



Climate grant making in Ghana- the first steps in our learning journey- December 2022

One of our major focuses at Gower Street in 2022 has been developing our climate grant making in Ghana. By the end of 2021 we were developing strong partnerships with three excellent climate and environment focused Ghanaian NGOs; [EcoCare](#), [Kasa Initiative](#) and [SYND](#). 2022 was to be the year that we added to this small portfolio and learned the best way to deploy our funding in Ghana between now and when the trust is due to close in 2030. This blog post relays the experience of working towards those goals over the past 12 months. The year opened with the team feeling driven by the sense coming out of Cop 26 that to address the climate crisis, a laser focus on keeping fossil fuels in the ground was required. We were aware that delivering on this goal might look very different in Ghana to the UK. However, we had a limited understanding of how the work we knew in Ghana, which focused mainly on sustainable agriculture, related to fossil fuels or whether indeed it did at all. So, we set out on a journey of learning to try and understand what tackling the climate crisis in a country that is truly on the frontline looks like. In particular we were looking through the lens of what role civil society and, by backing it, a small grant maker, can play. As we end the year, we have many more questions than we started with, and that laser is currently a bit more of a disco light. So, how did we get to this point and what have we learned along the way?

We began the year by mapping Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working on climate change in Ghana. We recruited a local consultant to develop an initial database which included 160 organisations. We added to this by desk research and asking our friends and partners in Ghana, adding several additional organisations and some pioneering individuals working on climate issues such as photographer and researcher [Muntaka Chasant](#). Lesson number one was that climate CSOs in Ghana don't necessarily look like climate CSOs. In many cases these organisations didn't come from the starting point of climate but were set up to tackle challenges in their communities that have become increasingly complex and profound as the reality of climate changes bites. A second lesson was that there are very few groups in Ghana shouting about fossil fuels, with some notable exceptions including [Oil Watch Ghana](#), despite it being an oil and gas producing nation. This is perhaps unsurprising in a country which historically produced such a tiny proportion of the world's emissions and is still focused on ensuring basic access to energy for its population. It was encouraging though to see people who were determined to leapfrog the mistakes of the global north, such as [Chibeze Ezekiel](#) and his campaign against a coal fired energy plant in Ghana.

Faced with such a large and diverse group of CSOs we decided that it would be sensible to invest some time in getting to know how these groups work and what the most effective routes to tackling climate change are before committing to



larger partnerships. At Gower Street we are conscious of the time and cost engaging with potential funders takes so we decided we would start funding with small 'getting to know you' seed grants. We are also conscious that we are not the experts in understanding work on the ground. Although as a team we have a long affiliation with Ghana and some fairly deep roots in the country including having had a member of staff and a trustee living in country this year, we are very aware that on balance we are pretty white, middle class and British. We are also aware of that impossible to eliminate but important to mitigate power dynamic between funders and fundees. So, in a first step to trying to address some of this imbalance we asked Ghanaian experts from across our partners past and present to form a steering committee that would help to assess applications and make decisions on who to award seed funded grants to.

The result of this first step in our process is a group of 14 seed funded grantees dispersed across the regions of Ghana and ranging in size from the one person band to the internationally recognised larger NGOs. Each is tackling climate change in very different but often complementary ways. In November 2022 we were able to convene the groups in Ghana and it was a huge privilege to see these groups drawn together and sharing knowledge and experience with each other. Some key learnings from this convening were how connected the sector is in Ghana, how vast the challenge is and therefore how large the civil society response needs to be, and how holistic most work is given that it is working in communities where climate change has to be both mitigated and adapted to.

Throwing the net out in this way and dipping our toe into participatory approaches to grant making has generated many questions including whether it is better to back small grassroots groups to develop their independent voice or to help larger groups to equip themselves to access international climate finance pots, whether it is better to contribute to sustainable agriculture at a landscape scale or back smaller community based initiatives. In terms of the process, it has led us to question whether participation should come in the form of expert advice or active decision making with the conflicts of interest that can create. We end the year with all these questions to be mulled over and the next steps to be taken on our learning journey. We also end the year taking some satisfaction that we are learning by doing and that we get to see how that disco light illuminates points of hope across Ghana; from women tackling erosion in the Tono river in the Upper East, to young people training as negotiators for the COP process, to children learning how to understand and live with a changing climate at their school's eco club.