climate finance loans than they receive. Debt levels are spiraling, lenders profit, and developing countries are paying for a crisis that they have not caused.

Between 1501 and 1867, nearly 13 million African people were kidnapped, enslaved, and forced to work under inhumane conditions. As Europeans conquered 84 percent of the globe from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, their systems of colonization and extractive activities brought about the exploitation of peoples, natural environments, public health, cultural traditions, and knowledge systems. Haiti’s history, for instance, demonstrates the perverse and enduring legacy of colonial rule on the island’s persistent indebtedness. French colonizers brought disease, enslavement, and violence to Black and Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean islands. Haitians were the first formerly enslaved people to achieve their own liberation from colonial rule in 1804. The French forced Haitians to pay for their own independence to the tune of 150 million francs. This amount was later reduced to 90 million francs, today equivalent to a staggering \$21 billion. This eventually led to Haiti repaying French, American, and German banks over generations, preventing the country from investing in education, health, and infrastructure and keeping it the poorest country in the Americas.

In another instance, the British empire extracted more than \$12.3 trillion (in today’s monetary terms) between 1765 and 1938 by imposing excessive taxes on India’s population, even during periods of extreme downturn such as famine. During colonial rule, India’s territory included what later became the countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh. In 2010, when Pakistan was hit with devastating floods, its government estimated that costs reached \$43 billion in economic losses, while the World Bank and Asian Development Bank estimated **\$9.7 billion in damages** after conducting a nationwide survey. Prior to the floods, the country was on track to continue repaying its debt and reducing its deficit to around 2 percent of GDP, from 4.5 percent in 2009. The floods forced Pakistan to borrow between \$20 billion and \$40 billion more than anticipated, raising its debt and interest payments over ten years to between \$36 billion to \$71 billion.

Patterns of complex pressures on food systems, agriculture, and fiscal spending have recurred and shaped governance in developing societies since the colonial era. The burdens that developing countries feel due to their continued, cyclical debt exist apart from the fiscal weight that natural disasters and extreme weather events generate, but the crises are interrelated.

Mechanisms of Climate Finance in our Current Economy

Private Capital and Markets: Wall Street and corporate actors employ tools like Environmental Social Governance (ESG) screens that aim to mitigate risk for and return profits to investors. When politically convenient, corporations support extractive systems under the guise of transformative initiatives calling for zero-carbon/net-carbon climate solutions. Such investments in recent years have included projects

like Bill Gates' [Breakthrough Energy Ventures](#) or government and multinational investment in rare earth mineral mining.

Overall, climate finance led by private markets focuses on investing in technocratic solutions and energy transition programs that center the pursuit of high returns for investors through continued extraction, allowing them to manage and protect assets in the face of increasing climate risks. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, tech, electronic, and automotive companies rely on [child labor](#) in the mining of cobalt, which is exported to produce lithium-ion batteries that power cell phones, laptops, and electric vehicles. While private sector actors are to blame for violations of human rights and international law, some states also bear responsibility for exploitation. For instance, the Chinese government controls the lion's share of cobalt production in the DRC and deliberately makes mineral traceability and rights monitoring difficult.

Third, in the philanthropic sector, a philosophy particularly influential in Silicon Valley philanthropic circles called [Effective Altruism](#) seeks to shape donors' assumptions about what is truly "transformative" or "high impact" in climate solutions investing. Many of these [recommendations for "climate investments"](#) focus on investing in: 1) neglected technologies (nuclear, "zero-carbon fuels", carbon-capture and sequestration); 2) reducing emissions in the Global South; and 3) advocating for policies that often support green capitalism through tax breaks for the private sector for funding research and development.

These approaches show that the climate finance models promoted on Wall Street, in Silicon Valley, and in private philanthropy rely heavily on the

dominant global financial system. The roots of this financial model lie in the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. Moreover, support among wealth holders means that we will continue to depend on fossil fuel extraction, technical fixes, and moving funds from the Global South to the Global North—strategies explicitly linked to a hierarchical, market-driven logic. A reparative approach, on the other hand, would integrate and center frontline communities affected by extraction and climate disasters in developing systems of accountable governance and mutual care for ecosystems.

United Nations Processes: The United Nations is a central forum for climate finance negotiations. It is the one space where civil society and communities have a direct avenue to advance demands for more equitable funding. Through the annual Conference of Parties (COP) process, frontline communities of the Global South seek to redress the harms caused by the Global North. For the United Nations' climate processes to serve as a bridge from the economy of extraction to the economy of liberation, negotiations need to recenter the values and concerns of the frontline communities. Programs like the Loss and Damage Fund or Green Climate Fund could be critical mechanisms that move resources to the ground in equitable ways, but their current designs limit the full realization of repair, as detailed earlier in this report. As a vehicle for climate policy, the UN carries out only what Member States advocate and support politically.

The biggest challenge to making a meaningful shift through UN processes is a lack of political will from Global North countries, [specifically the United States](#). The 2015 Paris Agreement included the Global North's commitments to providing financial resources to the Global South, but the United States Congress never ratified the treaty. Since then, the United States government has withdrawn

from the Agreement twice. The United States failed to provide its adequate share of the minimal \$100 billion “fair share” agreement of Global North contributions set in 2009, and the Trump administration has recently canceled pledges to continue its support to programs like the Green Climate Fund. Furthermore, through negotiations at COPs in Egypt, Dubai, and Baku, the United States continued to push for stronger control by institutions like the World Bank over UN climate finance institutions.

Participation is not enough within the Current Economic Paradigm: Political participation by Black and Indigenous leaders and advocates in international climate negotiations has created some opportunities to influence policies and pledges. For instance, at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland, after years of demanding to be heard, frontline communities successfully pressured several governments and private funders to pledge \$1.7 billion USD over five years to support Indigenous peoples and local communities in securing land tenure rights and advancing forest guardianship. This Indigenous Peoples Forest Tenure Pledge marked the first time that stakeholders agreed to value knowledge of nature and land management held by Indigenous communities in a UN negotiation setting.

While the Indigenous Peoples Forest Tenure Pledge surpassed its funding goal a year ahead of schedule, direct funding to Indigenous and local organizations remains low, at less than 10 percent of each year’s distributed funds. Most funding was directed to community-led projects in territorial management and sustainable, forest-based livelihoods through a combination of locally and internationally-led implementation. This example shows that it is not just about the financial resources, it is about who participates and how the resources are distributed.

CLIMATE FINANCE AS REPARATIVE

Moving toward an economy of liberation demands bold action from many players, and a willingness to collaborate and coexist in a changing world. This requires understanding global finance and its potential to better contribute to shared well-being and resilience to the effects of climate change.

Climate finance in an economy of liberation is a system rooted in transparency, accountability, and spirit that advances community-governed mechanisms to distribute restitution and direct the flow of investment toward solutions rooted in the frontlines and balances our relationship with each other and the earth.

Reparative climate finance aims to shape the future while relying on deep memory. Drawing on the notion of “constructive reparations,” this kind of transformation enacts systemic repair.

Reparations, imagined as the redistribution of global wealth following struggles for political independence and centuries of colonial oppression are distinct from aid or charity. In Táíwò’s estimation, the objective of global reparative policy is to “reshape the world order rather than simply manage its consequences.”

This is not the first time we have faced these questions. In the middle of the twentieth century, the collapse of colonial rule by the British and other imperial powers and World Wars created conditions for multi-scalar change. The link between self-determination and reparations was clear to some anti-colonial activists in Africa and the Caribbean then. Olufemi Táíwò argues that the “racial social structure” spread by European colonialism meant that the national political autonomy of colonized territories in the Global South was a key first step to repairing harms after generations of enslavement and exploitation. This

“possibility of reshaping the political relationships among and between peoples” remains urgent as climate change exacerbates inequalities. We need to link political and ecological crises to develop a reparative strategy for climate finance.

Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley spoke to this urgency, proposing that those historically responsible for emissions and exploitation should, first, “apologize and mean it” and then act, recognizing that the future of the world is not possible without the stability of Africa and its Diaspora.

A reparative system of climate finance demands a commitment to decolonizing economic and energy systems rooted in centuries-old forms of indebtedness. The “integral ecology” model proposed by African, Asian, and Latin American and Caribbean Bishops offers an example of this type of shift. They call on the Catholic Church to take steps to advance structural changes in economies and development strategies to overcome technocratic and extractivist paradigms that “perpetuate the exploitation of peoples and environmental degradation.”

The following elements help give more context to what reparative climate finance looks like in practice.

The Reimagining of Values: Reparative finance creates conditions in which trust and horizontal relationships help determine the nature of specific solutions to urgent problems at the frontlines. These relationship-based processes can remove barriers or distrust, thus opening the opportunity for financial flows to generate capacity and restore communities that have been excluded from traditional investment. The link between finance and frontline movements demands partnership, as well as a reimagination of resource distribution.

One approach is to invest in building frontline leaders’ capacities through investment in political education, social justice, and financial management. Supporting leadership matters, Stephanie Guilloud of Project South argues, because frontline organizing is “world-building” and a process of “rearranging systems.” Financial investment can allow movements to develop networks, experiment with on-the-ground solutions, and take risks. Capital invested in frontline communities has the potential to “make their labor productive in regenerative ways.”

But it is more than just relationships among people. The global climate reparations working statement calls for a restoration of healthy ecosystems. This necessitates that we rethink how our economic and financial systems value nature. Reparative climate finance rejects the financialization of nature and rather sees nature as valuable in its own right. This means reparative climate finance would not view land as a commodity to sell, but rather as a partner in stewardship. This approach can be seen in solutions from the Amazon to Zambia.

The values within reparative climate finance include: transparency and accountability, relationships and partnerships among people and nature, Spirit and Truth, and practices of decolonization, re-indigenization, collective care, and community stewardship.

Abolishing Debt and Providing Grants, not Loans: Debt cancellation for developing countries is a central aspect of an economy of liberation. By cancelling debt, rich creditors can break down barriers to a just energy transition, facilitating investment in resilience in vulnerable debtor countries. Developing nations face considerably higher borrowing costs than they faced ten years ago and often appear riskier to creditors than they

are because of an insufficient global financial safety net. A “deeper” safety net would allow Global South states to be significantly less dependent on loans from international financial institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank. It would also facilitate debt servicing and resilience to external shocks. In contrast to the loans and long-term lending arrangements offered by many IFIs, grant-based finance allows frontline communities and poor countries to dig out of debt traps and construct homes, businesses, and social programs to generate resilience.

Abolishing debt is not only the moral and just solution required right now, it also creates the opportunity for communities to prioritize investments in the solutions and vision for people to steward their common home. With a brighter outlook for spending state revenues and directing community support to building future-oriented solutions, the governments of developing countries could offer more robust healthcare, climate-resilient housing, water stewardship programs, and justly sourced renewable energy development. Second, to break the cycle of debt for good, we have to end the use of loans as a mechanism for climate finance and international development. Rather, direct payments in the form of grants or restitution are essential to meet the needs of communities.

Direct funding to frontline communities can also help build trust and autonomy. In Kenya, for example, unconditional cash transfers to pregnant women reduced infant mortality by 48 percent and mortality for children under 5 fell by 45 percent in rural areas. This finding points to a central pillar in support of direct funding: trust-based relationships and respect for local solutions. As Kenyan youth activist Asugo Luhmörögo put it, “direct funding means hope. It means resources finally reaching the people who live closest to the land and know

how to protect it. With direct support, our elders, women, and youth can restore range lands, safeguard our water sources, and strengthen our traditional systems of care for the environment.”

Embracing cultural practices and

sustainability: By engaging in shared practices and meaningful rituals, communities can center care and well-being as a part of restitution in a vibrant economy, as Nwamaka Agbo has argued. Participatory decision-making and local culture work together to generate the trust, leadership, and knowledge that allows for solutions to root in daily practice and economic processes.

Humans have demonstrated that it is possible to manage problems with accountability and equity, generating relationships based on trust and rooted in local knowledge and leadership. Taproot Earth has seen culturally-rooted collective governance practices play out after every climate disaster in the Gulf South and Appalachia and in our work with frontline climate leaders across the Global Black diaspora. More often than not, community practice draws on cultural tradition and collective care, complex processes that drive collective survival in an economy of extraction. Facilitating alignment across frontline communities allows movements to construct and transform economic infrastructure.

In research on wide-ranging contexts from Ugandan forests to Maine’s fisheries and the Swiss Alps, Nobel prize laureate Elinor Ostrom demonstrated that cultural practice and place are central to building sustainable institutions that help manage finite, common-pool resources like groundwater, air, and forests. For example, having local stakeholders participate in writing the rules on equitably sharing use of fishing waters or grazing pastures, for instance, engenders compliance; allows for flexibility in enforcement; and ensures

vibrant, durable participation. This notion of cultural integration with economic productivity and environmental care aligns with our vision of reparative climate finance. Material resources sustain networks of solidarity, such as mutual aid programs, community kitchens, or neighbor-to-neighbor disaster responses. By rooting our approaches to combating climate change in Indigenous cultural practices and sacred respect for the Earth, we can generate belonging and reciprocal responsibility. Culture can bridge communities and stakeholders across borders, bringing frontline knowledge into global spaces and challenging hierarchical forms of governance and business with approaches that center people.

Frontline Models of Reparative Climate

Finance: Local peoples and communities must design and develop solutions to climate challenges, which requires direct material support and trust. A system rooted in mutual reciprocity and collective care and trust requires a commitment to doing no further harm to frontline communities. It demands a recognition of past exploitation, including environmental exploitation and theft of land and natural resources. This approach to climate finance is reparative, direct, and flexible. Frontline communities participating in a reworked reparative climate finance system will rely on resources of different kinds, including new policies that facilitate migration pathways through new kinds of transit visas and getting “land back” in addition to financial support. Reimagining the purpose of climate finance is critical to moving toward a liberated economy rooted in repair.

And this work is already taking root in many contexts. The frontlines are rethinking financial investment by reframing land stewardship as climate solutions. Brazil’s MST (Landless Workers

Movement), the Andes-Amazon Initiative, and Grow4Gambia use land stewardship, agrarian reform, and forest protection standards to help ensure that the ecosystem is balanced and healthy. Not only do these solutions store carbon and support clean air, they also ensure that the rights of people and rights of nature are at the forefront of climate solutions. This is important to track as Indigenous peoples and local communities manage half of the world’s land and care for 80 percent of the Earth’s biodiversity while being allocated less than 1 percent of official designated assistance for climate change and less than 5 percent of official assistance for environmental protection.



Photo: COP30, Brazil

FIGURE 2.0 CLIMATE FINANCE IN AN ECONOMY OF EXTRACTION VS CLIMATE FINANCE IN AN ECONOMY OF LIBERATION

ELEMENT	EXTRACTION ECONOMY	LIBERATION ECONOMY
HOW and WHAT is value defined, determined, and measured?		
What is Valued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power, unfettered expansion, and large-scale growth • Wealth accumulation • Technocratic and professional class • Global North supremacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirit and Truth • Decolonization, re-indigenization, • Repair, collective care, community stewardship • Collective self-determination. • Interconnection with each other and the earth • Transparency and accountability
Priority Investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological solutions, carbon markets and un-just energy transition, mineral mining of Global South for Global North consumption, privatization of public infrastructure, militarized “security” • Asset class priorities (venture, real estate, private equity) • Financialization of nature: carbon offsets, carbon capture and storage, geo-engineering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological justice, including models of collective stewardship of water, energy, & land • Just transition programs, housing for all • Community protection, governance, and human needs • Documenting stories, lessons, and models for replication collective education • Regeneration, healing work
WHO gets to determine how resources are distributed?		
Who is Valued & Trusted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wealth and asset managers and wealth holders • Corporate stakeholders and leaders • Business class • Neo-liberal scientists, academics, and philanthropists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global South frontlines • Communities, poor and working class people, and migrants and displaced communities. Black feminists, workers, and LGBTQIA communities. • Community-rooted scientists, academics, and philanthropists
Decision Makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global North/Developed Nations • People in privileged positions of power • Investor Class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline communities • Women-, nature- and future generation-led communities • Communities with a commitment to move in symbiotic • Relationships with each other and nature • Spirit

This chart is a synthesis of findings from three strategy convenings over the last two years including thought ideation and partnership with the Good Ancestor Movement, Capital J Collaborative, CIDSE, global climate reparations fellows, and frontline partners and allies.

FIGURE 2.1 CLIMATE FINANCE IN AN ECONOMY OF EXTRACTION VS CLIMATE FINANCE IN AN ECONOMY OF LIBERATION

ELEMENT	EXTRACTION ECONOMY	LIBERATION ECONOMY
HOW and WHERE are resources raised and wealth built?		
Who Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The investor class and those who have access to capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All peoples and ecosystems - including nature and future generations.
Who Pays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frontline communities - Global South, poor peoples, individuals through consumptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those who have benefited most and have amassed wealth at the expense of frontline communities and nature.
View on Public Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replaced by or diverted into private corporate climate investments that seek to limit the risks of wealthholders from climate impacts Shielding and hiding dollars from public taxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dollars should be transparent and accountable. Capital should move directly to communities Redistribution of resources through public taxes or public commitments to frontline communities
WHAT are the legal conditions and frameworks in place to determine the rules?		
Root Cause Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on carbon emissions leading to false solutions such as offsets and geoengineering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extraction, privatization, enclosure of land, water, and energy. Colonialism and global Anti-Blackness
Political Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apolitical, ahistorical, and avoids power analysis and redistribution. One-dimensional focus on carbon reduction. Free market and neoliberal paradigm rooted in dominion over nature and others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political and acknowledges the historic and current harms of extractive systems. Focuses on redistribution of resources and power Intersectional and multi-dimensional Challenges free market systems and advances commons and care for a common home.
Guiding Narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scarcity: The need to privatize and control resources in order to secure the future a focus on "green growth" to benefit those who can pay for it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abundance: Resources should be collectively held or stewarded. The transition from an extractive global economy to one rooted in liberation must be governed by communities on the frontlines.
System Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Militarized Violence Debt and Loans Using public dollars to invest and subsidize private markets Division of people from nature Devaluing and exploitation of people Prioritizing competition at the expense of collective wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship-model of decision-making that incorporates people, Spirit, & nature Grants as compensation not charity Governed by frontline communities in a democratized, co-created, transparent, and accountable manner Legally robust system that allows for integrated systems that can reach broader possibilities Indigenous knowledge

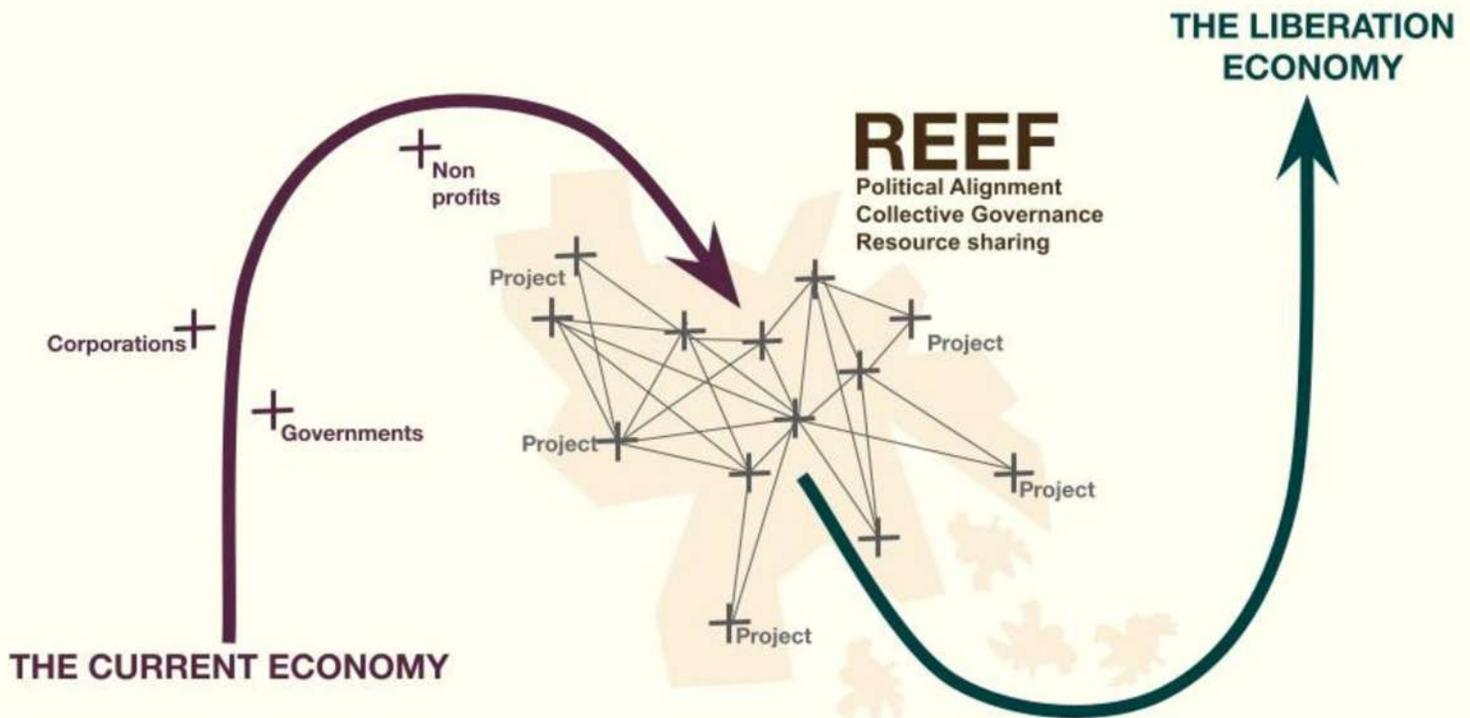


Figure 3.0 How do you shift a Paradigm?

SHIFTING THE PARADIGM FROM EXTRACTION TO LIBERATION

Paradigm shifts do not happen overnight, and jumping from one paradigm to the next can often cause significant harm to those most vulnerable in the current system. Transformations of systems are often beyond our control, happening as the world no longer sees the old paradigm as valuable. The question is: are we ready to advance a new vision when the old paradigm ends?

In June 2025, Catholic bishops from Africa, Asia, and Latin American and Caribbean countries argued against “the financialization of common goods.” Instead, they urged a restructuring of the world economic system “toward a restorative model that prioritises people’s well-being and ensures conditions for sustainable life on the planet.”

At this moment, the climate crisis is challenging our economic paradigm. Yet, the world’s current order is doubling down on an economy of extraction. We are seeing a retrenchment of ideas rooted in white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and dominion. These

ideas include widespread investment in technology that will cut us off from nature, a rise in authoritarianism, and a withdrawal from efforts of collective stewardship.

In order to transition from the old economy to the new reparative economy, we need alignment among frontline solutions and resourcing mechanisms. Communities are readying themselves for the paradigm shift. The movement needs not only to demand a more just climate finance system, we need to create a system like a coral reef. We have an incredible opportunity to grow and build the critical infrastructure to resource, connect, and strengthen frontline solutions to the climate crisis. This requires that we change perspectives (what we value), offer tangible solutions that model climate reparative finance (such as community controlled funds), and advance narratives and communication infrastructure that allow for people to lead with vision and hope.

ONGOING CATALYSTS FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE FINANCE

The paradigm shift is happening as we speak. In November 2024, Brazil proposed the creation of a “climate change council” through a General Assembly resolution at the United Nations, where the United States may see its influence slipping as a result of its lagging payments to fund the multilateral body. The climate council, if established, would focus on strengthening climate governance, accelerating Paris Agreement implementation, and raising climate finance. While the council proposal was not approved at COP30 in Belém in November 2025, negotiators demonstrated a clear focus on implementation plans, advancing the conversation from what to do, to how to do it. This conversation took place amid geopolitical tensions, trade wars, and a lack of consensus on committing to move away from fossil fuels.

As climate change fuels migration across borders, the meaning of those borders may be shifting. While sovereignty remains the anchor of authority in international politics, the factors that define and limit sovereign power continue to face critical challenges. States of the Global South struggle with poverty, recurrent conflicts, and climate change threats. Their strategies have included forming international partnerships to address security, trade and investment, and climate policy. Developing countries’ calls for reform of international institutions may gradually shape a new reality for climate finance and policymaking. In addition to diplomatic and political signs of change, international law contributes to the multifaceted and interdependent nature of climate justice action. In a recent decision, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) became the first regional court to acknowledge and express support for the rights of nature. The Court

recognizes “nature’s right to maintain its essential ecological processes” in a way that “respects planetary limits and guarantees the availability of vital resources for present and future generations.” In another critical judicial move, in a July 2024 advisory decision, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) determined that the 1.5 degree Celsius temperature target is legally binding under the Paris Agreement. As the primary UN court, the ICJ’s decision obligates all states (especially the largest emitters) to take ambitious steps toward mitigation. Governments’ failure to do so can trigger legal responsibility. In conjunction with the IACtHR’s finding, this means that sovereign governments must not only refrain from environmentally damaging behavior but also act on obligations to “ensure the protection, restoration, and regeneration of ecosystems.” Further enshrining the rights of nature in different legal systems around the world provides frontline communities and civil society with another transborder strategy and resource to defend nature and their livelihoods.

GLOBAL CLIMATE REPARATIONS WOULD SIGNAL A NEW PARADIGM

Advancing global climate reparations within climate finance requires de-centering approaches based solely on technological fixes and billion-dollar pledges. These are helpful interventions, but they remain incomplete and separate from an integrated global ecosystem. Efforts to balance and repair relationships in and among different communities, governments, corporations, and wealthy and developing societies demand clarity of responsibility and integration of resources and effort. Taproot Earth and many partner organizations in civil society can play a role in bridging networks and organizations, while co-creating flexible solutions to problems like injustice and climate change.

The Reef ecosystem would build alignment among multi-racial and multi-geographic frontline communities to advance global climate reparations with a specific focus on the Black Diaspora and Indigenous communities across the Global South. The role of constructing bridges across movements means bringing disparate groups into conversation, sharing experiences and ideas, and linking movement organizers with funders. This attempt to reimagine what we value means motivating finance and wealth holders to change the way they invest and give, ensuring a financial product that does not cause harm.

“ENERGY TRANSITION” AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ALIGNING MOVEMENTS AND BUILDING AN ECONOMY OF LIBERATION

The unfolding “energy transition” is understood by many as an urgent international effort to shift energy production away from fossil fuels and slow the swift temperature rises that generate extreme weather events. This complex shift—it is assumed—requires unacceptable tradeoffs between overall emissions reductions and increased mining of minerals seen as indispensable to developing more widespread alternative energy sources. But these compromises do not simply substitute one energy source for another. They threaten to worsen workers’ and communities’ well-being in the name of cleaner energy. Might the cure be worse than the disease? In a process hailed as global, the benefits and disadvantages of the energy transition are not being distributed equally. Global South minerals, resources, and workers continue to be exploited.

In advocating for just renewable energy efforts, the transition involves a second layer of compromises that approach the borders of democratic and authoritarian politics. Climate change threatens

democratic institutions, not only due to disasters and violent conflict over resources, but also the false promises of authoritarianism. To counter the effects of climate change, we need broad social participation and innovative solutions rooted in local communities. These are processes that take place more commonly in democratic political systems. The troubling patterns moving political practices toward authoritarianism in diverse parts of the world means that rights are under threat. But practices that focus on common concerns and recognize the interdependence among different public interests can lead people to see their interests in new ways and generate innovation. In his reflections on “bricolage,” Claude Lévi-Strauss described the work of a handyman or bricoleur, who builds new artifacts from heterogenous materials, assembling and adapting until construction produces an object. The bricoleur can “make do” with whatever is at hand, and the tools with which the bricoleur works are inherently finite. Working with familiar and locally abundant materials points to the practical nature of movement building around climate justice - an assemblage of distinct parts. Mia Mottley, speaking in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, made a call to action in 2025 to Global South leaders and citizens: “Let us remove the scars of history, and be firm craftsmen of our fate.” This process requires experimentation, flexibility, and the integration of the different perspectives of its designers.

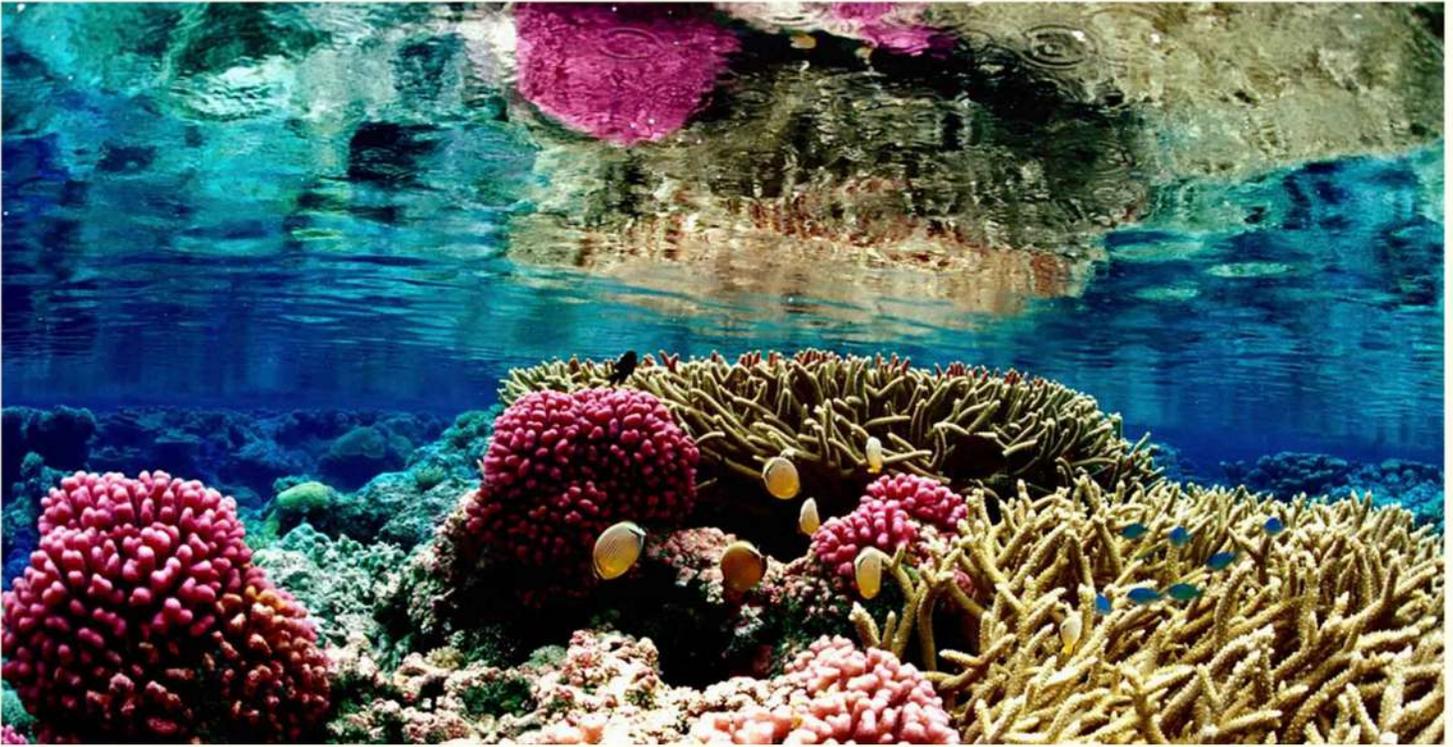


Photo: A coral reef, Wikimedia Commons

CREATING A REEF ECOSYSTEM

TO BUILD POWER AND ADVANCE COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

Today, we face a trifecta of challenges: the climate crisis, rising authoritarianism, and unfettered technological development. We know that building a world rooted in liberation and justice requires a paradigm shift. But creating a new paradigm of governance, economics, and social norms requires using what we have at our disposal today to act on a vision for tomorrow. At Taproot Earth, we call this the liberation horizon, the guiding purpose in building a world where we can all live, rest, and thrive in the places we love.

While it sounds impossible, the liberation horizon is achievable and underway. Frontline communities have been building solutions rooted in their own experiences, utilizing financial, political, and social tools and resources, as well as long connections to Indigenous wisdom and history. We can draw on these fundamental experiences.

To guide our way to the liberation horizon, we can look to nature. One coral polyp alone is important, but not enough to create an ecosystem that allows life to flourish and maintain a healthy ocean. It requires a symbiotic and collaborative system of coral polyps forming together in relationships to other marine life to create a vibrant, complex, and healthy ocean.

Reefs are one of the most vibrant and vital ecosystems on the planet. **Though they occupy less than 1 percent of the ocean floor, they sustain nearly 25 percent of all marine life.** Reefs are living systems built through collective processes, symbiotic relationships, and adaptive design. Similarly, reparative climate finance would be far more effective as an interconnected, regenerative ecosystem.

Status quo climate finance at times appears to work as a monolithic model, seeking to scale solutions and provide a one-size-fits-all approach to deal with acute challenges at the local level. This conventional strategy is akin to making a few of the coral polyps bigger and thus ill-equipped to provide for the patchwork of marine life and more prone to succumb to challenges. It is not an ecosystem but a monosystem.

As we work to build a more equitable and reparative climate finance system, we must draw on the natural wisdom of mutual care and invest in frontline communities across the globe if we want to address this precarious moment for social and natural ecosystems everywhere. What kinds of transformations in environmental and social resilience might 1 percent of all global wealth create? \$1.2 trillion or just 1 percent of the \$124 trillion intergenerational wealth transfer would support nearly 25 percent of climate finance needs of the Global South economies in 2026. For comparison, \$1.2 trillion is four times the amount of the Paris Agreement's unfulfilled climate finance commitments. Imagine the impact these funds could have if they were both reparative and implemented at the required scale. Just 10 percent of the \$1 trillion wealth transfer would transform the world for the better.

We cannot mobilize sufficient resources for change with a top-down, homogeneous approach. Instead, we need a diverse and collective approach that values self-determination, and embraces spirit and wisdom indigenous to people and the land. Reparative finance must be flexible enough to meet varying contexts and challenges. A collaborative effort demands development of a new model for community governance. The frontlines are already building and sustaining a patchwork of strategies, like a coral that takes root on the

surface and builds and connects to existing and new corals to create a diverse and vibrant reef of change.

FOLLOW THE CORAL ROAD

As humans, we protect what we love. Cultural practice and participation in collective labor and care-giving bring meaning to the broader ecological and economic systems we inhabit, and both are in interlocking crises. The messages that resonate most are those that focus on protecting what we love, including the everyday joys sparked and sustained by our communities. As we envision and build a healthy economy rooted in care and collective vitality, we have to rethink the ways in which we belong together.

The Great Barrier Reef in Australia, visible from space, has suffered tremendously as waters warm and coral bleaching occurs. Algae detach, and coral can no longer defend, nourish, and care for the ecosystem's inhabitants. The collective good and survival of multiple species depends on the flourishing of coral reefs. How can we value the health and flourishing of economic systems differently, learning from and acknowledging past harms and constructing with available materials, where we live?

Taproot calls for a strategy of convening the bricklayers to facilitate the architecture of a new system. This project is far from a "starting from scratch" transformation. Instead, we envision a learning process and a layering of experiences that honors past struggle and suffering. This patchwork of movement-building draws on norms and values, specifically seeking repair for historical exploitation as part of a just transition. It centers Black and Indigenous voices and knowledge through practices that help engender abundance rather than scarcity.



Photo: The GCR Jubilee Convening

We have worked both to aggregate different practices and negotiate different values and tensions in order to come to a collective vision or decision. It is not easy work, but it is worthwhile. It requires that frontline leaders come together to practice the sacredness of community. We know that by practicing community, we invite both Spirit and intentionality that can build the trust and discipline needed to advance what the climate reparations statement calls for: balancing ecosystems and building systems of accountability rooted in Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty. This is what it will take to build a Reef ecosystem.

Taproot Earth recognizes the enormous potential for change in capital markets and calls for climate finance to play a bridging role, allowing frontline movements to connect and take risks. In particular, we must find ways to leverage the UN's convening power and active negotiations as a point of departure to create the bridges to a new paradigm. When frontline communities of the Global South seek to redress the harms caused by the Global North at the UN's annual COP, these efforts must be supported and championed by all.

No one-size-fits-all climate finance solution exists. Models within the prevailing approach to climate finance policy can do better, and long-standing

institutional actors move resources to the ground and can be critical implementers of change. Many different community models such as The CS Fund, the Gulf South to Appalachia Community Controlled Fund, and Thousand Currents prove how resource investments can move based on local context, Indigenous wisdom, and collective practice. While some of these models exist in the current paradigm and others exist outside of it, we need all of them to build and walk the bridge from extraction to liberation. These movements represent different corals, sponges, and fish that move together in alignment, value, and impact to create an ecosystem of solutions. They invest in the frontlines by rooting in repair and care.

To get there, we need investment in the coordination and communication infrastructure among models, and we need to continue to ideate and create new models to practice elevated systems of reparation. We must continue to build relationships and trust so that we can practice collective self-governance. At the end of the day, the goal is not just to build a new system of climate finance in an economy of liberation, it is also about building community to lead us through the most challenging moments in human history. Together, we can be like a coral reef ecosystem that can protect, filter, and replenish the world with ideas of love, hope, and liberation.



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FOLLOW THE FRONTLINES

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