WORLD
RESOURCES
INSTITUTE

2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

Getting the Transition Right
for People, Nature and Climate

The world faces multiple crises. Our system of life is at an inflection point.

Growing inequality and economic turmoil are profoundly affecting society. The impacts of climate change — from record heat waves to destructive floods — are becoming ever-more apparent. Biodiversity is declining, with some species on the verge of collapse.

Policymakers, business leaders and concerned citizens know that the world cannot continue on its current path — and indeed, many are already embarking on a transition to a better future. A growing share of electricity now comes from wind, solar and other renewables. Electric vehicle uptake is on the rise. More investors are directing finance toward sustainability.

But these pockets of progress aren't happening nearly at the speed and scale necessary.

We need to shift from economies based on exploiting people and nature to low-carbon economies that are good for people and good for the planet. Getting there will require major transformations of every human system that supports life on Earth — from the ways we produce and use food and energy to how we design cities.

What the world needs is a great transition.

And WRI — a trusted partner for change — has the research, coalitions and global reach to help get it right.

We envision a new era in which we can meet people's needs while addressing climate change and protecting nature. We see a world where everyone can enjoy clean air, walkable cities, vibrant landscapes, nutritious food and affordable energy. Ecosystems are thriving. The climate is stable.

Building this better world will require more than ambitious commitments — we'll need measurable impact. That's why WRI is refocusing all its efforts on getting the transition right.

In our new five-year strategy, we no longer see isolated silos of crisis or piecemeal solutions. We are embracing an interconnected view, where we address systemic problems and pursue goals that benefit people, nature and climate together.

We aim to fundamentally transform the human systems driving unsustainable production and consumption — food, land and water; energy; and cities — as well as the economic, financial and governance systems that underpin them. We'll concentrate on transitions in focus countries where we can test, evaluate and scale strategies and lessons learned, in addition to global initiatives. We'll build on established and forge new partnerships with governments, businesses, non-profits and others to bring all the right change-makers together. And we'll take an even more rigorous approach to learning from our work, advancing evidence-based solutions with clear theories of change and indicators to evaluate progress.

The path ahead is narrow and hard. But with our new strategy, WRI is uniquely positioned to navigate it. We hope you'll join us on this great transition — for people, nature and the climate.

WHO WE ARE

World Resources Institute is a trusted partner for change. Using research-based approaches, we work globally and in focus countries to meet people's essential needs; to protect and restore nature; and to stabilize the climate and build resilient communities.

Founded in 1982, we have nearly 1,800 staff working around the world.

A BETTER WORLD FOR PEOPLE, NATURE AND CLIMATE

Increasing inequity. Degradation and destruction of nature. Escalating climate impacts. Understanding these and other threats — and changing their trajectories — requires a fundamental understanding: **The root causes of the challenges facing people, nature and climate are deeply interconnected. We must tackle them together and at the same time.**

Human activity to meet the need for food, energy and shelter is the primary driver of climate change and disruptor of healthy ecosystems. Likewise, the effects of climate change and ecosystem loss exacerbate human inequity, with the greatest harm suffered by those with the least capacity to respond.

That's why our strategy puts three interconnected goals for people, nature and climate at the center of all we do.

Addressing these goals in tandem can help create win-wins, ensure lasting impact and reduce the risk of negative trade-offs. For example, adding trees to farms can boost crop yields, reduce the need for deforestation, sequester carbon and increase farmers' incomes. Those are changes that simultaneously benefit people, nature and climate.

Our three goals intentionally align with and help achieve existing international targets, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework and the Paris Agreement on climate change:

Goal 1: Ensure people are living in an equitable society where they can meet their essential needs.

The world's great transition can leave no one behind. All people must be able to take advantage of social, economic, political and environmental opportunities — especially those historically marginalized because of gender, race or socioeconomic status, or people who depend on high-carbon industries for their livelihoods. This is as much a moral imperative as a practical one: The great transition will not be politically palatable if it doesn't fundamentally benefit people.

WRI aims to give all communities a voice in the policy decisions that directly affect them — from energy siting to infrastructure spending. We invest in initiatives chosen by marginalized and disadvantaged groups, such as adaptation projects led by communities at the front lines of climate impacts. We work to dismantle the structural barriers that keep people trapped in poverty and disproportionately constrained by the climate and nature crises. And we work to build political momentum for durable change.

Goal 2: Protect and restore ecosystem health.

Healthy ecosystems underpin human lives and economies. Fertile soil and ample water are essential for food production. Plants provide vital medicines. Mangroves and wetlands protect us from floods and erosion. Meanwhile, forests, the ocean and other ecosystems absorb more than half of the carbon dioxide the world emits.

Yet commodity production and consumption patterns — especially those driven by wealthy nations — are destroying the natural resources upon which all communities depend. WRI aims to halt the conversion of forests and other ecosystems while continuing to meet the world's growing need for food, water, timber and other goods. We will protect healthy landscapes and restore degraded ones to safeguard nature, reduce emissions, and improve lives and livelihoods.

Goal 3: Limit global warming to 1.5 degrees C and support communities in adapting to climate change.

Global temperatures have already risen more than 1 degree C above pre-industrial levels, making us vulnerable to droughts, floods and heat waves and putting human lives at risk. People living in poverty — those who had little role in creating the climate crisis — are least able to respond, but most likely to bear the brunt of its effects.

IN ACTION: **African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100)**

Two-thirds of Africa's farmland is unproductive, eroded or otherwise degraded. Restoring these landscapes through on-farm trees, sustainable agriculture and other practices can not only boost crop yields and incomes for farmers, it can also improve the water supply, sequester greenhouse gases, reduce extreme heat and more.

AFR100 is a partnership of more than 30 African nations committed to collectively restore 100 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. Together with numerous financial and technical partners, WRI, AFR100's managing partner, helps governments, businesses and community groups identify restoration opportunities, develop action plans and track progress. WRI also connects locally led restoration projects with public and private investment.

Research shows that preventing increasingly severe climate impacts requires limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees F), reducing global greenhouse gases by close to half by 2030 (compared to 2010 levels), and achieving net-zero emissions by midcentury. WRI works to achieve the 1.5 degrees C target while building resilience to climate impacts.

ACHIEVING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Transforming Three Human Systems

To achieve our three interconnected global goals for people, nature and climate, we focus on shifting the human systems that most directly affect them: food, land and water; energy; and cities.

These three systems — as well as the financial, economic and governance systems that underpin them — are essential to meet the world's needs, but are largely responsible for fueling climate change, inequity and the degradation of nature.

I. Food, Land and Water

Agriculture, deforestation and land-use change account for 22% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Agriculture employs more than one-quarter of the world's population, but also drives deforestation and uses 70% of the world's freshwater withdrawals. Meanwhile, inequity pervades the system: Around 800 million people face hunger worldwide.

Our vision is to shift the world's food, land and water system to meet the needs of all people while protecting nature and halting climate change.

Our approach is to:

- **Produce more food on the same or less land while minimizing environmental impacts.** We work to increase agricultural yields, reduce water stress and safeguard ocean health through better farming, fishing and resource management.
- **Protect remaining natural ecosystems on land and in the ocean.** We monitor forest loss and other threats, map and set strategies to alleviate water risks, help companies rid their supply chains of deforestation, increase finance for nature-based solutions and empower Indigenous Peoples to secure their ancestral territories.
- **Shift consumption patterns and reduce food loss and waste.** We work with companies and governments to measure and cut their waste, while employing behavioral science and partnerships to help consumers adopt lower-carbon diets.
- **Restore degraded and deforested lands back into healthy ecosystems.** We identify restoration opportunities; provide technical assistance to farmers, entrepreneurs and other local actors; build project pipelines; line up financing and monitor progress.

II. Energy

Despite rising renewable energy supply, most power still comes from polluting fossil fuels. Meanwhile, more than 700 million people lack access to electricity, while energy demands are projected to rise.

Our vision is to provide clean, reliable, affordable power for all communities while reaching net-zero emissions by 2050.

Our approach is to:

- **Decarbonize the energy supply.** We work closely with utilities and policymakers to develop climate-resilient infrastructure that supports variable renewables and electric transport.
- **Increase demand for low-carbon energy by leveraging relationships with corporations, institutions and governments.** We focus on three areas: shifting to renewable power, electrifying vehicles and industry, and promoting energy efficiency and low-carbon buildings.

IN ACTION: Energy Access Explorer

For health clinics, electricity is essential for powering life-saving devices like ventilators and vaccine refrigerators. Yet those located in remote and rural areas often suffer from unreliable grid connections or must rely on expensive, polluting diesel fuel to power generators.

WRI partners with government agencies and health organizations to power rural clinics in Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Uganda and India with reliable, affordable renewable energy. The project relies on the Energy Access Explorer, an open-source data platform and partnership that combines public data with custom analyses to map energy supply and demand to improve access in underserved areas. The tool allows clean energy developers and entrepreneurs, donors, electricity planning agencies, impact investors and more to identify energy-poor communities and connect them with clean, reliable and affordable electricity.

- **Expand energy access and support equitable development.** We map access to electricity in underserved areas, identify areas ripe for clean energy development, and ensure historically marginalized communities are included in energy planning decisions.
- **Reduce environmental impacts and create co-benefits.** We are exploring how the mining of critical minerals and materials necessary for clean energy may conflict with ecosystem protection, food production, and local land rights and land-use decisions. We will analyze the linkages between energy and food, land and water to ensure that ecosystem and global trade issues are considered.

III. Cities

Most of the world's population lives in cities. These are where the transitions in food, land and water and energy will largely play out.

Yet today, one in three urban residents lacks access to basic services like quality housing, affordable transport, clean water, reliable energy and sanitation. Nearly 90% of city residents live in places that exceed safe limits for air pollution. Many cities are located along coasts and major rivers, exposing citizens to dangerous floods. And urban areas produce 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

Our vision is to improve quality of life for all urban residents, including expanding access to jobs and essential services.

We know that achieving systemic change requires transformations in 5,000 of the world's largest cities. We work in 150 cities to research, test and scale solutions, with deeper engagement in 25 priority cities. We also host a prize focused on innovative urban initiatives to engage a broader swathe of cities around the world.

Our approach in all cities is to:

- **Develop livable neighborhoods.** We work closely with city agencies and other decision-makers to reduce air pollution; restore urban forests and watersheds; develop safe and reliable transportation; and ensure all residents can access sanitation, clean water, parks and other services.
- **Reduce cities' energy demands.** We seek to electrify buildings and transportation. We help redefine business and procurement models, provide technical assistance on forerunner technologies, and help cities set and achieve emissions-reduction targets.

IN ACTION: Electrifying India's Transport

WRI is working closely with partners in India's national government and its cities to accelerate the country's shift to electric two-wheelers, three-wheelers and buses. While electric vehicles can reduce air pollution, curb climate change, and improve safety and livelihoods, today only 2% of India's two-wheelers and 45% of its three-wheelers are electric.

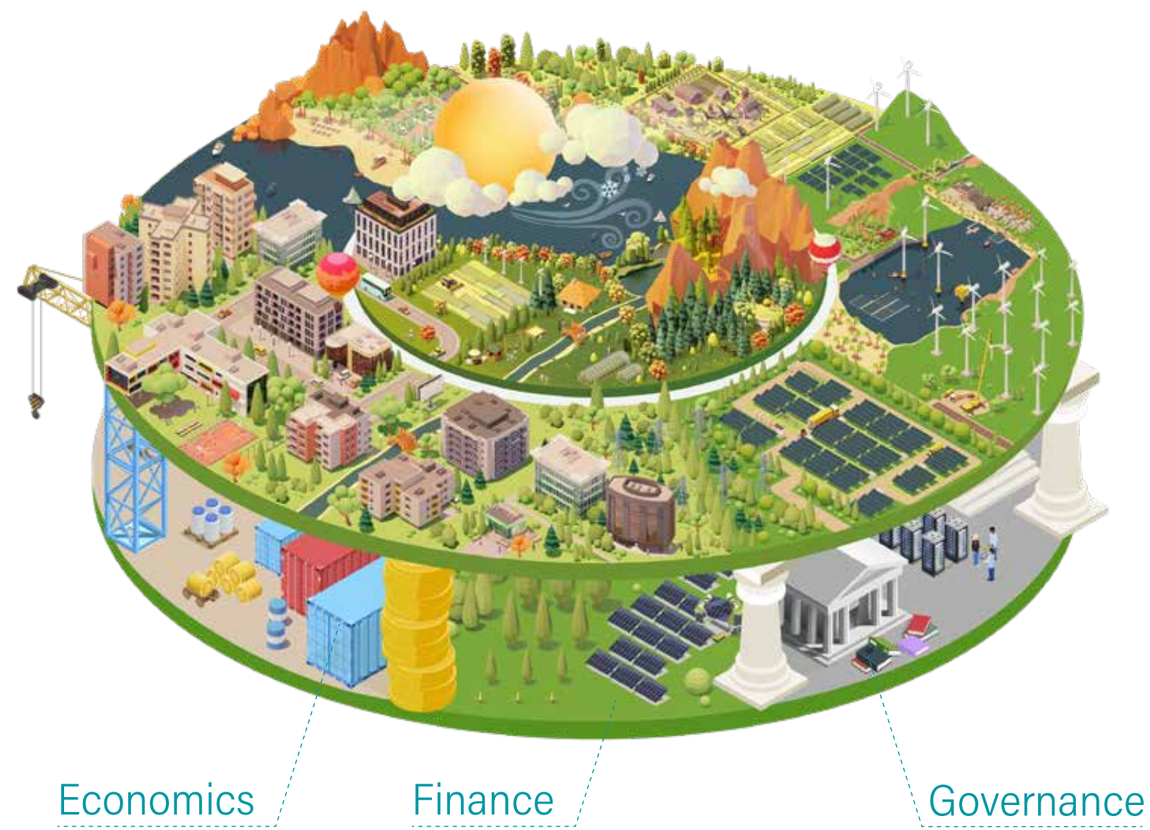
With local partners, WRI is helping to overcome barriers and develop the policy frameworks, financing models and charging infrastructure necessary to make electric vehicles affordable to all and hit India's target of ensuring 80% of new two- and three-wheeler sales are electric by 2030. In addition to boosting electric vehicle uptake, WRI is also working to make public transit, walking and cycling more accessible to all Indians, recognizing the importance of a coordinated system of transportation modes.

- **Build resilient water systems.** We aid cities in overcoming water challenges — from lack of pipes, sewers and other infrastructure to exposure to floods and droughts. We advance nature-based solutions wherever possible and help developing cities secure finance.
- **Create better mobility.** We improve public transport, help electrify bus fleets, and develop safe bike paths and pedestrian walkways. These shifts better connect residents to jobs and services while reducing emissions, air pollution and traffic crashes.

Creating the Right Enabling Systems

Transforming human systems also means shifting the economics, finance and governance that support them. These "enabling systems" currently incentivize the wrong things. It's why the richest 1% of the population has more wealth than the other 99%. It's why rising GDP often comes at the cost of greenhouse gas emissions and ecosystem destruction.

WRI strives to move economic, finance and governance systems from barriers to catalysts of progress.



I. Economics

We work to change economic goals, models, policies and behaviors to ensure healthy natural ecosystems and fair distribution of their benefits.

Our research quantifies the largely untapped social and economic benefits of reducing emissions and protecting nature. We advance policies and economic incentives for low-carbon, nature-positive development. We use behavioral economics to shift consumption patterns toward climate-friendly choices, like plant-based diets. And we help countries foster a "just transition," ensuring no one is left behind by the shift to a low-carbon economy.

II. Finance

We work with investors, banks, finance ministries and others to shift financial flows toward low-carbon development and away from environmentally damaging activities like fossil fuel production.

We track progress against the goals of the Paris Agreement and other targets to hold countries and others accountable for their climate finance pledges. We develop tools and research to support low-carbon investments, such as physical climate risk assessments. And we focus especially on building developing countries' capacity for finance, where investment gaps and resilience needs are the greatest.

III. Governance

We work to develop inclusive, transparent and accountable governance systems that build trust and lead to just, effective policies and investments.

We strengthen people's rights and ensure power and natural resources are equitably distributed. We aim to raise global ambition for climate action, including through influencing UN climate negotiations and supporting implementation of the Paris Agreement. We foster transparency and accountability through reporting and tracking mechanisms, such as corporate science-based emissions targets. And we elevate the voices and rights of vulnerable, marginalized communities.

IN ACTION: **Greenhouse Gas Protocol**

The GHG Protocol, a 20-year-old initiative co-created by WRI and World Business Council for Sustainable Development, provides standards, tools, guidance and trainings for businesses and governments to measure and manage their greenhouse gas emissions. Over 90% of Fortune 500 companies and more than 300 cities now use GHG Protocol standards to set and track their emissions-reduction targets. The initiative also works with partners in key countries to set national emissions programs based on GHG Protocol standards.

SUPPORTING COUNTRY-LED TRANSITIONS

Ultimately all impact is local. Every country must undergo its own transition based on its specific context and needs. That's why WRI has chosen to go deep in select geographies. Just transitions at the country level can deliver progress for all locally, while generating momentum toward achieving global goals for people, nature and climate.

In addition to working globally, we'll continue to work as a coordinated regional presence in Africa and Europe while prioritizing work in 12 "focus countries." We've selected these nations because they house large populations of vulnerable people, hold much of the world's remaining natural landscapes and/or have a significant opportunity to transition away from being high emitters. Our focus countries include Brazil, China, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Mexico and the United States — countries where WRI already has a long-term presence — as well as Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, where we will deepen our engagement.

Our approach is to form multi-year partnerships with national governments, businesses, NGOs and others to support countries in their transitions, including in economic planning and finance across multiple sectors. We provide decision-makers with the data, research and evidence-based approaches needed to transform the way their nations produce and consume food, manage natural resources, generate energy and design cities. And we share lessons learned more broadly to help scale solutions worldwide and shape economy-wide shifts.

We know that local and national change takes years — not just an election cycle. In all cases, we base our work on deep political understanding and aim to co-create solutions with partners in-country so all sides feel invested.

IN ACTION: **Electric School Bus Initiative**

More than 20 million children ride school buses in the United States. Most of these vehicles run on diesel, which produces toxic fumes linked to asthma, cancer and other diseases. Electric buses are far cleaner and safer, yet currently make up less than 1% of the country's bus fleet.

WRI's Electric School Bus Initiative brings together a range of stakeholders — from school districts and policymakers to bus manufacturers and transportation providers — to electrify all school buses in the U.S. by 2030. The initiative prioritizes bringing electric buses to low-income groups and communities of color, who are disproportionately burdened by diesel exhaust pollution.

HOW WE'LL DO IT: INSTITUTIONAL EXCELLENCE

Our strategy builds on 40 years of research and results. But to achieve the transitions the world needs, we also need to invest in our own internal transition.

We have entered a new phase of the organization — one even more focused on learning, accountability and achieving impact in the world. We aim to generate greater results through expanded partnerships; rigorous theories of change; a commitment to evolve and adjust over time; and better resources.

Partnerships

WRI won't achieve the changes we seek alone. Our efforts to bring about systemic shifts require working closely with an even wider array of partners — individuals, businesses, NGOs, governments and more. While we forge partnerships to grow our knowledge and capacity, we also aim to support our partners with ideas, data and resources so that we can move the world toward common goals together.

Impact Targets

We're holding ourselves to a higher standard than ever before. It's no longer enough to measure positive outcomes. Instead, we're starting with Global Impact Targets — changes we need to see in the world, linked to goals in high-level international accords like the Paris Agreement — and setting our institutional and country targets based on them. If we're not creating real change in the world that achieves our goals for people, nature and climate, we're not doing it right.

IN ACTION: **High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy**

WRI serves as the secretariat of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, comprised of 17 serving world leaders who have committed to sustainably manage 100% of their national waters by 2025. The panel is supported by a network of action groups, experts and advisors representing public, private, financial, research and civil society sectors.

Theories of Change

All WRI's work is based on rigorous, evidence-based theories of change. We identify key actors, risks, assumptions, knowledge gaps, social equity and political economy considerations. We develop methodologies for planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL), which provides us with information to assess our progress — and change course when needed. The ultimate goal is initiatives that generate clear impact and lessons learned that we share broadly.

IN ACTION: **Multi-year Funding for Poverty Reduction, Social Equity and Gender Equality**

For over a decade, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency have provided institutional multi-year funding to WRI in alignment with their overseas development assistance mandate. They have provided input to our five-year strategies, supported independent external evaluations of our progress, aligned reporting requirements to enhance efficiency, and met regularly with our leaders and technical experts to address challenges and advance shared goals. This flexible funding has been crucial to mainstreaming poverty reduction, social equity and gender equality across our programming — institute-wide needs difficult to meet through restricted funding.

Flexible Funding

Shifting our approach to fundraising is essential for achieving our vision of a globally coordinated network that delivers impact in a more focused set of areas with clear targets. We'll prioritize multi-year, flexible funding that allows us to dig deeper into projects and invest in building institutional capacity. To support our work, visit wri.org/support.

GETTING THE GREAT TRANSITION RIGHT

The goals we've set are ambitious. Working to achieve systemic change in focus countries and globally will be a herculean task. But it's also critical one — not just for the world of today, but for the one we're building for generations to come.

A brighter future is possible. With your help, we can set the direction for this decade and beyond. Come and join us as we help the world navigate its great transition.

Learn more at wri.org/strategic-plan/

WORLD
RESOURCES
INSTITUTE

10 G Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002
WRI.ORG

Photo Credits: Cover: Prashanth Vishwanathan / IWMI; Page 2: Angus Gray/Unsplash; Page 5: Thirawatana Phaisalratana/istockphoto.com; Page 6: Flickr/CIFOR; Page 9: istockphoto/Nattrass; Page 10: Flickr/shankar s.; Page 13 : shutterstock/Moiz Husein; Page 14: WRI; Page 17: Bill Dugan/WRI

creative commons

Copyright 2023 World Resources Institute. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
To view a copy of the license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/