

 Pillar 2.
COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

THE AFRICAN CLIMATE FOUNDATION

A climate foundation from Africa, to Africa

- **Country:** South Africa
- **Number of staff:** 22
- **Year of incorporation:** 2020
- **Type:** Regranting foundation
- **Endowment:** No
- **More info:** africanclimatefoundation.org

The African Climate Foundation (ACF) is the first African-led strategic climate change grantmaking foundation on the continent fully dedicated to working on climate and development. In less than two years ACF has issued over 80 grants, supporting work in 23 African countries. ACF has its operational base in South Africa, with teams working out of Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal supporting projects at the intersections of climate and development on the continent.

Despite the relevance of the climate adaptation and mitigation agenda for Africa, most of the international philanthropic community and many African stakeholders still focus on immediate and pressing challenges, such as poverty, health care, education and economic inclusion. In 2018, Funders Table discussions facilitated by ClimateWorks Foundation and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) decided to help fill this gap by establishing a trust that became the seed of what is now ACF.

Building on the success stories of similar operating models like the European Climate Foundation (ECF) and The Institute for Climate and Society (iCS) in Brazil, ACF is the most recent example of a family of regranting organisations that began its operations with a combination of seed capital from traditional and established climate philanthropies, and strong political, operational and strategic knowledge from the region in which it works.

South Africa as a testing ground

In its first year of existence, the ACF team visited several organisations on the African continent and abroad, to understand their structures. The team had more than 1 000 meetings with scholars, practitioners, decision-makers and activists from across the continent, to learn from their insight in to various African countries, get to know potential partners in person and refine ACF's strategic approach. This process confirmed ACF's initial impression: that the climate-development nexus was clear for many, but not explicitly addressed by anyone.

Among various possible intersections between climate and development, ACF decided to focus on just energy transition, looking specifically to South African dependency on coal and the correlated challenges. This focus is underpinned by a sense of urgency to amplify the understanding in Africa and outside the continent about how Africa's future will impact the rest of the world.

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First, because of the continent's extremely fast urbanising process. Second, it has the youngest population in the world. And third, if nothing changes, it will be the poorest continent, with people going to live across its border”.

– SALIEM FAKIR, ACF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As a result of this extensive effort, ACF's Board approved their first Strategic Framework 2021-2025¹ – an overview of the Foundation's theoretical framing, its body of work, objectives, and approach to delivering impact. Its blueprint is to expand the debate about a new economic development model from Africa, to Africa, that tackles climate issues and considers Africa's context and needs, while paying attention to future carbon emissions in African countries.

Expanding and quickly allocating resources

Since its inception, ACF has grown from one to 13 funders supporting their work, with more funders currently in the application phase. The Foundation is mobilising more resources while strengthening its operational team, in order to expand its impact. The ACF team is working hard to hone its management of a huge pipeline of

¹ “Strategic framework 2021-2025,” The African Climate Foundation, September 2022, <https://africanclimatefoundation.org/strategic-framework/>

grants; streamline Board approval with the organisational expansion strategy; and engage more grantees in the project design process. The team is experimenting with different approaches to defining their various country strategies, by conducting scoping work with local teams in each country. Scoping exercises are followed by identifying anchor grantees that are able to convene key stakeholders to secure local resources and get projects off the ground quickly, while still respecting the time that it takes to build systemic low-carbon economic and social change.

ACF attended COP27, hosted by Egypt in November 2022, and deliberately used this opportunity to fast-track African organisations investing in entities with the potential to impact the whole ecosystem. They joined and co-hosted dozens of roundtables and events, including one² in which a group of philanthropies committed to investing UDS 500 million to accelerate a just and equitable energy transition in low and middle-income countries.

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It is not about giving grants for [the sake of] giving grants. It is about building this ecosystem [into] a nested model”.

– SALIEM FAKIR, ACF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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² “Philanthropies commit \$500 million for an equitable energy transition”, The African Climate Foundation, November 2022, https://africanclimatefoundation.org/news_and_analysis/philanthropies-commit-500-million-for-an-equitable-energy-transition/