

WETLAND SOLUTIONS FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE

Strategic Intent 2015 - 2025



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Wetlands International is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, active in around 100 countries. We safeguard and restore wetlands for people and nature.

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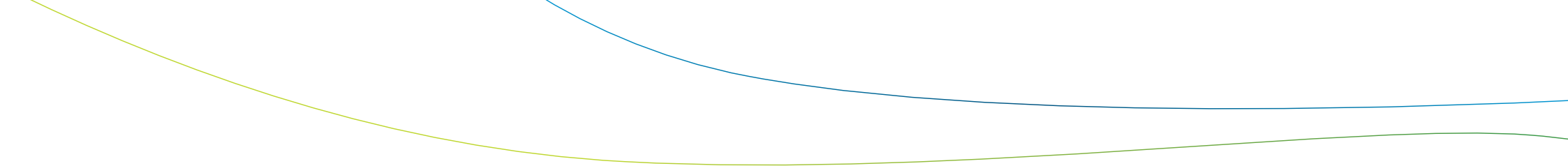
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Wetlands act as water sources, sinks and purifiers. They protect our shores. They are Earth's greatest natural carbon stores. They support abundant and unique nature. But we have lost so much of our wetland treasure. And those that remain are under growing pressure. This makes people and nature vulnerable.

It's time to reverse the trend.

Together with many partners around the world, Wetlands International works to safeguard and restore wetlands to benefit people and nature.

Foreword



In the past decades, in different parts of the world, the people of Wetlands International have demonstrated in very concrete terms that wetlands provide a practical and cost-effective solution to help redress the global challenges of water, climate, health and biodiversity. But it takes other parties to bring this solution to the scale needed for global impact.

By now most public and private stakeholders have recognised the potential of wetlands but often still allocate their resources in a fragmented or ineffective way. Wetlands International is uniquely positioned to bring these parties together in order to scale up and increase the impact. This will be a major focus area for Wetlands International in the years to come.

**Jan Ernst de Groot,
Chair, Wetlands International**

Introduction

This Strategy document is the highest level guide to our work. It sets out the ambitions of Wetlands International in terms of what we aim to achieve for people and nature – and how and where we plan to go about that work. We also indicate what it will mean in terms of organisational development and resourcing. We reset our Strategy every five years, but with a ten year outlook. This is because the world is changing rapidly around us and we need to regularly refocus on how we can best make a positive impact. Additionally, our own capacities and partnerships continue to develop. So, before preparing this document, we took stock of who and where we are and drew on advice from our stakeholders and members in all regions. The heads of all our offices and the senior technical team of the organisation then developed the thematic framework for our future work, which forms the heart of this document.

Our Strategy gives all of our offices a common focus and basis for collaboration across the globe. Regional strategies in turn provide the means to have a different emphasis in different regions, according to needs and opportunities. We will track and measure our success according to the goals set out here, reporting annually on outcomes and milestones reached. We will also use the Strategy to communicate our intentions to donors, partners and collaborators.

In the period up to 2025 we will combine our efforts with those of many other actors to prevent and reverse the loss and degradation of wetlands. We aim to scale up the gains that have been made over the past decade. It's true that wetlands and their special and beautiful nature are worth conserving for their own sake. But they are also vital for human well-being. The benefits of wetland conservation and wise use for people and nature are closely and complexly intertwined. So we look to understand these connections and use this knowledge as a basis for taking action. The context for our work varies greatly – from vast, almost natural floodplains, deltas and peatland landscapes to rice-fields,

aquaculture ponds and wetlands in and around cities. With the help of all stakeholders in each situation we work to optimise the management of wetland natural resources to benefit people and nature.

By implementing this Strategy, including mobilising the efforts of others, we will make a significant contribution to sustainable development. We see the negotiation of a set of Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 as a unique opportunity to establish a vision and pathway towards a better future for nature and people. Ensuring the sustainable management of water across watersheds will be central to driving progress across the whole spectrum of environmental, social and economic goals. In turn, safeguarding and restoring wetlands – the water sources and sinks in the landscape – will be vital to achieve the water goal as well as to enhance biodiversity; reduce water-related disaster risks; address climate change mitigation and adaptation; and reduce land degradation, poverty and hunger. We will use our Strategy to effect change in policies, investments and practices that bring about these multiple benefits.

I am grateful to all our stakeholders, member representatives, Supervisory Council and staff for shaping our Strategy and look forward to working together to bring it to fruition.



Jane Madgwick

Chief Executive Officer
Wetlands International

How we work

The ways in which we work to achieve our mission, vision and ultimate goal reflect the nature of wetlands as ecosystems and the wider biophysical and social context in which they sit. As wetlands are dynamic and connected to water flows in the wider landscape, we need to take a systems approach to their conservation and wise use so they can maintain the water cycle which in turn underpins sustainable development.

Maintaining or restoring the “health” or ecological integrity of individual wetlands can depend on taking action far away – and conversely the benefits of water storage and flood regulation from wetlands can be felt a long way downstream. Another key dimension to sustaining and restoring wetlands is the long history of human use and strong cultural connections that continue to shape this use. For these reasons we adopt an integrated socio-

ecological approach to conserve and restore wetlands that takes account of the full range of benefits that wetlands provide to society in an entire landscape or watershed.

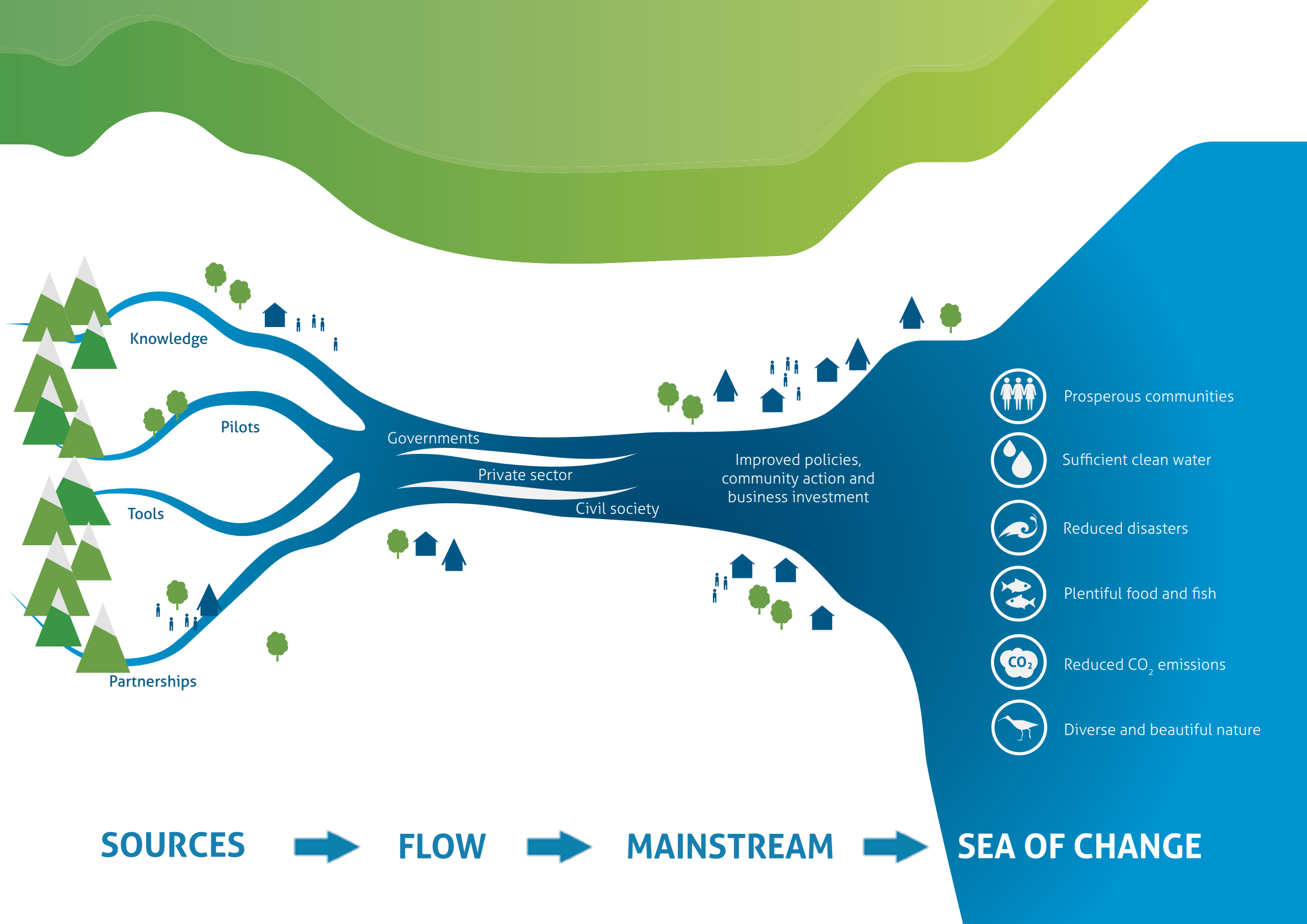
Our growing influence and impact as an organisation is linked to our approach connecting technical knowledge, policy dialogue and practical projects in the field. Using scientific knowledge makes us a well-trusted source of information, while powerful demonstration projects inspire people to act. We engage in advocacy on topics for which we have developed knowledge and have our own experience. We use this to stimulate governments and companies to develop and implement effective policies. This science-policy-practice approach runs throughout our programmes and is the basis for scaling up our impact and informing and enabling others to take action.

Our approach emphasises empowering those who use or depend on wetlands. Our experience proves that policies and investments can be strongly influenced through a bottom-up process. By working with local partners and building the capacity of local communities whose lives closely connect to wetlands, we empower civil society with knowledge and skills to more effectively engage with governments and the private sector, influencing decisions which affect them but which are made nationally and even internationally.

To leverage significant change, we need governments, the private sector and civil society to act individually and jointly. Wetlands International works with all of these sectors and with knowledge institutions, often acting as a connector and broker for joined up initiatives. We engage in strategic partnerships as a means to enable both the public and

private sector to safeguard and restore wetlands. Specific knowledge products, tools and pilot examples are enabling mechanisms. By connecting our work across offices and through partner networks, we combine local experiences and successes and scale up our impact to influence national, regional and global policies, practices and investments.

We have learnt that while we can demonstrate small scale successes in just a few years, bringing about positive change for people and nature in large wetland systems and watersheds takes time. Often it takes more than a decade. Therefore we work for the long-term in major wetlands areas. We invest strongly in the development of local and national relationships through our presence and forge innovative and strategic partnerships to maximise our reach and impact.





Our Vision

Wetlands International's vision is a world where wetlands are treasured and nurtured for their beauty, the life they support and the resources they provide.

Our mission is to sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity.

Our ultimate goal is that wetlands are wisely used and restored for the role they play in improving human well-being and local livelihoods – conserving biodiversity, sustaining the water cycle and reducing climate change and its impacts.

Factors affecting our choices and focus:

We aim to focus our work on the issues and places where wetlands matter the most to people and nature. We have chosen five **Streams** for our work and developed a vision for each one. This selection reflects our global and regional analyses of the linked environmental and development challenges and the specific niche and capability of Wetlands International to bring about change. Our choice to limit to a small number of clear, directional Streams as compared with previous Strategies is intended to bring greater focus and cohesion across our network, to facilitate the alignment of resources and tracking of progress.

In this Strategy we aim for our statements of ambition and intent to be engaging and easily understood by our stakeholders since we will need to combine our efforts in order to succeed. For this reason we define landscape scale outcomes in terms of both a **vision and a high-level goal**. We describe the main **intervention strategies** needed to achieve outcomes that contribute to our goals. These **Streams** are interdependent and to some extent overlapping, but they will lead to distinct **programmes** of work and targeting of specific partners, audiences and wetland systems. These will take shape according to global and regional needs and contexts.

The first Stream, "Healthy Wetland Nature" is the most fundamental, since it will drive

our work towards safeguarding and restoring the natural capital of wetlands. Inherent in this is that their value to society depends on the intactness of structure and functioning of whole wetland systems and their biodiversity. The other four Streams are defined by wetland landscape types, the threats they face and their values for people and nature in terms of ecosystem goods and services, as well as their inherent, intangible values. We will use simple, widely applicable measures of success in our programmes, in the form of **indicators and milestones**. These will relate to specific types of outcomes that we aim to achieve, represented in this Strategy by **six icons**. These icons are explained in the next section.

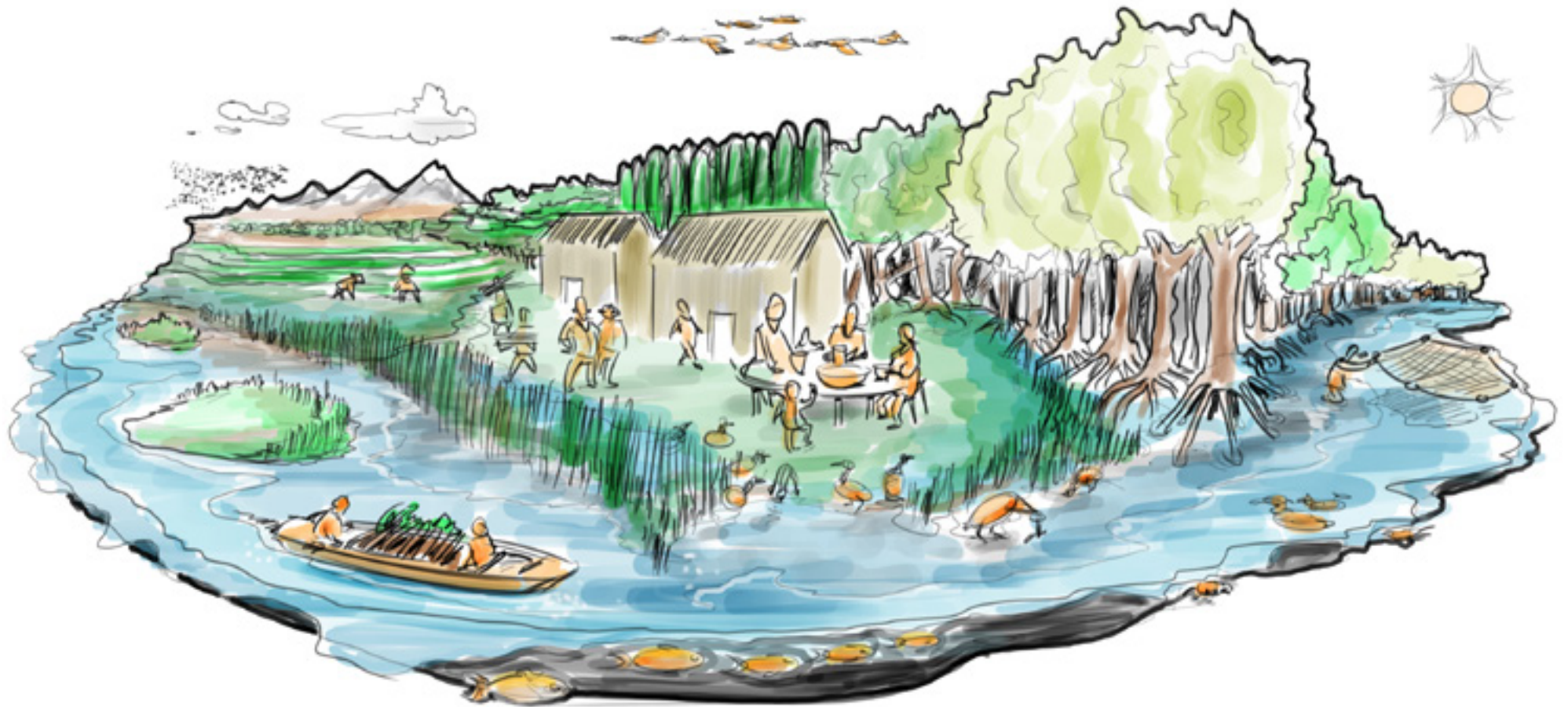
Key external trends influencing the focus of this Strategy:

- continuing rapid loss of wetland habitats and species and growing vulnerability due to pressure on water resources for food and energy production and climate change
- rapid urbanisation affecting especially coasts and deltas worldwide, which also need to adapt to the impacts of climate change
- increasing water-related hazards like floods, droughts and storms, exacerbated by poorly planned developments which cause environmental degradation in key risk areas, including high mountain wetlands, peatlands, floodplains and deltas
- recognition of the "nexus" between water, food and energy as one of the most fundamental relationships and challenges for society – the position of wetlands at the heart of this nexus – and the need for policy coherence across these sectors to deliver sustainable development
- the particular urgency to tackle the linked humanitarian and environmental challenges in the Sahelian zone of Africa – and the vital role that wetlands play as lifelines for people and nature there
- increasing interest in developing multifunctional agricultural systems that incorporate wetlands and are managed to provide the broadest possible range of wetland ecosystem services, as a key solution to improve food security
- increasing recognition (by national governments, finance institutions, business and industry) that boosting "natural infrastructure" in the form of wetlands, is among the most widely applicable, economically viable and effective tools to address water scarcity and flooding, and to combat the impacts of climate change
- the increasing leadership role of the private sector in establishing policies and mechanisms that address and account for environmental impacts and promote environmental stewardship

Read more about our five streams

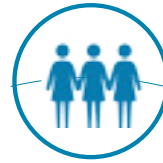
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Why wetlands matter...



PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES

Wetlands are often the engines for the local economy, but as they are converted or become degraded, livelihoods and the potential for development are undermined. Often, local communities that have a high dependency on wetlands for their food or income are caught in a “poverty trap”, having no other option than to overexploit the natural resources. But by providing incentives to use wetlands wisely and diversifying livelihood options for local communities, it is possible to reverse this trend.



DIVERSE AND BEAUTIFUL NATURE

Wetlands are in severe decline worldwide, from the Arctic to the tropics. Conversion and loss is continuing in all parts of the world – most rapidly in Asia where development pressures are the highest. Alongside this, global populations of freshwater mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds and fish have declined drastically since the 1970s. Action by individuals, civil society groups, governments and the private sector to reverse this trend stems from different motivations, from spiritual to legal. For some populations, like waterbirds, fish and some mammals which are hunted for food or recreation, measures for sustainable harvest are needed.



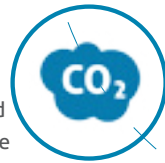
SUFFICIENT CLEAN WATER

The demand for water is growing at more than twice the rate of population increase. Still, 700 million people go without access to clean water while competition between water for human consumption, agriculture and energy is intensifying. Too much water is wasted and polluted. Over-abstraction and discharge of waste flows can deplete water resources, cause pollution problems and degrade wetlands. As wetland storage capacity is lost, the threats of flooding increase. By improving water sharing and restoring wetlands, water supplies and quality can be safeguarded and the risk of damaging floods reduced.



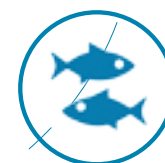
REDUCED CO₂ EMISSIONS

Peatlands, mangroves, salt marshes and other wetland types are amongst the earth’s top carbon stores –peatlands alone store twice as much carbon as the world’s forests. Continuing conversion, drainage, mining and burning of peat is contributing to climate change and leading to land subsidence, fires and floods, health risks and increased poverty. Conversely, by conserving and restoring these high carbon wetlands it’s possible to achieve significant gains in terms of climate mitigation and adaptation. Alongside this, improvements in biodiversity, water security and human well-being are achieved.



PLENTIFUL FOOD

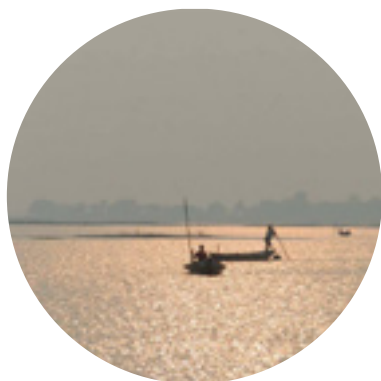
Many of the world’s wetlands are used to produce food through agriculture, wild fisheries and aquaculture. But measures to intensify and increase food production tend to lead to wetland degradation, disruption to water flows and pollution problems. Some usage, such as agriculture on drained peatlands, is unsustainable in the longer term. The push for biofuels and biomass production leads to more wetland conversion. Conversely, by adjusting water and agricultural practices in wetlands and incorporating wetlands in agricultural landscapes, long term productivity can be assured and biodiversity enhanced.



REDUCED DISASTERS

The impacts of natural and man-made disasters are increasing due to a combination of climate change, poorly planned development and environmental degradation. Efforts to lift people out of poverty are pushed back again and again in disaster prone regions. New and expanding cities are poorly prepared to cope with the range of environmental, climate and linked social stresses that they are facing. As 90% of disasters are water-related, reversing the loss and degradation of wetlands can be part of the solution. Systematic landscape approaches are needed to integrate the social and ecosystem aspects of disaster risk reduction.

Why wetlands matter to others...



"We get our water for drinking and farming from the wetlands, but recently the wells have started to dry up and there have been diarrhoea and cholera outbreaks in our villages. But a recent project helped us to see where the problems were coming from – and sometimes the cause was far away. We needed to convince the government about this and find solutions. Now more water is captured in the hills so the wetlands are recovering and the boreholes have more water. The water is better quality because latrines have been moved and some farming practices changed."

- Rwambu, Uganda



"Clearing gullies and making small dams helped safeguard our farming and fisheries because it improved our access to water and green pasture for our livestock, especially in times of extreme drought."

- Guanacache lagoons, Argentina



"Living here, we depend on the lake. Since the breach was made to the sea there is a mixing of fresh and salt water and it has come back to life. There are plenty of fish again. But it's hard to make a living. There are 200,000 fishers like me. Forming cooperatives has helped us to coordinate, and now with storage facilities we can charge more for what we catch. We work with the scientists monitoring the lake and help to make sure there is not overfishing. Some people in our village run tourist boats to see the famous Irrawaddy Dolphins. They try not to disturb them too much."

- Chilika Lake, Odisha, India





"My family and all the villages in this region live off the delta by fishing and farming. We received a lot of aid to redevelop after the cyclones hit, but then the next one brings the same devastation. Sometimes the rivers hardly run and other times we suffer from floods. But a recent project helped us to organise the help offered by different charities. It connected villages that are in the same part of the floodplain to tackle similar issues. We did some of the work ourselves but also got investments to de-silt channels, mobilise water user associations, and restore of mangroves along the coast. Now those who operate the Naraj barrage upstream understand and respect the river flow needs downstream. We are safer now."

- Mahanadi Delta, India



"The trees were logged and huge drainage canals were made to convert the peat forests into rice-fields – but we never harvested one grain of rice! As the water level dropped we suffered from fires. The smoke and haze covered the whole area. In one area we were helped by a project to design and make dams using local materials. These brought the water level up and stopped the peat soils from shrinking further. We developed tree nurseries and reforested with native tree species. Community fire brigades were trained and could quickly put out peat fires, protecting our villages."

- Central Kalimantan, Indonesia.



"Manatees are special symbols in our culture and there are many stories about them. They are sometimes caught by accident in fishing nets and trapped in dams, but they are also hunted by some along this coast as their meat is precious, their fat is used for medicine and skin for ropes. We learned there are fewer and fewer. Tourists will pay to have a chance to see them. I report when I see one and we have helped some stranded ones back into the water. The governments in West Africa have made special reserves for them and there are more rules to protect them."

- West Africa



Healthy Wetland Nature

Our vision for the future:

Wetlands support a healthy biodiversity and deliver a full range of ecosystem services. Wetland species are no longer in decline. Use of wetlands by stakeholders, ranging from local communities to industry, respects biodiversity. People all over the world are inspired by the natural wonders of wetlands, such as the miracle of migration of many kinds of waterbirds. They understand that wetlands are an essential source of life and a basis for sustainable development.



Raise awareness of wetland values, status and trends



Conserve and restore iconic wetlands and species through flagship initiatives



Improve private sector performance to benefit wetlands



Promote wise use of wetlands

Healthy Wetland Nature

Global situation:

Freshwater ecosystems and their biodiversity are declining faster than any other types of ecosystems and species populations. Global losses of wetlands are at least 64% since 1900 and around 87% since 1700.¹ The rate of loss and degradation of inland and coastal wetlands, and decline in species populations is accelerating. The highest rates of loss are in locations and regions where development pressures are the most intense. Conversion of wetlands for other land uses, changes in water flows and the impact of agricultural practices are the biggest causes of wetland losses. Wetlands are connected water systems in the landscape and have a fundamental role in global and local water cycles. Hence they are impacted by conflicts over water, including between nations that share watersheds. Migratory waterbirds, freshwater fish, aquatic mammals and reptiles are particularly vulnerable to wetland changes as they depend for their lifecycles on wetland sites and river systems that function as ecological networks across continents and regions. A fundamental root cause of the continued decline in wetlands is a lack of awareness about the value of the many services they provide to society.

The key challenges ahead:

1. To put the conservation and wise use of wetland nature higher on the global agenda.
2. To achieve cross-sectoral action for wetland conservation, with sufficient urgency and at a scale needed to redress the loss and degradation of wetland values.

Our goal is to:

Halt and reverse loss of wetland habitats, sites and species

Our interventions and outcomes:



Raise awareness of wetland values, status and trends

We develop and communicate knowledge on the status and trends in wetlands and the consequences for society, informing and influencing conservation priorities at all scales. We coordinate global and flyway-based waterbird monitoring partnerships, providing the basis for policies on protection and conservation measures.



Conserve and restore iconic wetlands and species through flagship initiatives

We conserve and restore iconic wetlands and populations of flagship species to build a higher profile and understanding of wetland values, resulting in further action by others.



Promote wise use of wetlands

We identify and promote sound wetland management and development practices, resulting in sustainable resource use and the improved ecological status of wetland habitats, sites and threatened and migratory species.



Improve private sector performance to benefit wetlands

We collaborate with corporates to develop business cases for wetland conservation and restoration. This engagement results in safeguards and investments linked with company operations to restore and better manage natural wetland capital.

¹ Davidson, N. 2014. How much wetland has the world lost? Long-term and recent trends in global wetland area. *Marine and Freshwater Research* 65, 934–941.

How we made a difference



SCIENCE

For 50 years we have coordinated the largest ecological monitoring programme in the world, the International Waterbird Census, in partnership with national coordinators. Volunteers annually count waterbirds at more than 20,000 sites in order for us to monitor and analyse trends in populations. This makes us a critical knowledge provider to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands as well as international flyway agreements. It has also led to the creation of numerous major wetland reserves worldwide that conserve waterbird habitats.



POLICY

As an International Organisation Partner to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, we have worked to guide resolutions on better wetland management. Once adopted, these provide policy guidance at the country level and coordination with the Convention on Biological Diversity. Over the last decade we have, amongst others, been instrumental in assisting the development of resolutions on wetland inventory, flyway conservation, avian influenza, sustainable fisheries, poverty reduction, climate change adaptation and mitigation, human health and disaster risk reduction.

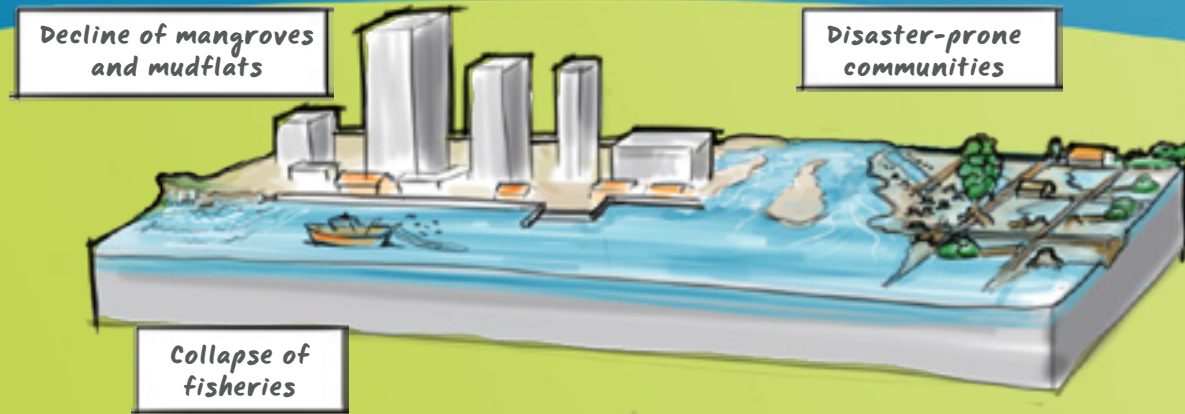


PRACTICE

The Badas Peat Dome in Brunei is one of the most important peat forests on the biodiversity-rich island of Borneo. It is home to the Clouded Leopard and Flat-headed Cat, a species rarer than the Tiger. To help protect the plant and animal species in this critical area, we developed a Biodiversity Action Plan that influences Shell to reduce negative impacts of their operations on the biodiversity.

Vibrant Coasts and Deltas

The current situation:



Secure vulnerable coastlines through Building with Nature



Protect intact coastal wetlands



Promote integrated approaches to manage water, nature and economic development in deltas



Enable sustainable aquaculture, fisheries and coastal agriculture

Our vision for the future:

People safeguard and nurture mangroves and other wetlands in deltas and along coasts. These wetlands are the basis of a prosperous economy in both cities and rural areas, providing rich resources and protecting people from the ravages of storms and floods.



Vibrant Coasts and Deltas

Global situation:

Coasts and deltas provide rich habitats for nature and are important centres of economic growth. Salt marshes, mudflats, mangroves and other wetland ecosystems protect people, land and property from hazards like storms and floods and create a diverse and attractive environment. The condition of coastal wetlands affects the viability and productivity of fisheries and agriculture. Problems like erosion, land subsidence and saline intrusion occur when these natural buffers are undermined. Considering 23% of the world's population and 60% of all megacities are located in lowland areas within 100 kilometres of the sea, these wetlands are under increasing pressure. Already more than 60% of coastal wetlands have been lost, and developments such as ports that involve the reclamation of wetlands are multiplying rapidly. Climate change poses new and increasing challenges along low-lying coasts.

Where we work:



The key challenges ahead:

1. To sustain nature along rapidly developing coasts and ensure that natural resources continue to provide hundreds of millions of people with a vital source of income.
2. To ensure that wetlands continue to keep people safe as the climate changes and sea levels rise.

Our goal is to:

Conserve and restore mangroves and other wetland ecosystems along the coast as an integral part of resilient and productive coastal landscapes

Our interventions and outcomes:



Protect intact coastal wetlands

We identify and promote the conservation of high-value and reasonably intact coastal wetland environments that are under threat from conversion, changing water flows or pollution, by enabling site-based planning approaches. This will result in a network of well conserved sites that provide a safe haven for migratory birds and marine life.



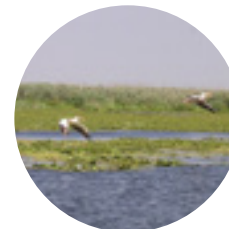
Enable sustainable aquaculture, fisheries and coastal agriculture

We optimise coastal production systems such as shrimp aquaculture and rice cultivation by bringing wetlands and their values back into the landscape – to buffer coasts for example. This results in several landscape scale initiatives that demonstrate how wetlands become an integral part of the economy, serving the needs of different stakeholder groups.



Secure vulnerable coastlines through Building with Nature

We create resilience along heavily degraded and urbanising coasts that are subject to erosion and land subsidence. We achieve this by promoting and demonstrating a Building with Nature approach: several large scale demonstrations will show how ecosystem-based and engineered solutions can go hand in hand to create a safe and productive coastline. This will result in increased political momentum for Building with Nature.



Promote integrated approaches to manage water, nature and economic development in deltas

We support integrated delta management by bringing stakeholders together and facilitating the sharing of information on wetland values and options for these to be sustained. The modification of existing and planned infrastructures will ensure the maintenance of these values for people and nature.

How we made a difference



SCIENCE

We conducted a global review on the values and role of mangroves for coastal defence, and designed and tested innovative hybrid-engineering techniques that enable mangroves to recover and land to be regained on highly eroding coasts in Central Java. On the basis of knowledge we developed, a large scale Building with Nature project was launched with the Government of Indonesia as an integral part of coastal defence measures.



POLICY

In the Paraná Delta in Argentina we brought government officials, local civil society organisations and the production sector (cattle-raising, forestry, fisheries) together to develop better policies and practices to safeguard wetlands and their key functions, including flood regulation and water supply. To ensure more sustainable development in this wetland ecosystem, we successfully influenced regional land use planning practices to better consider wetland conservation and wise use.



PRACTICE

We united six coastal West African countries to better conserve mangroves, formalised by signing a Mangrove Charter and Action Plans. We help implement the plans to conserve and rehabilitate mangroves to improve livelihoods and conserve species such as the West African Manatee and the Grey Crowned Crane, both threatened by poaching and habitat loss. Our work with women's groups creates new sustainable livelihoods that reduce mangrove wood consumption while supporting sustainable fisheries, honey production and oyster harvesting.

Blue Lifelines in the Desert

The current situation:

Loss of seasonal wetlands

Desertification



Poverty



Enable communities to safeguard and restore Sahelian wetlands



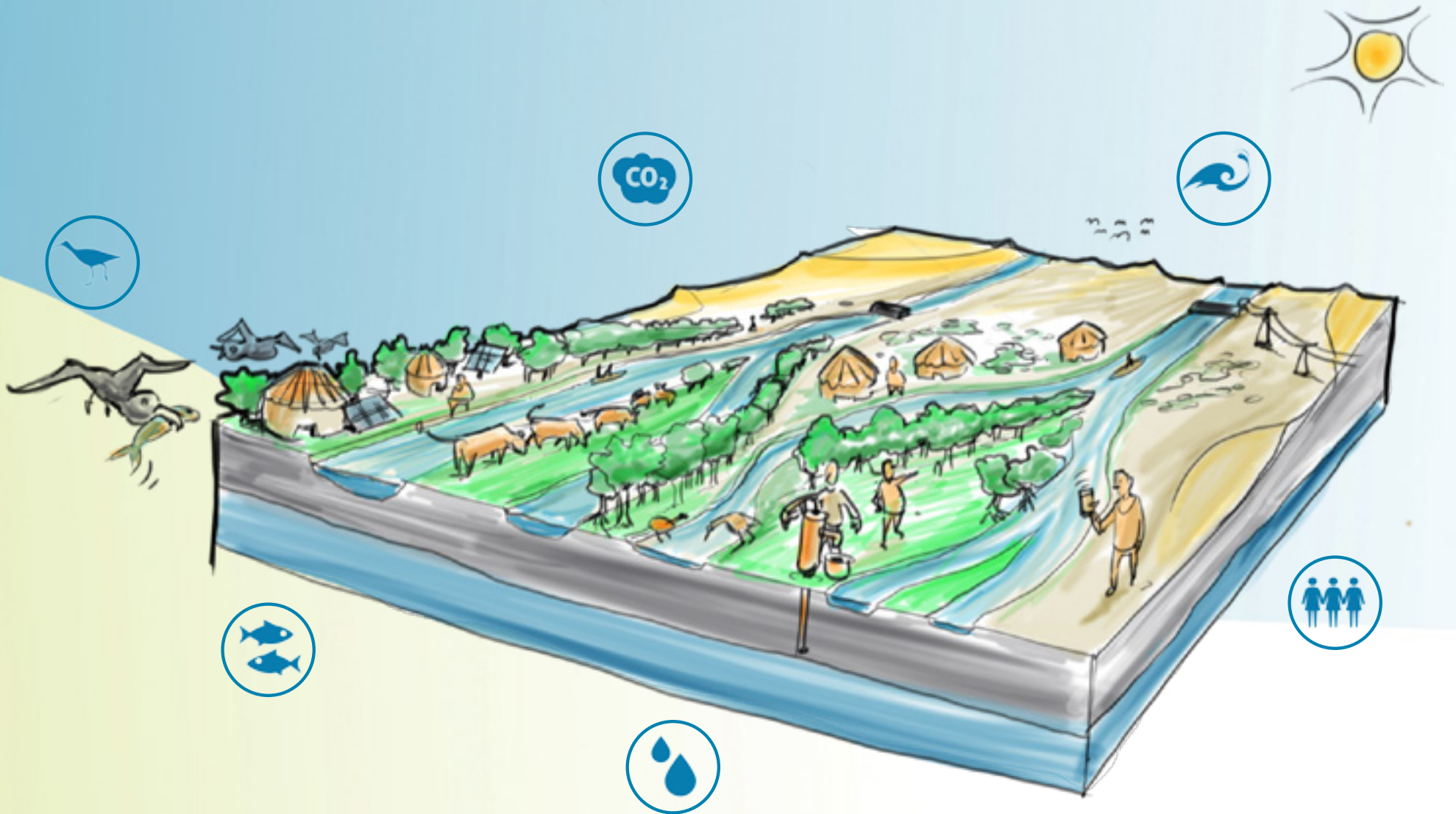
Influence development and climate policies and investments



Bring wetland values to the fore

Our vision for the future:

Life in arid and semi-arid landscapes is revived by securing freshwater flows. Recovery of drylands and wetlands such as floodplains and lakes creates a productive blue-green mosaic. This dynamic landscape halts the encroaching desert and provides a lifeline for animals and people who move and migrate seasonally.



Blue Lifelines in the Desert

Situation in the Sahel:

Sahelian wetlands, including rivers, their floodplains, seasonal lakes and ponds, act as lifelines for people and nature alike, providing critical natural resources that enable seasonal patterns of migration. They are areas of high productivity for farmers, pastoralists and fishers, as well as wintering grounds for millions of migratory waterbirds that breed in Europe. Water is already very scarce in this region and is likely to become scarcer. The need for economic development for a fast growing population is driving water-intensive food and energy production, often at the expense of the seasonal floods that are needed to sustain the floodplain wetlands and downstream production. This in turn impacts the over-wintering of waterbirds and other biodiversity. Furthermore, climate change is modifying the water system itself, making the situation even more variable. If development proceeds without safeguarding the vital role of wetlands for water and food security, humanitarian conflicts and mass migrations are likely to become commonplace across the Sahel. Key issues are that poor and isolated rural communities lack a voice in how water and natural resources are managed and different sectors and institutions tend to plan and act separately from each other.

Where we work:



The key challenges ahead:

To sustain and enhance wetland systems as a contribution to sustainable development in a region of growing water scarcity and variability.

Our goal is to:

Enable governments, decentralised institutions and communities to take action to sustain the flooding and natural resources of Sahelian wetlands, so that livelihoods, biodiversity and the economy can adapt to a changing environment

Our interventions and outcomes:



Bring wetland values to the fore

We map, assess and monitor wetland values in key river basins and wetlands making this knowledge accessible to all stakeholders. We will deliver reports on the status and trends of Sahelian wetlands and water resources and support knowledge-sharing platforms. By providing access to knowledge and analyses of this kind, we will make governments, basin organisations, decentralised institutions and communities aware of the location and values of wetlands and priorities for conservation and restoration.



Influence development and climate policies and investments

We engage in dialogue with investment institutions and governments over development and climate change adaptation policies and schemes that will impact Sahelian floodplain wetlands and deltas. We will ensure that international donors and policymakers at the regional and national level have an increased understanding of the value of wetlands under their jurisdiction. We will work to influence policy developments and investment decisions so that they take these values into account and deliver balanced and sustainable development. Within key basins, we will improve understanding of the optimal hydrological thresholds and regimes required to sustain wetland ecological integrity, operationalise decision-support tools from local to basin scale, elaborate development scenarios and enable civil society to engage in water dialogues. This will result in better informed decision-making for water and wetland management.



Enable communities to safeguard and restore Sahelian wetlands

We enable local communities to restore priority habitats, increase their food security and enhance their resilience to water scarcity and climate change. We achieve this by empowering communities with knowledge, forging multiple partnerships with development partners, communities and government and facilitating access to micro-finance. Community-based environmental initiatives and measures are integrated into local development, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation plans. Successful pilots will be replicated and brought to scale across the Sahel region by bottom-up influencing policies and investments.

How we made a difference



SCIENCE

Mali's vast Inner Niger Delta wetlands are a seasonal oasis that spread out over three million hectares and support more than two million people. Over the years we have brought together a large body of knowledge on the Delta's rich biodiversity and the relationship between river flows, climate, hydropower and livelihoods. We are using our knowledge to secure the long-term functioning of the ecosystem and resilience of local communities by optimising the management of water to sustain the Delta.

POLICY

The Ndiaël wetland is an outstanding reserve in the Senegal River delta. Diversion of water for human consumption and irrigated agriculture over the last decades led to the complete drying out of the wetlands. Working with Senegalese civil society organisations we persuaded the government to restore the Ndiaël. We are guiding the development of a new management plan to revitalise it for local beneficiaries and make it an international destination for birdwatchers.

PRACTICE

The flooded forests of Mali's Inner Niger Delta contain much of its natural wealth and are referred to as "local banks". They have been greatly reduced due to clearance and grazing linked with reduced flooding and a growing population. We enabled local communities to restore flood forests across the Delta using an innovative financing mechanism. In exchange for funds that support sustainable livelihood activities communities planted over 20,000 trees and restored nearly 500 hectares of flood forests.

Replenished Water Stores from Mountains to Sea

The current situation:



Disappearing floodplains, lakes and marshes

Reduced access to clean water

Floods



Develop business cases for wetlands as natural infrastructure



Demonstrate innovative wetland solutions to water management challenges



Influence water policies and investments

Our vision for the future:

The degradation of wetlands of critical importance for water storage from mountainous regions to the sea is reversed. They will again feed the rivers with water, reduce the risks of harmful flooding and provide renewed opportunities for biodiversity. This creates a more productive and safer landscape for millions of people and nature downstream.



Replenished Water Stores from Mountains to Sea

Global Situation:

Water risks to society, including chronic water scarcity and more frequent and severe droughts and floods, are increasing around the world. Competition for finite water resources is placing limits on development in many regions. Loss and degradation of wetlands is exacerbating these problems whilst their maintenance and restoration can be part of the solution. Examples include drainage and overgrazing of high mountain peatlands, channelisation of rivers and streams and drainage and conversion of lakes and ponds. These all reduce the capacity of the landscape to store water, reducing the replenishment of groundwater and increasing the risks of water scarcity and flash floods. Traditional hard-engineered solutions to address water risks often exacerbate these problems and can drive further degradation and loss of wetlands. In rural and peri-urban situations in many developing countries, the pollution or degradation of wetlands can endanger the sustainability of water supplies and the health of people that depend on them.

Where we work:



The key challenges ahead:

To align policies across multiple sectors to transform the way water risks are managed in the landscape, including the improved management and restoration of wetlands as networks of natural water infrastructure.

Our goal is to:

Conserve and restore wetlands to reduce water risks in the landscape

Our interventions and outcomes:



Develop business cases for wetlands as natural infrastructure

Working in multi-stakeholder partnerships we explore and evaluate business cases for the maintenance and restoration of wetlands to increase water security and generate co-benefits linked to specific cases. The results include the development of critical spatial information, decision-support tools and technical guidance that have wider applicability.



Influence water policies and investments

We advocate for wetland-based solutions to address water risks via regional, national and watershed policy and planning, coupled with targeted advocacy to private sector stakeholders and global and regional finance institutions. This results in public-private partnerships, improved policies and better coherence, and increased investment in wetlands to store water, sustain water supplies, prevent floods and provide a range of other benefits. In local watersheds we empower civil society partners with knowledge and skills to participate in water policy dialogues and water governance, resulting in enhanced access to water and sanitation that is environmentally sustainable for the long-term.



Demonstrate innovative wetland solutions to water management challenges

We collaborate with corporates, government and civil society groups to design and implement pilot initiatives which can test and demonstrate the role of wetlands as natural infrastructure to reduce water risks. This results in the identification of success factors and barriers to implementation, as well as benefit assessments and the development of tools and standards that help governments and companies incorporate natural infrastructure measures as viable investment options and to assess the scalability.

How we made a difference



SCIENCE

Wular Lake, the largest floodplain lake in the mountainous Kashmir state of India, formerly functioned as a sponge that buffered against flooding, benefiting millions of people. 90% of the water storage capacity of these wetlands has been lost due to agriculture and deforestation, resulting in flash floods and more frequent water shortages downstream. Based on our knowledge base we developed a cost effective management plan for the government to reduce water risks through wetland restoration.

POLICY

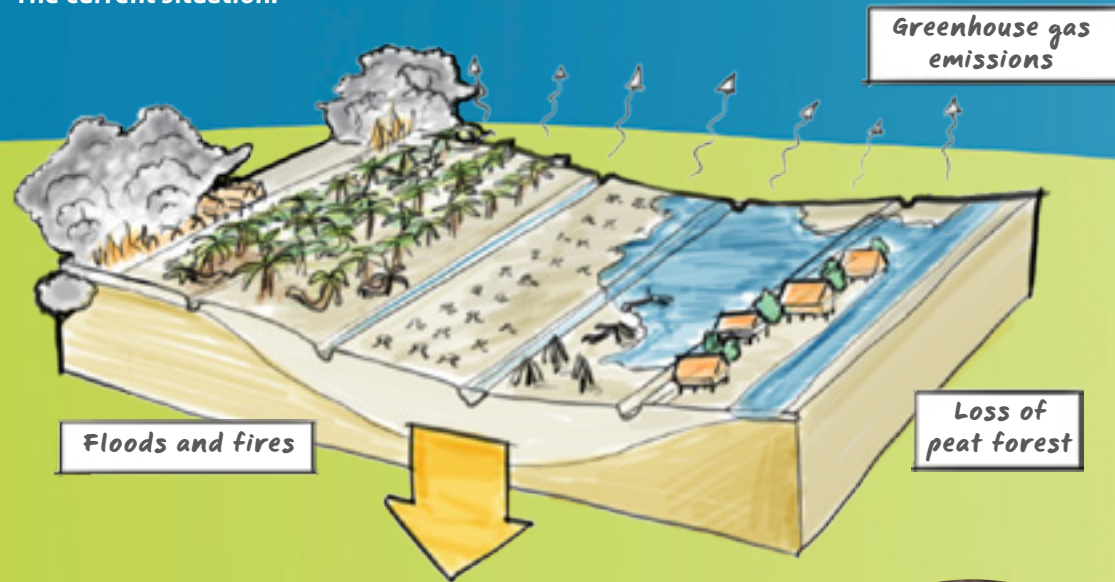
Restoring wetlands can help prevent and reduce disaster risks caused by floods, droughts and storms. Such measures need to be integrated with other disaster risk reduction (DRR) interventions across a landscape. We work in disaster prone regions with numerous humanitarian partners to bring such an approach into DRR and sectoral policies. Building on this wealth of experience, we were instrumental in ensuring that ecosystems have a strong focus in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

PRACTICE

Communities in the rural catchment of Rwambu, Uganda were suffering from poor health due to contaminated water sources, declining harvests and diminished livelihoods. This was driven by badly planned water and sanitation coupled with unsustainable agricultural practices. We supported local organisations to change this. Landscape scale planning, wetland and catchment restoration and appropriate water and sanitation technologies brought clean and accessible water back, improving crop yields, health, biodiversity and community well-being.

Peatland Treasures are Safeguarded and Restored

The current situation:



Develop and promote sustainable landuse on re-wetted peatlands



Rehabilitate and restore drained peatlands



Inform and influence public and private policies and practices for peatland wise use



Protect and conserve the remaining intact peatlands

Our vision for the future:

The full value of peatlands all over the world is revealed: their tremendous carbon storage, ability to regulate and purify water and precious natural beauty. From the Arctic to the tropics, and from the high mountains to the sea, we maintain these treasure troves. We prevent the fires and halt harmful reclamations that literally put them up in smoke and down the drain. And we reverse degradation by re-wetting desiccated soils and promote their sustainable use.



Peatland Treasures are Safeguarded and Restored

Global situation:

Peatlands cover about 400 million hectares worldwide, representing about half of the world's wetlands. Over 50 million hectares have been converted to intensive agriculture and forestry use and are degrading. This is resulting in the tremendous loss of biodiversity, disproportionately high greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and major peat fires that impact on local economies and public health. Conversion is also causing the subsidence of extensive coastal lowland landscapes, resulting in increased flood risks and the loss of productive land. The most pressing issues are in Southeast Asia, where unsustainable palm oil and pulp production drives peatland drainage resulting in GHG emissions on the order of 500 million tonnes CO₂ equivalent per year.

Where we work:



The key challenges ahead:

1. To attain global attention for the values of peatlands and the dire consequences of their continued loss and degradation.
2. To establish the policy, practice and investment means to protect the world's remaining intact peatlands, from the Arctic to the tropics, and support commercial land uses on re-wetted peat as a real alternative to unsustainable agroforestry practices.

Our goal is to:

Conserve and restore peatlands as part of integrated landscape management, contributing to sustainable development, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and biodiversity

Our interventions and outcomes:



Protect and conserve the remaining intact peatlands

We assess the status of peatlands, highlighting values, vulnerabilities and needs for protection and rehabilitation. We develop overviews on the status and trends in peatlands and consequences for biodiversity and society. This information informs advocacy and results in improved policies and practices that prevent conversion and damage to valuable peatlands.



Rehabilitate and restore drained peatlands

We rehabilitate and restore peatlands for their ecosystem, livelihood, biodiversity and carbon values, for example through improved management of existing agricultural plantations, blocking drainage channels to enable re-wetting, reducing fires and community-based reforestation. This is being achieved through a global portfolio of long-term ecosystem restoration projects. We leverage financing through governments and the private sector via carbon markets.



Develop and promote sustainable land-use on re-wetted peatlands

We undertake research on the ecosystem restoration of peatlands, linked with new commercial uses that can deliver a range of sustainable products as a basis for local businesses. This results in demonstration projects that help evaluate innovative business opportunities for peatland-based bio-economies.



Inform and influence public and private policies and practices for peatland wise use

We inform and influence relevant policies and mechanisms of the UNFCCC, European Union and governments. We contribute to enhancing the sustainability of the palm oil, pulp, and peat trade chains through dialogue with companies and participation in the industry roundtables. We raise awareness on the impacts of peatland degradation and urge action by governments and Conventions, resulting in policy adjustments and contributions to master plans that facilitate management of climate-smart peatland landscapes. We collaborate with oil and gas sector companies resulting in improved standards for infrastructure planning and management in peatlands.

How we made a difference



SCIENCE

Since 2001 we have supported the development of local and international networks of peatland scientists and conservationists, and commissioned research and inventories on peatlands in relation to climate and biodiversity in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Our activities resulted in global recognition of the importance of peatlands for climate change mitigation by national governments and international conventions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

POLICY

We successfully lobbied the national governments of major peatland countries and peat-based industry, as well as the UNFCCC, with information on peatland degradation. This resulted in a moratorium on the conversion of peatlands in Indonesia, a tightening of the sustainability criteria for responsible palm oil production, responsible peatland management policies from numerous leading companies and a substantial increase in funding for peatland conservation and restoration in Russia, China, Europe and Southeast Asia.

PRACTICE

Since 2005 we have supported peatland restoration projects in China, Russia, Belarus, Argentina, Kenya, South Africa, Malaysia and Indonesia, working with local communities to promote sustainable land use options. In China this involved re-wetting thousands of hectares of high mountain peatland grasslands, and in Indonesia we were the first to pilot the large scale community-based restoration of severely degraded peatlands. In Russia our pilot project supports the ecological re-wetting of 30,000 hectares to prevent fires, reduce emissions and restore biodiversity.



Shaping up for the future

OUR SPECIAL CHARACTER

Wetlands International has a specific personality and approach which is consistent around the world. In 2013 we researched and defined this personality through the development of a brand promise and strategy. We decided to upgrade our visual identity to support our brand. In the process our members and partners held up a mirror to the organisation and also expressed their clear support and ambitions for Wetlands International to have a greater impact. Below are the principal approaches that will keep the organisation distinctive and effective in achieving our goals.

Bring together knowledge, policy and practice

- We provide insights into modern life's dependency on wetlands
- We build scientific, practical and traditional knowledge on wetlands and use this to stimulate effective policies and practices

Connect local actions to make a global difference

- Through our global network, we combine local experiences and successes to influence national, regional and global policies, practices and investments

Enable society to take action

- We work for the long-term in major wetland areas all over the world
- We catalyse action to safeguard wetlands and support those that use or depend on them
- We forge innovative and strategic partnerships to maximise our reach and impact

Passionate

- We are passionate about the positive change we make for people and nature
- This is anchored in our communications and behaviour

OUR STRUCTURE

Our structure as a global network of semi-independent offices provides us with the opportunity to combine a strong local and regional presence and experience with global influence. Originating from three regional organisations, we have strong roots and a set of offices in Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Our experienced national and local staff have an impressive track record, well developed relationships with governments and extensive partner networks. This enables us to work in many countries where we do not have

our own office. With our relatively modest size we can readily adapt to global and regional shifts and emerging issues. While we may extend our office network over the period of the Strategy, our emphasis will instead be on strengthening the capacity of our existing offices and amplifying our impact primarily through partnerships and collaboration with others.

All offices are locally established as legal entities, but are bound together by the same brand, a shared vision and Strategy on how to achieve common goals as well as the same institutional policies and standards. For us, "global" means "connected local".

Each office has the flexibility to zoom in and adapt our Strategy regionally and per country. Multi-region programmes involving several offices provide the opportunity for synergy, for example linking sustainability efforts through trade chains and connecting global investments to local impacts. Many of our offices act as the coordination centre for regional and multi-country initiatives. The role of the head office is to bring coherence and synergy to our work generated across the network. In 2014, we established a "global board" including the heads of all offices and the global Management Board, to take oversight on strategic choices that affect the whole organisation.

OUR HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Whilst the organisation has developed its institutional capacity and scale of programme delivery significantly over the last decade, further growth and improvements in organisational effectiveness are needed in order to deliver the goals presented in this Strategy.

Investing in people

Our staff is our most valuable asset. Over the period of this Strategy, we will invest more in coaching, mentoring and learning resources so that our offices all have core competencies and skillsets that are needed to underpin our overall effectiveness. Our ambition is that all of our colleagues feel they are a part of the greater organisation and are appreciated and accountable for their individual efforts. To assist this, we are building an organisational culture that creates a supportive environment for feedback and quality assurance. By improving coordination and communication mechanisms across the network, we will also make it easier for offices to work together and share information, including in programming, budgeting and fundraising. We aim that the expertise and networks of individuals and teams in different offices become

increasingly known, recognised and regarded as a global resource. This will also improve our rapid response and contingency capability. If an opportunity or event occurs in one region, the needed representation, skills and expertise can be drawn from other regions quickly and efficiently. In this respect, the head office will act as a mentor, facilitator and clearinghouse for the network.

Broadening our resource base

We recognise that greater investment in reaching out to new donors will be required to resource this Strategy, since the donor landscape is changing and competition for resources amongst NGOs in the fields of environment and development has increased. Government budgets for biodiversity conservation have been greatly reduced and in some cases subsumed into allocations for addressing climate change. Increasingly the financing of improvements in environmental management is dependent on there being a proven benefit for the economy and jobs. Philanthropic donors are also becoming more risk averse. Significant regional economic shifts like the emergence of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) as strong, influential economies

and the transformation of many countries resulting in reduced dependence on aid, also influences significantly our target audiences, donors and the way in which offices coordinate to bring about positive change per region.

To support our resource development efforts, we will create a strong business case and plan linked to our overall Strategy outcomes under each Stream. The business plan will articulate our special capabilities to catalyse real change and the resources required. We envisage that growth across the organisation will be achieved in two ways: building on our strength to acquire funding for multi-region and multi-year programmes, and accelerating the broadening of our donor base, in particular to increase core financing. A larger proportion of core finance will be sought for general use, such as advocacy and communications, creating new programme proposals, nurturing our expert networks or responding to unexpected world events. We will seek to broaden our set of donors globally and in each region and bring together donor coalitions.



SCALING UP OUR IMPACT

As set out in this Strategy, we aim to scale up positive changes for wetlands, primarily by influencing the policies, investments and the practices of others. We see the following as the five essential ingredients for scaling up our impact:

1. Strengthening our technical capacity and reach

We will build our technical capacity by extending our collaboration with knowledge institutes at all scales, including in programme implementation and evaluations. According to our joint interests, we will engage with and extend our Associate Experts network and Specialist Groups in building and communicating knowledge and developing projects.



2. Increasing our capacity for policy influence

Considering the range of successful cases and knowledge that the organisation has to offer, we aim to engage additional dedicated staff for advocacy and communications across our network of offices. This is needed so we can better connect with policymakers, corporates, governments and local communities on the urgency to take action and on possible solutions.



3. Deepening and extending partnerships

Our partnerships have mushroomed over the last decade, with most growth in collaboration with knowledge institutes, NGOs from the development and humanitarian sectors and corporates. By working with those who share our goals, we seek to add value. By working alongside organisations from different sectors we complement our own strengths with the skills and knowledge of others. This spurs innovation and generates more chances and resources for creating impact. Therefore, in accordance with our Ethical Policy, Partnership Policy and Corporate Engagement Policy, we aim to further nurture and deepen collaborative relationships at the country, regional and global scales over the period of this Strategy.

We plan to broaden our portfolio of corporate collaborations, and at the same time work closely with governments to create enabling policy environments to scale up wetland solutions. Through dialogue and joint initiatives with such companies, we aim to demonstrate approaches and practices that have wider industry relevance. We will engage with governments to promote policy coherence across sectors and establish regulations that define key sustainability limits. Through our partnerships and close relationships with civil society, governments and corporates, we will often play a facilitating role in these processes.



4. Strengthening the voice of civil society

We will invest more, as part of our programmes, in empowering civil society with knowledge and building the capacity of local organisations to effectively engage with governments and the private sector, so as to influence policies, investments and practices through a bottom-up process. This civil society empowerment will often involve working with and through many local partners who have a long-term presence in key wetland areas, basins and regions where our work has high relevance.

Recognising the vital role that women play in managing water and wetlands, and the barriers that exist to their full participation in decision-making processes, we will make sure that the role of women is promoted and that gender equity is addressed in the design and structuring of all programmes.



5. Leveraging investments

We have a strong track record in attracting co-finance through partnerships, bringing philanthropic, government and private sector investments together. Even a modest amount of initial base funding can help us to invest in developing innovative programmes. These programmes attract further investments that can bring the tested, proven and locally acknowledged solutions to scale. Our ambition is to trigger the implementation of large scale solutions that transform entire landscapes, supported by applying a staged, multi-donor approach, often including a mix of philanthropy, social impact investing and enterprise. By attracting the investment of frontrunners and bringing together other groups of donors who are individually attracted by specific thematic elements of our work, we will combine investments for large scale change. By demonstrating results and reporting on outcomes, we will attract interest from others to replicate and magnify these outcomes.





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