



Building resilience together

Youth leadership and creative approaches in climate adaptation



GLOBAL
RESILIENCE
PARTNERSHIP



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people are increasingly recognised as influential agents of change in climate resilience, bringing creativity, lived experience, and a strong commitment to equity. Nonetheless, many still face obstacles in accessing transformative learning environments that support experimentation, reflection, and learning from failure. Overcoming these challenges necessitates intentional, inclusive programme design that centres equity and cultivates collaborative leadership. The Global Resilience Partnership's (GRP) approach has been to integrate capacity development, knowledge brokering, and creative storytelling, establishing conditions where young leaders can combine lived experience with evidence and translate this knowledge into effective, locally relevant adaptation strategies. Here we distil key lessons from GRP's youth programming, underscoring how creative, inclusive, and locally rooted strategies drive sustainable progress in climate adaptation and resilience efforts.

GRP is reshaping youth engagement by embedding young people as core contributors, not just participants. Through roles such as interns, young experts, and grantees, young people gain access to mentorship, leadership opportunities, and an expanded professional network through opportunities to plug into GRP's network of practitioners and implementers across the Global South. GRP prioritises power-shifting to the Global South, fosters intergenerational collaboration, and builds long-term partnerships that emphasise trust and shared learning. This model empowers youth to shape evidence, influence discourse, and lead change.

Through our working areas below, GRP integrates youth programmes through our outcomes:

1 Transforming Food and Financial Systems. GRP supports local innovators and entrepreneurs, including young people and women, to scale context-specific food and financial solutions that strengthen resilience at the ground level.

2 Scaling Innovative Formal–Informal Collaborations GRP connects formal institutions with informal systems and communities to deliver more inclusive, equitable and locally-led climate action, especially in vulnerable urban settings. GRP also plays a convening role in global policy arenas through the **Resilience Hub**, ensuring that resilience priorities and local perspectives are heard and reflected in decision-making spaces.

3 Increasing Inclusive Transdisciplinary Learning. GRP creates space for diverse actors to learn from one another, reflect, and share knowledge that informs resilience practice and policy. This includes brokering dialogue, facilitating transformative learning for resilience professionals, and centring the perspectives of young people and women.

4 Embedding Resilience in the Private and Financial Sectors. GRP engages with private sector actors, including business schools, to integrate resilience into their strategies and investments, unlocking innovation and finance for adaptation.



Resilience Hub session. **Photo credit:** by Lemes Produções

THE POWER OF SMALL, CATALYTIC FUNDING

Prioritising unrestricted small grants for youth and arts-based initiatives enables creativity and grounded local adaptation solutions. Flexible, early-stage funding remains one of the most effective ways to empower young innovators and community-based creators. Through the **Knowledge Into Use (KIU)** Awards, GRP demonstrated how catalytic small grants can unlock experimentation and encourage locally tailored approaches to climate resilience. Because the funding was flexible, youth and grassroots organisations were able to try unconventional methods, adapt their plans in real time, and respond directly to community needs without delays.

These small grants enabled a wide range of arts-based and storytelling approaches, such as murals, theatre, digital media, documentary film, music, comics, and citizen science tools. Such creative formats made technical climate information more understandable and emotionally resonant for children, young people, policymakers, and local communities. By allowing innovators to work in ways that felt culturally meaningful and grounded in local realities, the programme expanded the forms of knowledge that could influence decision-making. **The Knowledge into Use awards diversified how resilience evidence is generated, shared, and understood.**



Workshop hosted by Knowledge into Use winner Āranya Design, a women-led rural design, research and advocacy studio based in Western India



Theatre production by Knowledge into Use Awards winner, Noble Arts Foundation

“The Knowledge into Use Award helped us execute our arts project on a much larger scale. We reached over 100 more people than before and were finally able to document our work digitally, something we had struggled to do before the grant.”

Menkemndi Randy, Knowledge into Use Grant awardee (2023)- Performing for change by Noble Arts Foundation, Bamenda Cameroon

Supporting innovators at early stages helps unlock larger investments and long-term growth. Small, catalytic grants act as springboards for further opportunity. Several youth-led initiatives used their KIU-supported projects to secure follow-on funding, enter innovation challenges, or gain recognition within national and international networks. The experience of managing a small grant, combined with improved storytelling and facilitation skills, positioned them competitively for additional support. This progression shows that early investments in youth leadership and creative knowledge translation can mature into scalable, community-led resilience solutions. Many participants continued to apply the skills learned, such as participatory storytelling, digital content creation, systems thinking, and facilitation in their academic, professional, and community work, demonstrating sustained impact beyond the program.

“This was one of the first opportunities that made me believe funding can truly reach the grassroots without overly rigid rules. The flexibility allowed us to create real change with communities who are often excluded from climate finance.”

Enock Mwangilwa, Knowledge into Use Grant awardee (2022)- Wildlife and Environmental Conservation of Zambia (WECSZ)



Knowledge Into Use winner Youth Visions in a Changing Climate's first gathering of youths in Muizenberg to explore Mountain, Ocean, Vlei ecosystems. Photo Credit - Elona Mteto

Pairing funding with mentorship and visibility plays a vital role in building youth capacity, deepening engagement, and creating stronger long-term outcomes. The most notable results emerged when grants were paired with structured guidance like mentorship, storytelling and communications workshops, editorial support, and opportunities to showcase work on global platforms. Young innovators reported greater confidence in articulating their ideas, translating evidence into accessible narratives, and engaging with wider audiences. For instance, the **Resilience Perspectives** storytelling competition supported 20 shortlisted young people with training that enabled even them to refine and publish their stories, demonstrating lasting benefits far beyond the final selection. When young people receive both resources and structured support, they develop durable skills that influence their future community work, studies, and professional trajectories.



Gikomba market stall Credit: Janet Chemitei

“The one-on-one support I received through Resilience Perspectives really sharpened my storytelling and introduced me to new ways of strengthening my work. The training helped me express my ideas more clearly and intentionally, and turn my experiences into stories that connect with wider audiences. Since then, I’ve used these skills beyond writing, including in video storytelling. The combination of the award, mentorship, and visibility didn’t just support my work at the time it helped build my capacity for the long term.”

Janet Chemitei

Resilience Perspective awarded 2023

Visibility at global events, including the Resilience Hub at COP, London Climate Action Week, and online global storytelling platforms, further amplified the KIU awardees' work, opening new avenues for collaboration, policy dialogue, and influence. Several projects extended their reach into rural areas, established new institutional partnerships, or attracted national and international media attention. GRP's publication of youth-led stories further increased their credibility and helped them reach donors, practitioners, and policymakers.

Success Stories:

1

Youth Innovation Lab Nepal piloted its long-envisioned Mural Art for Disaster Risk Communication project, using creative visuals to make flood risk maps more accessible to communities. The project garnered national and international attention, earning recognition from the Nepalese government, local media, and the UNDRR. They further secured funding through the GRP **RISE innovation challenge**.

2

Community Design Agency (India) initially focused on small-scale urban storytelling projects. With communications support from GRP, they expanded their work, leading climate conversations within communities and gaining invitations to showcase their art at events such as the Bengaluru Conference and London Climate Action Week 2024.

3

Noble Arts Entertainment (Cameroon) used storytelling and performance to bring communities together around the interconnected issues of climate change, conflict, and food security. Their work created space for local dialogue and learning.

4

Aranya Design (India) developed a child-centred approach that encourages children to lead climate conversations at home, effectively bridging intergenerational dialogue on environmental awareness and adaptation.

5

Socratus (India) used its KIU grant to launch an international artist's edition of Climate Recipes. They successfully secured additional funding to implement the project fully, demonstrating the catalytic potential of small grants to unlock larger support and impact.

6

Interfer used inclusive/participatory street art to visualise the stories of local community members' experiences of the challenges and opportunities of securing water services in low-income areas of Cape Town

YOUTH CREATIVITY AND STORYTELLING AS A CATALYST FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Art, storytelling, and creative media are powerful tools for shifting culture, amplifying local knowledge and realities and strengthening community-driven climate action. Arts-based approaches help simplify complex climate ideas and connect them to lived experience in ways that technical reports cannot. Creative forms such as film, murals, theatre, music, photography, digital media, and comics make climate information accessible not only to policymakers and researchers but also to children, elders, and community groups. Through GRP's youth storytelling initiatives, participants demonstrated a natural ability to innovate, translate evidence into relatable narratives, and build emotional connections that drive awareness and action.



Knowledge Into Use Awards winner IIED América Latina creating murals illustrating sustainable practices.

The Resilience Perspectives Storytelling Contest and the **#Art4Resilience** social media contest showed that youth can communicate climate realities with clarity, honesty, and creativity that cuts across age, geography, and language. These initiatives amplified lived experiences from informal settlements, Indigenous groups, pastoralist communities, rural villages, and urban neighbourhoods - stories often absent from formal climate discourse. This diversity enriched global understanding of resilience, illustrating how climate impacts are experienced differently and how local knowledge drives innovative solutions. Digital platforms and social media further expanded reach, allowing young people in underserved or remote regions to participate globally. Elevating these voices helped shape narratives that are more reflective, inclusive, and responsive to community needs, ultimately strengthening the legitimacy and relevance of global resilience agendas.



Credit: IIED América Latina

Designing programmes with accessibility at the centre is essential for broad and equitable youth participation. GRP's use of several digital platforms, open submission formats, and diverse storytelling styles attracted participation from across regions and identities. Yet the contests also revealed persistent barriers, including limited internet access and language constraints, showing that inclusive design must remain an ongoing priority. Addressing linguistic, digital, and geographic barriers ensures that the youth voice is not confined to those with privilege but reflects the full diversity of resilience experiences across the Global South.

“Having my work showcased through GRP opened up new collaboration opportunities. It connected me with people and platforms that expanded the reach and impact of my work. Those relationships didn't end with the showcase—I have continued to collaborate with GRP in different ways, and that ongoing engagement has been an important part of my growth as a young innovator.”



Anita Soina
#Art4Resilience 2022 Awardee



Credit: IIED América Latina



Illustration from the Resilience Perspectives Storytelling Competition, where Finding the Trickle was one of the winning stories. Illustrated by Steven Vala.

Why the Global South Talent Pool Matters

- Shapes professional trajectories by providing real-world experience and exposure in the climate and development sectors
- Builds technical and interpersonal skills like stakeholder engagement, research, digital communication, program and project management and administration support
- Strengthens understanding of climate adaptation and resilience frameworks, with a focus on Global South contexts
- Offers access to global policy spaces such as the UNFCCC-COP, enhancing familiarity with international processes
- Supports engagement in community initiatives, academic research, and global climate networks
- Provides a supportive learning environment through patient mentorship, collaboration with senior staff, and space to experiment
- Enables continued peer collaboration and connection across GRP and partner platforms
- Encourages ongoing learning through suggested additions like thematic webinars, writing workshops, and possible rotations with GRP partners

DEEPENING PROXIMATE LEADERSHIP

“Being able to work directly with senior members of GRP and contribute to real discussions helped me understand resilience across sectors. When young people are trusted with responsibility, they become core contributors rather than symbolic participants.”



— Nirvana Chavon Milton,
GSTP Intern (2023)

Putting youth as core partners from design to delivery is essential for building trust, strengthening leadership, and creating sustainable pathways for long-term collaboration. Additionally, institutionalising youth co-leadership ensures that evidence systems and adaptation strategies reflect diverse realities and challenge traditional notions of expertise. When youth are included as co-designers, implementers, advisors and evaluators, not peripheral participants, they gain substantive decision-making power and contribute meaningfully to shaping resilience agendas.

Programmes such as the Global South Talent Pool (GSTPS) internship and young expert program, Mobilising Business Schools for Resilience, and the Resilience Evidence Forum (REF) showed that structured opportunities for co-leadership enhance youth agency while improving the quality and relevance of outcomes. Participants engaged directly in research, policy dialogues, community work, and evidence-building processes, developing confidence and professional skills while generating insights grounded in lived experience.

Resilience knowledge is richer, more credible, and more actionable when shaped by those closest to climate impacts, helping to strengthen trust between institutions and the communities they aim to serve. During the Resilience Evidence Forum, youth-led contributions highlighted new approaches for generating and sharing evidence rooted in everyday practice. These approaches demonstrated how community-generated data, arts-based communication, and citizen science can translate lived experience into forms of evidence that local communities relate to, while remaining legible and valuable to global audiences.

Amplifying youth voices at COP and other global platforms is a critical step toward influencing policy, attracting partnerships, and legitimising youth-generated evidence. Yet visibility alone is insufficient. Meaningful roles, such as rapporteurs, co-facilitators, speakers, and organisers, allowed young participants to influence agenda-setting, shape narratives in real time, and demonstrate their analytical and leadership capabilities. At REF, for instance, youth rapporteurs contributed directly to session documentation and the final report, developing valuable skills in knowledge synthesis and policy engagement. Capturing and connecting youth-generated knowledge to decision-making spaces is essential for ensuring influence at both community and global levels. Arts-based approaches, storytelling outputs, and evidence from KIU and other initiatives demonstrated strong potential to inform adaptation policy, if intentionally integrated into policy dialogues. Strengthening these pathways will enable youth to shape both community-led action and high-level strategies, ensuring that their lived experiences are recognised as a legitimate form of evidence.

Being part of the Resilience Hub team was a transformative experience. It wasn't just about participating—it gave me real responsibilities, exposed me to global conversations, and helped me understand how my voice and work could contribute to larger systems change. That experience continues to shape how I approach professional assignments and collaborate with others



Benefique Maganju,
Former Youth Expert, Resilience Hub



Designing engagement processes that are authentic and mutually beneficial helps cultivate enduring partnerships with youth organisations. Trust grows when institutional partners recognise and respect youth-led ways of working, including flexible structures, peer-led learning, and collaborative decision-making. Initiatives such as communities of practice, alumni networks, and repeat engagement opportunities tap into youth expertise, foster collective understanding, and strengthen cross-regional collaboration. These peer networks also help young leaders adapt to challenges, exchange solutions, and sustain momentum far beyond the lifespan of individual programs. Building long-term structures strengthens trust, supports leadership development, and enables youth to remain active contributors to resilience action.

The GSTP Internship was a pivotal experience for me. It strengthened my confidence and research skills, and directly contributed to securing another fellowship and a PhD scholarship. The exposure to resilience research and the opportunity to work closely with a supportive team opened doors to academic and professional opportunities I continue to build on today



Mariana Hernández, GSTP Intern (2022)



GSTP intern Rubina Adhikari (centre) with climate activists and experts at the COP28 Resilience Hub.

HOW DO WE PARTNER BETTER WITH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS?

GRP's continued engagement with young people has provided valuable lessons on how to strengthen partnerships with youth organisations. Building meaningful collaboration takes sustained effort, adaptability, and respect for how these organisations operate.

- 1 Unlike traditional entities, many youth organisations function with informal but effective accountability structures. Acknowledging and respecting these alternative models is essential to building trust and fostering equitable partnerships.
- 2 To support long-term collaboration, there is a need to cultivate a learning ecosystem through youth-led networks or communities of practice. These platforms act as living labs, enabling knowledge exchange, reflection on failure, and continuous adaptation. They also respond to a strong appetite among youth organisations for connection, co-creation, and collective learning.
- 3 Youth partner-led “teach-ins” offer another way to strengthen collaboration. These peer-led sessions provide space for youth organisations to share insights on cross-cutting issues and showcase “youthful” approaches. They promote mutual learning, shift power dynamics, and reinforce the role of youth organisations as equal and valued contributors.
- 4 To ensure broader representation, there is a need to deepen partnerships with youth networks at both global and regional levels, especially in underrepresented regions and communities. Targeted outreach through trusted local organisations can surface diverse voices and ensure that storytelling efforts reflect a wide range of lived experiences. Strengthening collaborations with universities, youth-led groups, and climate networks can further expand participation, creating meaningful entry points for youth across disciplines and sectors.
- 5 To meaningfully engage youth organisations in non-English speaking regions, translation and interpretation should be embedded from the outset. Providing bilingual or multilingual calls, application materials, reporting templates, and learning products can significantly expand participation. Investing in culturally contextualised communication ensures that concepts, methodologies, and expectations resonate locally.

Unlocking scalable impact in youth-led climate resilience hinges on sustained, flexible investment, intergenerational collaboration, and a resolute commitment to inclusion. By institutionalising co-leadership, amplifying young people's voices in high-level policy forums, and creating accessible, community-centred learning spaces, organisations can ensure that young people remain not only at the forefront of climate adaptation but are recognised as equal architects of a more resilient and equitable future.



Knowledge into Use award winner Community Design Agency. Art by Natasha Sharma and Namrata Narendran through art workshops with the Govandi youth group.
Photo credit: Moin Khan, Community Design Agency

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN CAPE TOWN (CORECT)



"WHAT IS STRANGE IS THAT THEY DO NOT ATTEND TO WATER PROBLEMS MEANWHILE THEY SAY WE MUST BE WATER-WISE."

"THE WATER METRE IS LEAKING AS A RESULT THERE'S A DAM IN MY ROAD"

"WE WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE, MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD AND MAKE SUGGESTIONS AS WELL."

"AS USUAL THEY MAKE DECISIONS WITHOUT US, FOR US, WHICH IS A VERY BAD THING FOR A CITY THAT SAYS IS WORKING FOR THE PEOPLE"



GLOBAL RESILIENCE PARTNERSHIP

UCT researchers teamed up with Interfer to create a new mural visualising local community members' experiences of water as part of GRP's Art4Resilience contest. Photo by Michelle Shields.



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Advancing Resilience

GRP is made up of 90+ organisations that have joined forces to advance climate resilience. We believe that resilience underpins sustainable development in an increasingly unpredictable world. GRP is registered as a non-profit organisation in South Africa and is a programme at the Stockholm Resilience Centre at Stockholm University.

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www.globalresiliencepartnership.org