

 Pillar 2.  
**COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES**

# ALLIANCE OF SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDS OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

## Creating an alliance of Global South socio-environmental funds

- **Region:** Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia
- **Number of staff:** N/A
- **Year of incorporation:** 2021
- **Type:** Regranting foundations
- **Endowment:** No
- **More information:** [linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com)

### ALLIANCE MEMBERS

- [Casa Socio-Environmental Fund](#) (Brazil)
- [AC Solidarity Action Fund](#) (México)
- [Tierra Viva Foundation](#) (Central America)
- [The Samdhana Institute](#) (Southeast Asia)
- [Fundación Semilla](#) (Bolivia)
- [Peru Socio-Environmental Fund](#) (Peru)
- [Emerger Socio-Environmental Fund](#) (Colombia)
- [Ñeque Fund](#) (Ecuador)
- [Tindzila Fund](#) (Mozambique)

The Alliance of Socio-Environmental Funds of the Global South (Alianza Socioambiental Fondos del Sur) was created in 2021 by bringing together independent and activist socio-environmental funds from nine countries and regions in the Global South. Each fund is nationally or regionally based, operates in local languages and cultures, and issues grants in local currencies.

The Alliance is inspired by a growing Latin-American activist philanthropy model which has been addressing socio-environmental issues since 2005. Its primary goals are to act on two distinct problems faced by several philanthropies and other donors working on the climate agenda: how to define a grantmaking strategy that responds to local priorities and is grounded in local knowledge, and how to disburse resources in the absence

of a legal entity operating in the country. The emergence of institutionally and politically strong local funds has the potential to make resources readily available for grassroots organisations that face the worst impacts of environmental devastation and support the most vulnerable populations in places that do not usually receive traditional philanthropic support.

The Alliance was ignited by the Casa Socio-Environmental Fund's efforts to build sister philanthropic funds in the Global South. Since 2015, the Casa Socio-Environmental Fund, a signatory of the International Philanthropy Commitment on Climate Change, has experienced increased demand from foreign philanthropic and international cooperation players that are willing to fund locally-led, climate-related projects, particularly in Latin America. Based on the belief that philanthropy must rely on a deep local understanding of the environmental challenges faced by the most vulnerable populations, the Casa Socio-Environmental Fund decided to share its operating model and expertise with like-minded players in relevant countries. Instead of opening new offices and expanding its work across different countries, Casa Socio-Environmental Fund helped build a loose intercontinental network of funds.

These funds all face similar institutional challenges in their start-up phase, regardless of where they are located or the specific thematic issues that they address. They encounter challenges in building the institutions, setting up calls for proposals and other grantmaking mechanisms, engaging with donors and defining communication strategies, among others. Acknowledging this, the Casa Socio-Environmental Fund shared its own expertise and practical tools with partners in other countries who want to learn from their model and work on socio-environment challenges with strong grassroots implications. The exchanges in Bolivia and Colombia are illustrative of how this works.

## Fundación Semilla: Socio-environmental philanthropic giving in Bolivia

Fundación Semilla was created in 2020 to contribute to conservation and strengthening the leadership of Bolivian community groups and grassroots movements working on socio-environmental issues. When the initial conversations about creating Fundación Semilla started in 2015, Eduardo Franco Berton, Semilla's founder and director, was working as an environmental journalist for an organisation that was supported by the Casa Socio-Environmental Fund. Strong connections with movements that are active on the ground facilitate the process of identifying players and priorities, as well as channelling funds from foreign organisations that are willing to support the climate agenda in the country.

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*“As a journalist, part of my work is to tell the stories of the communities that had their rights violated and their territory destroyed.”*

— EDUARDO FRANCO BERTON, FOUNDER OF FUNDACIÓN SEMILLA

A deep understanding of what is happening on the ground, socially and environmentally, is essential for stimulating solutions at a grassroots level so that communities can promote the protection of their own territories. Semilla has already supported around 35 community-based projects, small and medium organisations, civic platforms, groups and social movements with small grants (between USD 2 500 and 7 500). Beyond financial support, Semilla invests considerable human resources into strengthening local capacities. Focusing on the institutional development of these organisations is intended to empower grantees to manage and execute their own projects and access larger funds independently. La Asociación de Recolectoras los Mangales del Sur<sup>1</sup> is an example of a grantee, led by women, that collects, recycles and reuses garbage, and became the first group to have a legal statute in Santa Cruz – the most populous Bolivian city.

Apart from receiving grants from different funders, Semilla manages the Bolivian chapter of the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA)<sup>2</sup> which aims to strengthen and unify the capabilities of community-based women’s rights and environmental justice groups and movements. In its second year, GAGGA supported 11 groups with projects focused on climate change and women’s rights. By drawing from members’ experiences and emulating their practices, Semilla has leapfrogged some of the challenges of the start-up phase and has been able to mobilise more resources from different donors, despite operating in a small country like Bolivia. Furthermore, Semilla is developing a South American programme focused on supporting groups affected by large infrastructure projects, such as mega-dams. By learning from the experience of other socio-environmental funds in the Amazon that opposed the Belo Monte hydroelectric power plant<sup>3</sup>, Fundación Semilla succeeded the Casa Socio-Environmental Fund in supporting women-led communities in the Gran Chaco – the second-largest forest in South America. Since Semilla is closer to the impacted community than the Casa Socio-Environmental Fund, it continued the work to resist the territorial destruction caused by large energy infrastructure interventions in Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Chile and Argentina.

Fundación Semilla seeks to promote a socio-environmental agenda in the long term by leveraging domestic resources. Its association with the Global South Alliance and the frequent meetings to share intelligence have

<sup>1</sup> La Asociación de Recolectoras los Mangales del Sur, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkmEB4KpBfV/>

<sup>2</sup> Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA), <https://gaggaalliance.org/>

<sup>3</sup> “A vida das famílias que reagiram contra Belo Monte”, Fundo Brasil, 2018, <https://www.fundobrasil.org.br/a-vida-das-familias-que-reagiram-contra-belo-monte/>

helped Semilla gain a better understanding of how the climate philanthropy ecosystem works. Its goal is to find ways to connect its grantees with the Bolivian philanthropic world.

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*“These groups (community organisations) do not conceive themselves as organisations. They are movements pulled by their territories, and they organise around that because they fear their territory will disappear. It is not up to the money. It’s something else working from the ground. It’s even more powerful.”*

— EDUARDO FRANCO BERTON, FOUNDER OF FUNDACIÓN SEMILLA

## Emerger Socio-Environmental Fund: Strengthening grassroots movements in Colombia

The Emerger Socio-Environmental Fund<sup>4</sup> is a community fund that was created in 2021 with the goal of fostering environmental knowledge, management, conservation and sustainability in Colombia. The Fund currently works in four thematic streams: Food and post-pandemic food sovereignty; Food sovereignty post-Covid; Sustainable management and ecosystem community protection; Vulnerability and responses to climate change. Emerger adopted the model of public calls for proposals and targets very small organisations with an annual budget of less than COP 50 million (roughly equivalent to USD 10 million).

The establishment of Emerger can be traced back to Colombia’s recent environmental history. In the 1990s, the creation of Ecofondo – a non-governmental organisation in charge of channelling debt-for-nature swap Funds with developed countries – was a pivotal axis of articulation of the national environmental movement. All five founding members of the Emerger Socio-Environmental Fund participated in Ecofondo’s expansion and experience in co-financing 357 environmental management projects until its shrinking process in the early 2000s. This experience provided important lessons which they brought to establishing Emerger.

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*“The access of grassroots organisations to this kind of resource is difficult. This kind of financial support usually demands large, technical interventions and well-established political relationships. Without them, things don’t really change.”*

— JUAN CAMILO MIRA, COORDINATOR OF THE EMERGER SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL FUND

<sup>4</sup>Fundo Emerger Socioambiental, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/EmergerSocioambiental/>

After Ecofondo reduced its funding capacity, the concentration of resources for the environmental movement shifted to the Colombian Presidential Agency of International Co-operation<sup>5</sup>. The government-led structure directed resources towards the kinds of activities that grassroots organisations required. There was a need to create a legitimate and agile structure grounded in local expertise, to ensure that those on the front lines would be able to access the resources. Dependence on foreign resources made grassroots organisations more vulnerable. The exchange of technical information between members of the Global South Alliance has been very helpful in speeding up the process of finding other funding sources and strengthening capacity for growth. Knowledge exchange with the Alliance has also helped Emerger with different tasks, from drafting statutes and templates to dealing with daily challenges and jointly participating in missions like COP27.

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*“It’s not possible to create an alliance without practice. On paper, a new platform can be beautiful and establish new moral grounds for action. But we are dealing with people. And when financial resources are involved, we need to deepen our platform exchange if we don’t want things to get complicated.”*

— JUAN CAMILO MIRA, COORDINATOR OF THE EMERGER SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL FUND

In 2022, in partnership with other Alliance members, the Emerger Socio-Environmental Fund received funds from Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA)<sup>6</sup> and UNICEF to finance another 40 projects<sup>7</sup>. Colombia is one of the country priorities for CLUA, which supports the implementation of protected indigenous and Afro-descendent communities’ land rights and their sustainable management of forests and biodiversity. A partner like Emerger, which has strong local connections and regranting capacity, helps to ensure that the resources respond to local needs.

Emerger has positioned itself as an important fund in the region in a short space of time. It has received funds from the Inter-American Foundation, Open Society Foundations and the Global Fund for Community Foundations, which gives it more capacity to act. In one year, the number of projects it supported has doubled. Although the climate agenda represented only 5% of Emerger’s portfolio until 2022, elements of climate action are present in several of its grants which tackle food sovereignty and efforts to combat the expansion of fracking in the country. Emerger’s Urban Amazon programme aims to increase communities’ resilience to climate shocks, which is currently a minor but growing component of the unfolding climate agenda in the region.

<sup>5</sup> Colombian Presidential Agency of International Co-operation, <https://www.apccolombia.gov.co/>

<sup>6</sup> Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA), <https://www.climateandlandusealliance.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Proyectos apoyados, Fondo Emerger, <https://emerger.org/proyectos/>

The examples of Fundación Semilla and the Emerger Socio-Environmental Fund demonstrate the value of cooperation mechanisms like the Socio-Environmental Funds of the Global South, for speeding up the channelling of resources locally, in communities vulnerable to socio-environmental impacts, by proactively facilitating knowledge sharing about how regranting organisations function in practice. To tackle the climate crisis at a local level, it becomes clear that when bigger philanthropies lack political connections, legitimacy or institutional conditions to operate, socio-environmental funds and other regranting mechanisms can serve as the missing link.

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