



ASPEN GLOBAL
INNOVATORS GROUP
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Impact Report 2024



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Letter from Founder and Interim Executive Director



We face a challenging landscape ahead, but through leadership, collaboration, and courage, we will continue to make a difference.”



This year was a difficult one for Aspen Global Innovators Group (AGI). In October, we unexpectedly and sadly lost our Executive Director and friend Lola Adedokun. The loss of Lola, who was a bright light to so many, was profound. Since Lola’s passing, hundreds of colleagues, friends, and young leaders have reached out to tell us stories of how Lola changed their lives—how she helped them to think through a difficult problem, how she went out of her way to promote them, how she mentored and coached them for years. Lola has left a remarkable legacy of hundreds of leaders who learned from her and are dedicated to preserving her vision of opportunity and dignity for all.

When Lola joined the AGI, she wanted to invest in *people*. She was passionate about the goal of transforming inequitable systems that have existed for generations. As we grieve the loss of Lola, I find strength in seeing the impact Lola has had on everyone she knew—and countless people she’d never even met.

This report is not simply a compilation of statistics or program highlights. Instead, it traces the journeys of leaders who’ve dedicated their lives to addressing challenges of food security, women’s health, youth empowerment, climate resilience, and other aspects of equity and opportunity. It captures the essence of AGI, where each voice in the network reinforces and amplifies the others.

Since founding AGI in 2009, I’ve seen firsthand that our impact lies not just in our programs but in the journeys of leaders who continue to shape policy, build movements, and transform communities. Lola understood this intuitively. She personified the true

meaning of leadership as legacy, actively cultivating spaces where new voices emerge and innovation flourishes. Meeting old challenges with innovation creates hope and possibility. We see this hope in our fellows’ triumphs, tribulations, and dedication every day.

Returning as Interim Executive Director has been an honor. It is a joy to see the growth of programs founded more than a decade ago guided still by enduring principles and purpose. Lola’s legacy reminds us that our impact is ongoing and built through daily acts of leadership, collaboration, and courage. We face a challenging landscape ahead, marked by a drastic retrenchment in funding for health, economic opportunity, and community development, coupled with challenges to long-held fundamental principles of human dignity and equality. In response, AGI is committed to expanding and deepening our partnerships, intensifying our community-driven approaches, and actively engaging with broad audiences in dialogues that move us beyond divisive positions. Our mission has never been more critical, and we will continue pushing for meaningful change.

I invite you to read this report not just as a summary of accomplishments but as an ongoing stream of work to elevate community driven solutions, courageous leaders, equality, and opportunity for all.

With gratitude,

Peggy Clark
Founder and Interim Executive Director
Aspen Global Innovators Group

Lola's Journey:

A Life of Purpose and Impact

In December 2024, more than 150 people from over thirty-four countries joined a virtual gathering, celebrating the life of Lola Adedokun, Aspen Global Innovators Group's esteemed Executive Director. Peggy Clark, Founder and Interim Executive Director and Lola's close friend, opened the event by noting that the true measure of leadership is reflected in the lives touched along the way, a truth that became apparent as stories poured in from fellows, partners, and colleagues worldwide.

Lola's impact was felt personally by those who worked closely with her. Dan Porterfield, President and CEO of the Aspen Institute, spoke about how Lola's approach has made him a better leader. As he considered Lola's unique ability to inspire others to become better versions of themselves, Porterfield said, "I felt enlarged myself by being in Lola's presence, listening to her, and learning from her."

Lola was a driver of equity and inclusion. She was a force who consistently pushed the boundaries, wanting to make sure that voices were heard and respected. Allison Goldberg, President of the Merck Foundation, recalled Lola's vision of transforming corporate philanthropy by lifting up local communities. She described her as a leader who "took challenges, ran toward them, and turned them into opportunities for real transformation."

A video of Lola captured the essence of her leadership philosophy: trust, authenticity, and joy. Lola said, "Trust is essential. Without trust, all we do is repeat

"Leadership is joyful—it fuels your spirit, and most importantly, it inspires others to lead alongside you."

past mistakes and stifle creativity." Lola believed that leadership is a continuous journey marked by courage, vulnerability, and joy. She encouraged leaders to embrace their instinctive truths, especially in times of doubt or resistance, stating, "Rather than wait for someone to tell you that you're a leader, do what comes authentically from your gut."

Fellows like Omare Jimmerson, 2024 Healthy Communities Fellow and Executive Director of the Oklahoma Birth Equity Initiative, spoke of Lola's empowering presence during a time of self-doubt at an event on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly. Lola gently reminded Omare that her place at the table was earned and essential, exemplifying Lola's belief that every human has the potential to succeed. "She challenged me to dream big by placing me in rooms I once thought I didn't belong to," Omare said.



Lola's legacy, weaved intrinsically with AGI's mission, extends far beyond programs or fellowships.

It's seen in the thriving global network and lasting systems changes initiated under her guidance. Peggy Clark agreed: "AGI's fellowships are not singular experiences; they're sparks for sustained movements and community transformation."

Lola's words remain a guiding force for AGI's future: "Leadership is joyful—it fuels your spirit, and most importantly, it inspires others to lead alongside you." Her journey lives on through the lives she influenced, the communities she uplifted, and the pathways of change she forged. Lola Adedokun's legacy is not only remembered; it is actively carried forward daily by those who believe in a more equitable world.

Announcing the Lola Adedokun
Aspen-Doris Duke Award:

Uplifting visionary leaders by
advancing the health
and well-being of
communities and
beyond through
locally-driven
leadership

AGI proudly establishes the Lola Adedokun Aspen-Doris Duke Award in honor of the life and legacy of Lola Adedokun. Lola dedicated her life to elevating underrepresented voices and establishing community-led solutions in health, development, and gender equity. The award will celebrate and support exceptional leaders who exemplify her values of social justice, collaboration, and leadership, advancing community-driven solutions and defending the rights of women and girls.



Each year, one to two distinguished fellows will be selected to join one of Aspen’s impactful fellowship programs: Aspen New Voices, Impact West Africa, Advanced Advocacy, or Healthy Communities. Awarded Fellows will demonstrate:



A proven
commitment to
addressing health
and development
inequities



Brave leadership
in driving
breakthrough
systems change



Generosity,
empathy, and
mentorship in
their leadership
style



Authenticity in
action, leaders
who genuinely
“walk the talk”

AGI's Programs

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES FELLOWSHIP

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Investing in community-based leaders driving solutions for healthy, thriving communities across the U.S.

ADVANCED ADVOCACY PROGRAM

aspen institute

Amplifying New Voices Senior Fellows' voices and missions as global health and development leaders to address critical challenges and achieve strategic advocacy goals.

AMP HEALTH

aspen institute

Improving health systems and outcomes by collaborating with governments to strengthen the leadership and management capacity within Ministry of Health teams.

COMMUNITIES FIRST GLOBAL COLLABORATIVE

aspen institute

Building a collective voice of community leaders who are strengthening local public health and community health systems.

NEW VOICES FELLOWSHIP

aspen institute

Catalyzing locally-rooted, globally networked leaders to become visible, effective champions for more equitable health and development systems.

IMPACT WEST AFRICA FELLOWSHIP

aspen institute

Equipping changemakers across West Africa with the skills and resources to drive meaningful and sustainable change in their communities and beyond.

ASPEN MATERNAL SURVIVAL INITIATIVE

aspen institute

Integrating community-based solutions in policy and practice

2024 Impact by the Numbers

In 2024, AGI made significant strides in advancing health, development, and leadership across the globe. The following data highlights the achievements of our fellows, the impact of our programs, and the strength of our community network.

276



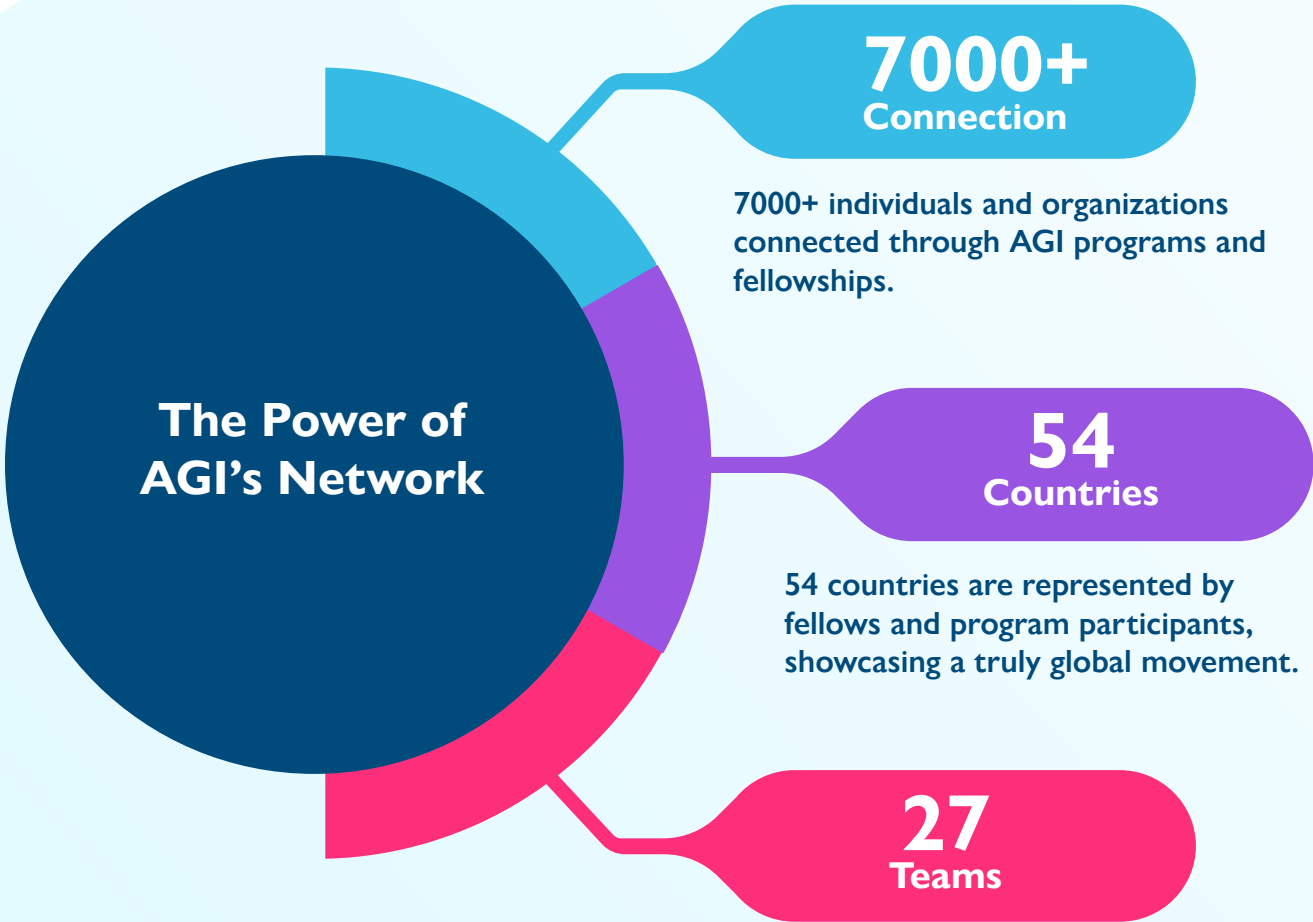
Fellows in the Aspen Global Innovators Group

Direct Impact on Communities¹

AGI fellows’ initiatives directly impacted 1.8 million people.



197 New Voices and Impact West Africa Senior Fellows collectively achieved in 2024



¹ These figures come from a survey of the AGI fellows distributed in December 2024. The survey had a 10% response rates, so all these figures represent minimums.

AGI's Global Reach



AGI's programs and networks span 54 countries

Building Pathways to Climate Resilience through Food Systems

Climate change poses a significant threat to global food security, affecting agricultural productivity and the livelihoods of millions.² In 2023, approximately 733 million people worldwide faced hunger, which equates to one in eleven individuals globally and one in five in Africa.³

Women and smallholder farmers play a crucial role in food production, especially in developing countries. Women make up nearly 43% of the global agricultural labor force and produce 60-80% of food in developing

nations.⁴ Despite their important contributions, these farmers often lack access to essential resources, such as agricultural investments, credit, and land rights.

Addressing food insecurity requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond increasing food supply. It involves implementing climate-resilient agricultural practices, supporting local solutions, formulating policy reforms, and promoting cross-sector collaboration to build sustainable and equitable food systems.



Strengthening Local Food Systems

Several AGI fellows are advancing locally driven solutions to improve food security in regions vulnerable to climate shocks. This includes efforts to reduce reliance on food imports, promote indigenous and climate-resilient crops, and support market access for small-scale farmers. These initiatives help communities become less dependent on external food sources and increase their ability to withstand severe weather or geopolitical instability, which can disrupt access.

Improving Agricultural Resilience

Some AGI leaders like Emma Naluyima, a Ugandan veterinarian and urban farmer, are adapting by adding climate-smart agricultural techniques to their work, helping support smallholder farmers as they adapt to issues resulting from poor environmental conditions. Strategies include regenerative farming, water-efficient irrigation, and soil restoration efforts that sustain long-term productivity. These approaches stabilize food production and contribute to climate mitigation by reducing land degradation and emissions from farming.

Expanding Access to Nutrition Amid Climate Challenges

As climate change exacerbates food insecurity, some AGI fellows like Ndidi Nwuneli, President/CEO of the ONE Campaign, are focused on making sure all people have access to safe, nutritious food, particularly vulnerable populations. This includes meal programs, maternal and child nutrition initiatives, and community-driven food distribution models that reach those most affected by rising food costs and supply chain disruptions.

Advancing Policy and Investment in Resilient Food Systems

Many AGI fellows like Vivian Maduekeh, Managing Partner of Food Health Systems Advisory, are engaging with governments, donors, and the private sector to advocate for policies that strengthen food security and climate adaptability. Their efforts range from securing financial commitments for smallholder farmers to shaping national strategies for sustainable agriculture.

AGI's Role in Climate-Resilient Food Systems

AGI supports a diverse network of leaders who are developing solutions to strengthen food systems in the face of climate change. While not all AGI fellows focus on agriculture or food security, many are working to build strength and adaptability through initiatives that address climate-related challenges in farming, nutrition, and economic stability. Their work ranges from developing climate-adaptive agricultural practices to expanding access to nutrition programs and advocating for policies that support smallholder farmers. In 2024*:

50+ Fellows

actively working in food security, with many also addressing climate resilience.

\$5.7M Raised

for food security initiatives.

At least 36 Publications

focused on food security and climate resilience.



* Self-reported data from the 2024 Fellow Impact Survey

²Srinivasarao, C., Baral, K., Chandana, V., Jagadeesh, M., & Karthik, R. (2024). Climate change adaptation and mitigation in Indian agriculture. *Journal of Agrometeorology*, 26(2), 137-148.

³World Health Organization (WHO). (2024). Hunger numbers stubbornly high for three consecutive years as global crises deepen: UN Report. Retrieved from WHO

⁴World Economic Forum (WEF). (2024). AgriTech for Women Farmers Report. Retrieved from WEF

⁵Oxfam. (2024). Empowering Women Farmers to End Hunger and Poverty. Retrieved from Oxfam

Gloria Agyare

Building Ghana’s
Climate-Resilient
Food Future



Growing up in Ghana, Gloria Agyare, Impact West Africa Senior Fellow, noticed how climate issues and unsustainable farming practices directly impacted the communities around her. Instead of watching from the sidelines, Gloria became part of the solution. She embraced environmental advocacy and sustainable agri-food systems, turning her passion into tangible action.

Gloria works closely with local farmers, particularly women and youth, advocating for eco-friendly agriculture that benefits both the environment and local economies. Through her work as an Environmentalist and Agri-food system advocate she has implemented community-based initiatives like agroforestry projects, designed to restore degraded lands and rouse young people to lead community-driven change.

Reflecting on her journey during her fellowship, Gloria said, “Being a part of the Impact West Africa Fellowship opened so many opportunities. It allowed me to meet and collaborate with leaders who genuinely understand the value of youth voices in climate conversations. It gave me confidence to speak directly to policymakers and showed me the importance of grounding our climate solutions in community wisdom.”

Gloria’s advocacy extends to influential platforms. She is a recognized voice in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Gloria also participates in the World Bank Group’s Youth Consultation for Ghana’s Country Partnership

“We don’t have to wait for others to give us solutions, young people are already leading. We just need opportunities and platforms to amplify our impact.”

Since joining the fellowship, Gloria has:



Established a new agroforestry advocacy project with GYEM. The project addresses agricultural challenges like climate instability and promotes food system sustainability.



Influenced national policies. She actively engages in international climate discussions to add youth perspectives to Ghana’s climate resilience strategies.



Amplified her message through various speaking engagements. She has brought attention to the critical role of youth and women in environmental decision-making.

Framework. These roles have enabled her to represent Ghana’s youth. She believes their perspectives should influence decisions on agriculture, food security, and climate resilience.

others to give us solutions,” she says. “Young people are already leading. We just need opportunities and platforms to amplify our impact. That’s exactly what AGI has given me.”

Looking ahead, Gloria aims to scale her advocacy work on food, climate and nature nationally. She also continues to encourage youth leadership in climate action across Ghana. “We don’t have to wait for



Renzo Guinto

Promoting Climate Resilience and Planetary Health



Growing up in the Philippines, Renzo Guinto, New Voices and Advanced Advocacy Senior Fellow saw the disastrous effects of climate change on human health. His home country was regularly devastated by typhoons that displaced thousands, destroyed communities in an instant, and affected the health of vulnerable populations. As a physician, Renzo realized his patients' health was being impacted by climate change. Climate action became more than an environmental concern—it was needed for the health of his community.

Renzo decided to commit to help build the emerging field of planetary health, a discipline that ties human health directly to environmental sustainability. At that time, medical professionals were scarcely involved in fighting climate issues, but Renzo felt passionately about the problem and began advocating for the cause. However, early in his calling, Renzo encountered a barrier: His voice, though impassioned, was initially confined to local conversations. He knew that addressing planetary health demanded global engagement, not just local action.

Joining the New Voices Fellowship in 2016—and later the Advanced Advocacy Program in 2023—marked a pivotal turn in Renzo's journey. The rigorous training provided by Aspen Global Innovators Group gave him the communication tools he needed to expand his reach. "Before Aspen, my voice had boundaries.

“AGI didn’t just amplify my voice; it connected me with a global network equally dedicated to transforming planetary health.”

Through their training, my perspective and advocacy expanded internationally,” Renzo says.

With AGI's support, Renzo was able to bring his solutions forward globally. Eventually, he succeeded in joining conversations to influence global policy on climate change and health. He built a strong regional presence, becoming an associate professor at the National University of Singapore, where he established a dedicated planetary health research and advocacy team.

Since his involvement with AGI, Renzo has:



Discussed planetary health in high level policy forums across Southeast Asia and globally.



Secured considerable funding to advance research and practical initiatives addressing climate resilience in vulnerable communities.



Created lasting change in policy paradigms with the integration of planetary health into policy frameworks.

“AGI didn’t just amplify my voice; it connected me with a global network equally dedicated to transforming planetary health,” Renzo says. “Now, I’m committed to making sure more voices from the Global South shape the climate and health narrative.”

Looking ahead, Renzo is deepening his work in Asia, focusing on building regional collaborations to confront

the climate crisis head-on. His work is not just about immediate interventions. Renzo's goal is to set the stage for lasting change to protect the health of communities and the planet at large.

“We’re at a critical turning point,” Renzo says. “With global commitments wavering, it’s more important than ever that leaders from impacted regions step forward to drive the global response.”

Stephen Lucke

Cultivating Community Health and Climate Resilience in San Antonio, Texas



A decade ago, Stephen Lucke, Healthy Communities Senior Fellow, sat in a college nutrition class with a serious question: How could he effectively address the crises of obesity, food insecurity, and climate change affecting his community in San Antonio? His answer was grounded in the soil. Driven by this vision, Stephen founded Gardopia Gardens, a nonprofit dedicated to creating green spaces that promote public health. He is passionate about caring for our environment and his community.

“Not everyone is eager to go to the gym or eat salads every day,” Stephen explains. “But gardening? It’s natural, enjoyable, and people connect to it instinctively.”

Stephen’s approach addresses systemic issues of food inequity and urban development patterns. Many underserved communities in San Antonio lacked access to green food and gardening spaces, so Gardopia Gardens began turning empty lots into vibrant gardens. This model improves community nutrition and actively combats climate change by reducing food miles and restoring urban biodiversity.

His mission has been noticed in the community. Gardopia recently celebrated a huge milestone, gaining three new spaces for gardens, two purchased and one generously donated, making their presence in the community known. With these spaces, Stephen sees a path toward even greater impact. Sustainable urban agriculture techniques, such as solar energy use, composting, and rainwater harvesting, are also possible.

“Not everyone is eager to go to the gym or eat salads every day. But gardening? It’s natural, enjoyable, and people connect to it instinctively.”

Stephen’s journey took a significant step as a 2023 Aspen Healthy Communities Fellow. The fellowship magnified his voice, sharpened his advocacy, and connected him to networks to expand Gardopia’s reach and influence. “The fellowship built my confidence to assert myself as a community advocate,” Stephen says. Since completing the HCF fellowship, he secured major grants, including a USDA Farm-to-School grant, a substantial five hundred thousand dollar grant aimed at expanding local tree canopies. He also hired a Chief Learning Officer to enhance educational outreach.



Looking ahead, Gardopia is poised for significant growth. Their next strategic phase is poised to expand land stewardship, launch a paid apprenticeship program for young urban farmers, and develop digital curriculum resources to reach classrooms across Texas and beyond.



“We’re creating pathways for the next generation of urban farmers,” Stephen says proudly, “building resilience against food insecurity and climate shocks.”

As Gardopia Gardens marks its upcoming tenth anniversary, Stephen Lucke remains firmly planted in his mission, turning once-neglected spaces into thriving community gardens. His vision for San Antonio isn’t just about growing plants. It’s about nurturing healthier communities.



Advancing the Health of Women and Families

In too many parts of the world, pregnancy is still a life-threatening condition. For 287,000 women each year, childbirth ends in death instead of celebration. Many of these deaths could be prevented with access to timely, high-quality care.⁵ For every woman who dies, many more suffer severe complications, and the families are left to deal with the financial and emotional consequences for life.

For Black women in the United States, the risks are even starker. A pregnant Black woman is 2.6 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than a White woman.⁶ The disparity persists regardless of education or income. This fact reveals the deep-seated biases in medical treatment that leave Black women's pain dismissed, their symptoms ignored, and their voices unheard.⁷ This crisis is not limited to the U.S. In Brazil, Indigenous women face maternal mortality rates nearly twice the national average. In the UK, Black women are four times more likely to die in childbirth than White women.⁸

Beyond the horrifying reality of maternal deaths, at least half of the world's population lacks access to essential healthcare services. It can be hard for many women to access contraception, prenatal care, and safe delivery options.⁹ The consequences do not just affect individual families. Women who cannot access reproductive healthcare are more likely to leave the workforce, fall into poverty, and suffer long-term health complications. These issues can create setbacks that keep women stuck for generations.¹⁰

At the same time, a global rollback of reproductive rights is making care even harder to access. Since 2022, fourteen U.S. states have eliminated or severely restricted abortion access. These restrictions have forced people to travel hundreds of miles or carry pregnancies against their will.¹¹ In parts of sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, restrictive policies mean that even lifesaving post-abortion care can be denied to women in emergency situations.¹²



We know how to prevent these deaths. Community-based healthcare models, where trained midwives and frontline workers provide culturally competent, localized care, have reduced maternal mortality by up to forty percent in some low-resource settings.¹³ Investments in maternal health also yield significant returns: for every dollar spent on reproductive healthcare, economies see up to nine dollars in social and economic benefits.¹⁴


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AGI leaders and partners are working where these issues meet; they are advancing policy reform, maternal healthcare access, and reproductive rights. Whether through expanding midwife-led care, pushing for gender-equitable health financing, or integrating reproductive health services into national healthcare systems, these fellows are building models that prove equitable care is necessary and feasible.



In 2024, forty-eight AGI fellows working in reproductive health advocacy*:

 Helped pass at least four reproductive health policies

 Published at least thirteen op-eds advocating for maternal and reproductive health equity

 Raised \$3.45 million for reproductive and maternal health initiatives

* Self-reported data from the 2024 Fellow Impact Survey.
⁵Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2023). Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2021. Retrieved from [CDC](#).
⁶Taylor, J., et al. (2019). Racial Disparities in Pain Management and Maternal Health. *Journal of Women's Health*.
⁷Knight, M. et al. (2022). MBRACE-UK: Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care. Retrieved from Oxford University.
⁸World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). Universal health coverage fact sheet. Retrieved from [WHO](#).
⁹Buvinic, M. & Carey, E. (2021). The Economic Costs of Gender Gaps in Health. Center for Global Development.
¹⁰Guttmacher Institute. (2023). State Policy Trends 2023: The First Full Year Since Roe Fell. Retrieved from Guttmacher.
¹¹Center for Reproductive Rights. (2023). The Global Impact of Abortion Restrictions on Women's Health. Retrieved from CRR.
¹²UNFPA. (2023). Scaling Midwife-Led Models to Reduce Maternal Mortality. Retrieved from UNFPA.
¹³Every Woman Every Child. (2020). Investing in Maternal Health: A High Return on Investment. Retrieved from EWEC.

Omare Jimmerson

Advocating for Birth Equity in Tulsa



Omare Jimmerson, Healthy Communities Senior Fellow, has always been driven by community. As the daughter of a Nigerian immigrant and a mother of two, she knows personally the obstacles many Black women face within a healthcare system that regularly overlooks their humanity. Now the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Birth Equity Initiative, Jimmerson channels her passion into ensuring that all women, particularly Black and brown mothers, receive respectful, compassionate care.

Jimmerson's journey toward advocacy began during her undergraduate years when she worked closely with teenage girls. Observing how often these young girls were prematurely treated as adults sparked a deep desire to ensure young people could advocate for their own bodily autonomy. That early realization laid the foundation for her future work: addressing systemic inequities by empowering women through education and support.

"Doula care is not just for the 'haves,'" Jimmerson emphasizes. Through the Oklahoma Birth Equity Initiative, she has made doula services accessible to Black and brown women in Tulsa County. This critical support has demonstrably improved birth outcomes, reducing rates of preterm birth and low birth weight, key indicators closely tied to infant mortality. Over the past year alone, her advocacy has directly served 276 individuals, raised seven hundred thousand dollars in funding, resulted in three awards recognizing her impactful work, and led to twenty-five speaking engagements and two published articles highlighting maternal health equity.

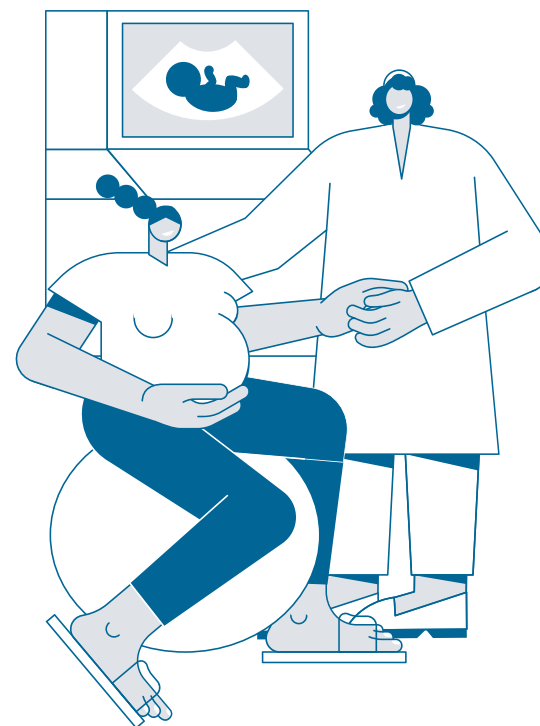
Before joining the Aspen Global Innovators Group (AGI) Healthy Communities Fellowship, Jimmerson confronted multiple challenges, including restrictive policies, limited visibility, and inconsistent funding that hindered her ability to scale impact.

Her participation in the fellowship proved deeply transformative. As she describes, "My involvement in the fellowship has created a life-long support network to survive tough times and taught me how to amplify not just my voice but also the experiences of others beyond my inner circle and immediate community."

Jimmerson sees the systemic challenges clearly: American healthcare prioritizes profit over humanity, dispensing care as if it was an assembly line. She understands that relationships rooted in trust are crucial in communities long undermined by the system. Her work directly addresses this gap, offering personalized, culturally competent care through trained doulas.



"My involvement in the fellowship has created a life-long support network to survive tough times and taught me how to amplify not just my voice but also the experiences of others beyond my inner circle and immediate community."



Looking ahead, Jimmerson aims to further dismantle barriers by working closely with hospital systems, despite significant hurdles from recent legislation limiting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. She remains steadfast, committed to amplifying communities by equipping them with resources to reclaim dignity in healthcare.

Reflecting on her fellowship experience, Jimmerson says, "I committed to one year of participation in this fellowship; however, what I found is those responsible for leading the fellowship were and are committed to me as a person and leader in the community."

Jennie Joseph

Reimagining Birth Outcomes Through Common-Sense Care



Jennie Joseph, Healthy Communities Senior Fellow, has dedicated her life to changing the narrative around maternal and infant health. Jennie, a British-trained midwife and one of the world's leading authorities on women's healthcare, moved to the United States in 1989. Her ability to view the American healthcare system from an international perspective sparked a remarkable journey that has improved birth outcomes for thousands of women and children and the families that love them.

Jennie quickly recognized specific structural barriers within America's healthcare system, such as lack of access to prenatal care, high rates of medical interventions during childbirth, and racial disparities in maternal health outcomes. She observed, "The root causes aren't physiological. They're structural. They're historical. They are part of this awful setup we have here: the business of birth, the capitalism of hospitals and medicine." Rather than accepting these conditions, she set out to change them.

In 1997, Jennie founded Commonsense Childbirth Inc., establishing The JJ Way®, an innovative maternal-child healthcare model emphasizing dignity, respect, and accessibility. "Our mission has always been 'no one turned away.' If you're marginalized, at risk of becoming a statistic in these disparities, we're here to help."

"When you treat women and families with respect and maintain their dignity, when you slow down enough to open up trust and listening, outcomes change themselves."

By implementing a human-centered approach, emphasizing respectful care and community trust, Jennie has produced extraordinary results. She explains, "When you treat women and families with respect and maintain their dignity, when you slow down enough to open up trust and listening, outcomes change themselves."

Driven by deep frustration with persistent disparities, Jennie emphasizes the urgency of practical solutions: "Can we just get a mother and baby safely to term? Can we support breastfeeding? It's not complicated. We don't need another study." Her passionate advocacy underscores the gravity of the issue: "We're dead last among developed nations for maternal and infant outcomes. And that's worsening, particularly for marginalized people—Black and Indigenous especially."

Jennie's advocacy extends beyond clinical care into policy and systemic reform, where she has fought tirelessly, often against significant odds. She has been instrumental in key policy battles, including efforts with the Black Maternal Health Caucus on the Maternal Health Momnibus Act. This act is a comprehensive legislative package that aims to address racial disparities in maternal health by improving access to care, promoting research, and supporting community-based initiatives.

The Aspen Healthy Communities Fellowship has significantly bolstered Jennie's work, giving her a platform to amplify community-led solutions and

the best-practices already impacting marginalized communities. "Aspen has given me the platform and prestige that supports the work I do every day," she reflects. "Being an Aspen Healthy Communities Fellow is something I'm incredibly proud of."

In September, Jennie helped launch the Aspen Maternal Survival Initiative, which focuses on addressing maternal mortality, highlighting health equity and community-centered solutions. At this event, Jennie shared insights alongside Peggy Clark and Lola Adedokun, her participation underscoring the importance of building global alliances while leveraging local wisdom to improve maternal health outcomes. She emphasized a community-wide sentiment from fellow leaders in the perinatal ecosystem stating, "We shouldn't have to ask permission to save our lives."

Through her leadership, Jennie also founded the National Perinatal Task Force. "I started the National Perinatal Task Force with five midwives. Today, we've grown to over four hundred perinatal safe spots: community workers banding together to change outcomes." Her network continues to grow, emphasizing community-driven healthcare solutions as the most effective pathway to lasting change.

Jennie Joseph's career and commitment highlight the transformative potential of compassionate, community-based healthcare. Her approach demonstrates that when healthcare systems center women and babies above profits, meaningful progress can and does occur.



FELLOW SPOTLIGHT

Fighting to End Maternal Mortality in Nigeria

Uche Udekwe

In 2017, Uche Udekwe, Impact West Africa fellow, received a call that too many people in his home country of Nigeria receive. He found out that his sister-in-law and childhood friend, Dorcas, died during childbirth due to preventable complications of childbirth. This tragic event, a personal loss that shook him to his core, was a turning point in his life. Nearly twenty percent of all global maternal deaths occur in Nigeria.¹⁵ As he grieved his friend and unborn nephew, he discovered that thousands of Nigerian women die each year from inadequate prenatal care, unsafe delivery practices, and lack of essential medical resources.¹⁶

Uche founded *Natal Cares*, which uses mobile technology and low-cost innovations to combat maternal and infant mortality, to honor Dorcas' memory and prevent other premature deaths. As he began Natal Cares, he understood that advocacy and policy engagement are just as critical as providing direct services.

In Nigeria, 2,300 children and 145 women die from preventable, childbirth-related complications every year.¹⁷ These deaths often occur in remote and underserved communities, where less than forty percent of pregnant women receive adequate prenatal care.² The lack of maternal health education, stigma, and a healthcare system that makes survival a matter of luck all cause poor outcomes.

Despite the early success of Natal Cares, Uche faced an uphill battle in influencing policy and public perception. He had the vision, but he needed a stronger platform to impact society, advocate for change on a greater level, and secure the support required to scale his work. Overcoming these challenges was a testament to Uche's determination and the importance of his mission.

At this critical juncture, Uche joined the Impact West Africa Fellowship, a program designed to equip emerging leaders with the skills, networks, and communications and advocacy strategies needed to drive sustainable change. This fellowship was a game-changer, providing Uche with the platform and support he needed to boost his message and scale his work.

“Before the fellowship, I had never written an op-ed or engaged directly with policymakers. Through AGI’s mentorship, I learned how to craft compelling narratives that resonate with decision-makers and the public.”

Since joining the Impact West Africa Program, Uche has:



Expanded Natal Cares' reach to three states, so they could provide over 14,000 safe delivery kits and maternal health education.



Advocated for maternal health policy reforms to gain traction with Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Health.



Been featured on BBC and other major media outlets, showing the urgency of addressing maternal mortality.



Secured funding and partnerships to pilot a mobile health platform, connecting pregnant women to real-time medical advice and resources.



Looking ahead, Uche is working to expand Natal Cares nationwide. His goal is to prevent women in Nigeria from dying due to preventable childbirth complications. He is also exploring opportunities in Francophone Africa, where similar maternal health crises persist.

Uche's journey illustrates why leadership development and advocacy training are just as important as direct service delivery. His work shows that a single intervention, whether a safe delivery kit, mobile health message, or policy shift, can save lives. The Impact West Africa Fellowship was a catalyst for Uche—it equipped him with the tools, networks, and confidence to take Natal Cares to the next level.

“Maternal deaths shouldn’t be a norm in any country. AGI helped me amplify my voice, and now we’re pushing for real, lasting change.”



¹⁵Temie Giwa-Tubosun - the Nigerian Entrepreneur Delivering Blood to Patients - Naturenews.africa. <https://naturenews.africa/temie-giwa-tubosun-the-nigerian-entrepreneur-delivering-blood-to-patients/>

¹⁶World Health Organization. (2019, June 25). Maternal health in Nigeria: Generating information for action. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news/item/25-06-2019-maternal-health-in-nigeria-generating-information-for-action>

¹⁷National Primary Health Care Development Agency. (2024, March 6). 2,300 Nigerian children, 145 women die daily – NPHCDA. Punch Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/2300-nigerian-children-145-women-die-daily-nphcda/>

AGI's 2024 Global Engagements

In 2024, the Aspen Global Innovators Group advanced its commitment to health equity by uplifting community leadership and challenging traditional approaches to global development.

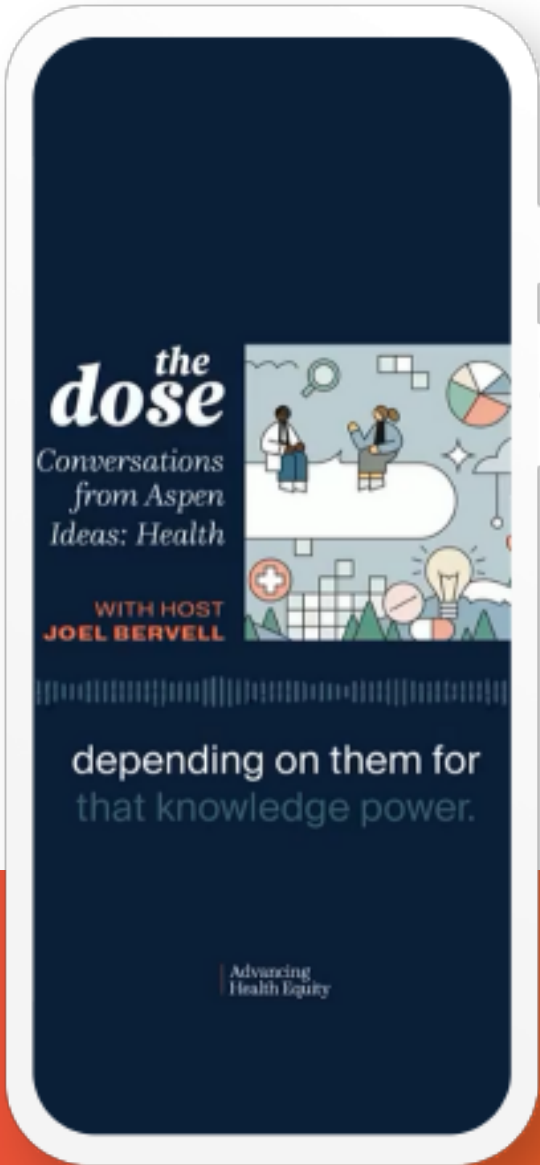
At the Festival of the Diaspora in Rio de Janeiro, AGI joined *Conversations about the future of philanthropy*. The team highlighted lessons from its work in Africa, Latin America, and the United States, focusing on the need to center local voices in decision-making. Discussions emphasized that intersectionality should not be an add-on but a core principle. AGI

underscored how philanthropy must move beyond top-down models and begin to reflect the lived realities of the people it aims to serve.

In March, AGI co-hosted *Women Catalysts: Inspiring Stories of Global Health Entrepreneurship* with MIT Solve. The event featured women from AGI's fellowship network who are building health-focused ventures rooted in their communities. They shared experiences of navigating systems that were not designed for them; they spoke to the structural barriers that limit access to capital and resources. The

conversation was not just about celebration. It was about naming what needs to change. Speakers made it clear that investing in women is not optional. It is essential for economic and social progress.

Later in the year, AGI took part in the *Conversations on Health Equity* podcast produced by the Commonwealth Fund and hosted by Joel Bervell. Elizabeth Lutz, alongside several AGI fellows, spoke about the importance of building long-term trust in advocacy work. They shared stories about how policy change often begins with personal experience, and networks like AGI help leaders translate those experiences into action. The episode also highlighted the ways AGI supports its fellows beyond funding,



from helping shape public narratives to creating opportunities for collaboration.

Through these engagements, AGI reinforced its role as a connector, convener, and advocate. **The organization does not simply participate in global health conversations. It helps set the agenda, always returning to its core belief: those closest to the challenge should be at the center of the solution.**

Investing in the Next Generation: Advancing Youth Health & Leadership

Today, approximately 42% of the global population is under the age of twenty-five, meaning that over three billion young people are ready to shape the future.¹⁸ Despite their potential, many children and teens face significant challenges, including limited access to healthcare, economic opportunities, and platforms for civic engagement. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, more than 40% of the population is under fifteen years. It is urgent to address these issues in regions with growing youth demographics.¹⁹

Adolescents and young adults are met with rising health challenges, such as mental health crises, restricted access to reproductive health services, and intensified exposure to climate-related health risks. In the United States, the suicide rate for individuals aged ten to twenty-four increased by 52.2% between 2000 and 2021, stressing the need for mental health support.²⁰ Additionally, nearly one in four American teens cannot afford or access menstrual products, which can lead to health issues and disruptions in schooling.²¹

Investing in youth leadership is pivotal for changing the system. Young leaders are at the forefront of driving policy reforms, leading the way for advocacy movements and strengthening community health outcomes. For example, during a United Nations event, youth activists emphasized the necessity for substantial changes in global leadership dynamics. They also championed for their generation to take the lead in addressing current crises in the world.²¹



AGI is steadfast in its commitment to equip the next generation of leaders with communication and advocacy skills. These skills are essential to amplify their reach and impact. Through various fellowship programs, AGI has supported leaders by tackling issues ranging from combating sexual and gender-based violence among youth, addressing youth mental health challenges, and working toward solutions for the climate crisis. AGI provides targeted training and mentorship, which aids these leaders in refining their strategies and enhancing the visibility of their work, helping them create meaningful change.

¹⁸World Bank. Chart: How Is the World's Youth Population Changing? - [World Bank Blogs](#)
¹⁹United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (2024). World Population Dashboard. Retrieved from UNFPA
²⁰Rachel's Challenge. (2023). Barriers to Mental Health Treatment for Youth. Retrieved from [Rachel's Challenge](#)
²¹Associated Press (AP). (2024). Youth Activists Call for Leadership Reform at United Nations Event. Retrieved from AP News

In 2024, AGI Fellows advancing youth health and leadership yielded measurable impacts:

45

Total fellows focusing on youth issues

41 Global, 4 Domestic



Geographical Reach

Youth programs operated across **Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East**, and domestically in **San Antonio, Tulsa, and North Carolina**.

Policy and initiatives

7 youth-focused policies influenced or passed*.

7 youth health initiatives launched*.

These figures underscore AGI's pivotal role in nurturing young leaders who are actively transforming their communities and addressing global challenges.

Funding and publications

\$5.05 million raised for youth health and leadership programs*.

9 publications on youth health and leadership*.

Community impact

886,750 people served through youth initiatives*.

184 events featured youth leadership*.

13 awards won by youth-focused fellows*.

* Self-reported data from the 2024 Fellow Impact Survey.

Kennedy Odede

The Power of Community



Kennedy Odede, New Voices Senior Fellow, knows firsthand what it is like to grow up in one of the largest informal settlements in Kenya. From a young age, he experienced the daily struggles of life in Kibera, where he faced poverty and witnessed many injustices. At only seventeen, Kennedy started Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO). He was motivated by the belief that solutions to these problems should come from the community itself.

When asked about his motivation, Kennedy said, “For me, it was about seeing the injustices every day, seeing children not in school, seeing women suffer. I wanted to do something. But it had to come from us, from the community. It had to be real.” His beliefs guided SHOFCO’s early days. Then Kennedy gathered his neighbors to build trust and take action together, creating the SHOFCO Urban Network of community leaders. He strongly believes that change begins locally, saying, “It’s about people seeing that change is possible, that they have power. That was the foundation.”

Despite his early success with SHOFCO, Kennedy faced significant problems. He needed resources, advocacy, and leadership skills to expand his organization. At an important moment in 2013, he joined the New Voices Fellowship. Through the fellowship, Kennedy gained new tools to increase his advocacy and develop the important leadership and communication skills he needed.

“The fellowship helped me understand how to better communicate our vision. Before, I spoke from the heart, but now I could speak with clarity and strategy to people who could support us.”

Kennedy thought about this experience, saying, “The fellowship helped me understand how to better communicate our vision. Before, I spoke from the heart, but now I could speak with clarity and strategy to people who could support us.” With guidance from AGI, Kennedy’s voice reached larger audiences. It increased partnerships and funding for SHOFCO’s projects.

“AGI was critical,” Kennedy explained. “They helped us grow without losing our core mission. We stayed authentic but became more effective.” Looking ahead, Kennedy remains committed to expanding SHOFCO’s approach throughout Kenya and beyond. He remains deeply grounded in his original vision: “Change comes when people believe they matter. That’s the key.”



Since joining the New Voices Fellowship, Kennedy’s organization has made notable strides:



SHOFCO expanded its services immensely. They now reach thousands more people through health clinics, schools, and clean water initiatives.



Kennedy has become a compelling advocate in global discussions about poverty and community-led solutions, regularly sharing his insights at international forums.



He established a network to replicate SHOFCO’s community-based model in other informal settlements across Kenya.

Kennedy’s journey highlights the importance of community-driven solutions supported by effective leadership development. His story shows that meaningful change happens when communities lead, supported by organizations that magnify their voices without diminishing their authenticity.



From Waithood to Dignified Work: Vision for Youth-Led Change

Mohamed Ali Dini, New Voices Senior Fellow and 2025 Advanced Advocacy Fellow, grew up in the chaos of Somalia’s civil war. During these turbulent years, he observed many friends and family members trapped in what he calls “waithood.” This is the concept of being trapped in a financial situation caused by limited economic opportunity. Mohamed recognized early that this limbo wasn’t just frustrating; it was dangerous. “When young people lack opportunities, they become vulnerable,” he explains. “Extremism takes root when there’s nothing else available.”

Mohamed was motivated by these insights and established the Iftiin Foundation in 2013. His aim was clear: Create tangible economic opportunities for youth to foster lasting peace in conflict-affected communities. This groundbreaking, community-led approach drew global attention. Mohamed earned recognition as a 2013 New Voices Fellow and a BMW Foundation Responsible Leader.


But Mohamed knew he needed to take his vision further. In 2025, joining the Aspen Global Innovators Advanced Advocacy Program provided him the tools and connections necessary to fully realize his goals and broaden their scope. Through AGI, he sharpened his ability to highlight local community solutions globally, which bolstered his belief that sustainable change must emerge from within communities themselves.

“Young people need opportunities that respect their dignity, talents, and dreams.”

His current initiative, the Shaqo Platform, epitomizes this philosophy. Unlike conventional programs, Shaqo places young Somalis at the forefront of economic transformation, shifting them from passive recipients to creators of their employment. “Shaqo Sharaf Leh,” Mohamed stresses, “Young people need opportunities that respect their dignity, talents, and dreams.” By empowering local youth leadership, Shaqo has grown rapidly. The program has become an inspiration and source of hope for economic and social revival across Somalia.

Mohamed’s unique approach to youth unemployment and economic resilience has gained international attention, with features in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *BBC*, and *Al Jazeera*. However, his true focus remains local. “Real change happens when communities own their solutions,” he says. Despite the world coverage, he believes that “True change isn’t imported. It comes from communities defining their own futures.”





Looking ahead, Mohamed remains dedicated to transforming waithood into opportunity. His work expands from Mogadishu’s neighborhoods to communities in Manila and Mexico City. “Waiting is not an option,” Mohamed says. “Together, we build opportunities, restore dignity, and unlock potential.”

Alex Bailey

Redefining Outdoor Spaces for Black Youth



Alex Bailey's story began as an outdoor educator watching kids experience the outdoors for the first time. Yet, something began to unsettle him. He saw almost no campers who looked like him. This shone a light on a deep-rooted problem in the outdoor education field—the lack of resources for Black kids to access the outdoors. The realization pushed Alex, Healthy Communities Senior Fellow, to create Black Outside, Inc. in 2019, an organization dedicated to providing Black youth with culturally relevant outdoor experiences.

“We saw a huge gap in opportunities and access for Black youth connecting to the outdoors,” Alex says. In just a few years, his organization has reached over five hundred young people, breaking down economic and social barriers to outdoor spaces.

When Alex joined AGI's 2023 cohort of the Healthy Communities Fellowship, he joined a community of activists, eliminating the isolating nature of working toward change. Alex found the cohort model especially beneficial, as it emphasized collaboration and peer support rather than competition. “Aspen created the structure for deeper collaboration,” Alex says, pointing to fellow participant Stephen Lucke, founder of Gardopia Gardens, as a prime example of how fellows supported each other's efforts through joint programming and resource sharing.

“We saw a huge gap in opportunities and access for Black youth connecting to the outdoors.”

A pivotal experience for Alex was traveling with other fellows to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Washington, D.C., where they explored systemic inequities and historical Black narratives. This trip impacted Alex substantially and reinforced the importance of his mission to reclaim outdoor spaces for Black communities. Encouraged by AGI's mentorship, Alex started engaging more intentionally in advocacy and policy discussions around outdoor equity. He was encouraged by AGI's mentorship and started exploring more opportunities to engage in outdoor advocacy for Black kids, as San Antonio is a significant place for Black history in nature and recreation.

In recognition of his work, Alex was awarded the 2024 McNulty Prize Catalyst Fund, which honors early-stage leaders who create meaningful impact in their communities. Looking forward, Alex plans to expand youth leadership roles within Black Outside, nurturing the next generation of kids as environmental stewards and advocates. He believes that by connecting youth to nature today, they become tomorrow's caretakers and policy influencers. “Our firm belief is that if we can get youth fired up about the land and deeply invested in nature, they'll grow into future caretakers, voters, and policymakers,” Alex explains.



For Alex, AGI's Healthy Communities Fellowship enhanced his organization's reach, validating and deepening his commitment to systemic change and community collaboration. Alex quotes Audre Lorde: “Without community, there is no liberation.” These words underscore how central community-driven change is to his work.



Defending Progress, Investing in the Future

The work of the Aspen Global Innovators Group has never been more important. Progress is being rolled back in key areas of health, economic opportunity, food security, sustainability, and youth leadership. In this moment of profound change, it is more important than ever to invest in community-based leaders who are pioneering solutions from lived experience and community needs. The leaders we invest in at AGI are navigating these challenges, reclaiming space, and forging new solutions to critical problems that we have not even imagined. Out of challenges we see resilience, hope, commitment, and creative innovation. The impact of AGI doesn't end when a fellowship concludes or a program cycle is complete. Our model is not just about funding initiatives; it's about investing in the people who will drive change for decades to come.



Our community is not just made up of program participants. They become:

-  Mentors to the next generation of changemakers
-  Policy influencers shaping national and global agendas
-  Global leaders advancing solutions in health, development, economic justice, and human rights



Each person in the AGI network ripples far beyond the institutions and initiatives they lead. Their work reshapes institutions and creates lasting systems of care, advocacy, and opportunity.



AGI has always been driven by one guiding belief: The most effective solutions come from the communities closest to the challenges. As we enter 2025, that belief is both a strategy and a hope for the future.

But we cannot do this alone. The journey continues. We invite you to join us.

Recognizing Our Generous Supporters

We want to thank all the organizations that supported AGI in 2024. We look forward to continued collaboration in 2025 and invite any organizations curious about supporting our work to connect with us.

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Suite 700
Washington, DC 20037

Please do not hesitate to contact us at
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