

Scanning the Horizon – Project Concept, 2022-23

Resilient civil society strategies for climate just and nature-positive futures

Initial concept for stakeholder feedback (January 2022)

Project Summary

The Centre's [Scanning the Horizon](#) collaborative platform is the only dedicated international civil society community for collaborative trend analysis and futures thinking in the sustainable development sector. This collaborative learning project for 2022-23 will convene this community to share insights, explore key trends and develop relevant strategies which challenge and catalyse international CSOs to incorporate a more integrated approach to climate change, biodiversity, planetary systems and major environmental risk factors in organisational thinking and practice. It will strengthen sector understanding of how these organisations can work more holistically towards climate just and nature-positive futures, and build better resilience into strategies to anticipate emergent future disruptions in an uncertain and complex world.

Background

2022 is the year for greater integration between climate, environment and development

Sector trend watchers see 2022 as the year of 'the emerging climate-focused mindset' (New Humanitarian), 'climate reshaping the development narrative' (Devex) and 'action on the climate and ecological crisis' (Bond). Environmental risk factors are also increasingly being identified as global existential threats - the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s [Global Risks Report 2022](#) survey of almost 1,000 global experts identified all five topmost 'menacing' critical threats to the world over the next 5-10 years as environmental: 'climate action failure', 'extreme weather' and 'biodiversity loss', 'natural resource crises' and 'human environmental damage'. The first three also rank as the most potentially damaging, aggravating each other and a host of other severe global risk factors.

These existential risk factors are interlinked and must be addressed at the same time

Despite this increasing recognition, climate change and biodiversity loss in particular are often discussed independently, and have traditionally been structurally separated in the international system, with different research communities, international conventions and intergovernmental bodies. However, they are intrinsically interlinked, share many of the same underlying drivers and must [be addressed simultaneously](#), according to the world's most senior scientists. The UN sees biodiversity loss, like climate change, as also a [developmental, economic, security, social and moral](#) issue. And many leaders are increasingly looking towards 'nature-based solutions' and ecosystem-based approaches to help address global challenges.

There are signals of increasing strategic coherence in the multilateral system

The multilateral system is increasingly articulating the interconnections between these threats in the longer-term framings for global collaborative action. There are explicit 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on climate action, life under water and life on land. The recent UN



climate COP26 outcomes include commitments to end deforestation and land degradation. In April 2022, the new UN global biodiversity framework will define fresh targets for 2030 across all sectors, coherent with the SDGs and Paris Agreement, and leading towards the 2050 goal of ‘living in harmony with nature’.¹ The [Leaders’ Pledge for Nature](#) endorsed by 93 countries is another united signal to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 for sustainable development.

But many international CSOs are still strategically ‘behind the curve’ on this

This integration still seems to be missing from the strategic thinking of most international CSOs. Although many not traditionally ‘environmental organisations’ have now mainstreamed understanding of how climate change relates to the broader development or rights outcomes or target groups they support, biodiversity loss and other major environmental risk factors are still heavily overlooked.² They are still seen more as the traditional remit of conservation or environmental CSOs. Many international CSOs have ‘climatized’ organisational, programmatic and advocacy strategies and also have a clear strategic narrative on where they sit on the climate action axis between mitigation - reducing climate change – and adaptation - adjusting to future climate-changed contexts. But their strategic positioning in relation to these other interlinked risk factors is far less clear, a lack of coherence which constrains organisations from deepening their potential impact and intervening more effectively in the systems driving inequality.

Biodiversity and other environmental blind spots limit these organisations’ impact

Strengthening this strategic coherence for credible, integrated responses has clear relevance for organisations working on a [range of issues](#) including agriculture, food security and systems, livelihoods and economic inequality, health and mental wellbeing, energy poverty, resilience, disaster preparedness and risk reduction and water security. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic starkly highlighted the risks of missing the intricate links between ecosystem and human health. Organisations need to negotiate complex trade-offs between actions that are good for climate, nature and people. And emerging trends like ‘[nature becoming a person](#)’, with animals, plants and rivers being granted legal rights, or ecocide being seen as a new international crime, also raise interesting strategic opportunities for rights-based organisations.

Future strategy-making must remain resilient to emergent change in a ‘whirly world’

Scanning the Horizon’s [recent work](#) and other strategic thinkers have reiterated the need for both adaptable long-term strategies able to embrace emergent change, and greater diversity in collective intelligence to ‘look around and ahead’. This specially recognises the volatility of climate change, biodiversity loss and other major environmental risk factors as ‘threat multipliers’ and uncertainty aggravators for each other and many other global risk factors. This unique community of practice will continue to support organisations to build their own resilience to these major risks, as they build and influence this in turn in the wider ecosystem. It will ensure that new future ‘disruption scenarios’, influential framings and narratives are analysed together, developing collective insights and sharing practical approaches. For instance, one key ‘disruption scenario’ relates to shifts in the enabling environment for CSOs as a driver, blocker and outcome of climate and nature-positive action. States’ responses to the climate crisis could affect future civic space in complex ways, creating [new opportunities and threats for CSOs](#). This project will help produce new strategic, inclusive analysis by and for CSOs themselves on these potential interlinkages.

¹ The new 2030 targets will help countries to develop national strategies for the protection, conservation and sustainable use of their natural resources, species, ecosystems and genes, which mitigate and reverse the decline in nature until 2050. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity has 196 state parties.

² A rapid scan of the 12 international CSO Scanning the Horizon community members with current strategy documents publicly available highlights multiple, substantive references to the global climate crisis or climate change in most cases. In contrast, references to biodiversity loss or other major environmental risk factors are few and far between, except for a very few minor contextual mentions of species extinction or ecosystem loss.



Project aims and approach

This project aims to challenge and catalyse international CSOs to incorporate a more integrated approach to organisational, programmatic and advocacy strategies. It does this through developing and sharing new strategic insights on how to work more holistically towards climate just and nature-positive futures. Building from Scanning the Horizon's work on complexity and uncertainty, the project will include the following outcomes:

1. Learning and sharing good practice from a range of international and national CSOs, and other sectors, on how to integrate more coherent thinking around climate change, biodiversity loss, planetary systems and major environmental risk factors into organisational strategies.
2. Identifying strategic opportunities, developing collective analysis and insights and sharing practical methods to ensure ongoing relevance and resilience of international CSO strategy-making, by:
 - better anticipating and adapting to a range of key plausible future disruption scenarios from 2030-50, including special emphasis on climate and nature-positive action and the enabling environment for CSOs,
 - making sense of key emerging framings and narratives, like 'nature-based solutions', being used by influential stakeholders (for different agendas) and what this means for our sector.
3. Documenting, disseminating and 'democratising' the knowledge outcomes from three areas of enquiry (see below) as civil society 'sector good' Sector Guide analysis and good practice guidance to strengthen future strategic thinking. This will include diversifying both contributing organisations and audiences to increase sector reach and relevance.

Areas of enquiry

Our learning and analysis will explore three main areas, guided by the following questions:

1. Climate just and nature-positive organisational strategy-making

- Which main planetary system or major environmental risk factors are international CSOs considering explicitly in their strategies (as cause or effect)? What are practical ways in which organisational, programmatic or advocacy strategies can be strengthened?
- Which are the main sub-sectors where these factors feature in strategies (for instance, agriculture, food security and systems, livelihoods and economic inequality, health and mental wellbeing, energy poverty, resilience, disaster preparedness and risk reduction and water security)?
- Where are organisations strategically situating themselves on the climate mitigation-adaptation axis? How are they balancing both approaches strategically across their work?
- What opportunities do potential trends like natural entities being granted legal rights present for rights-based organisations in terms of strategic coherence?

2. Strategic opportunities for integration, scanning and sense-making on climate action, biodiversity and major environmental trends

- How can and should international CSOs use the new biodiversity targets and 2050 goal of 'living in harmony with nature' to improve future nature- and human-positive outcomes?
- Where are the strategic opportunities for conservation, development, humanitarian and rights-based organisations to align more clearly on shared ambitions?
- How can organisations come together for scanning and strategic sense-making of emerging framings and narratives, especially 'nature-based solutions' – how are these terms being used by influential stakeholders, what do they mean for our sector, etc.?



3. Resilience of climate just and nature-positive strategy-making to future disruptions

- How might strategies responding to climate change, major planetary system and environmental risk factors continue to adapt, expand and exploit opportunities in the face of continued high uncertainty and rapidly changing conditions?
- What are possible/plausible future disruption scenarios in the 2030-50 period for which organisations might anticipate new opportunities and challenges to climate just and nature-positive strategies? What kind of adaptations might they need to make, or influence others (e.g. governments) to also make in their strategies?
- What are some of the potential future scenarios at the intersection of (civil society) climate and nature-positive action and the enabling environment for CSOs which can inform future strategic thinking – as risks, opportunities, causes and effects – for these organisations to be more effective as champions of both?

Project activities and outputs

The project will run on an 18-month timeframe from June 2022 to November/December 2023, with the following outputs:

- A baseline survey and informal interviews with international CSO strategists to identify the current status, challenges and opportunities of integrating planetary systems and environmental risk factors into organisational, programmatic and advocacy strategies.
- Bi-monthly peer exchange webinars from both the community and external content inputs to share current practice, analysis and thought provocations about opportunities and risks.
- Online workshop sessions for discussion, sense-making and analysis to explore potential disruption scenarios, emerging framings and narratives, using inclusive tools.
- Regular content communication pieces – thoughtpiece blogs/podcast interviews.
- A joint [International Civic Forum](#) convening event in November 2022 and collaborative work with the Centre's [Solidarity Action Network](#) civic space community to produce future reference scenarios for (civil society) climate action and the enabling environment for CSOs. This would include a facilitated, iterative, online process involving up to 20 diverse civic space, climate action and futures thinkers.
- Scanning Sector Guide (no. 3) in 2023 covering these areas (after [Global China, 2019](#) and [Uncertainty and Complexity, 2021](#)) based on community lessons, research and analysis.



About the Centre's Scanning the Horizon initiative

Since 2015, the Centre's Scanning the Horizon collaborative platform has helped international CSOs prepare for disruption and benefit from change. With members including leading international CSOs, national CSO umbrella organisations and private sector consultancies, the platform addresses the need for collaborative trend analysis in the sector. Futurists, strategists, trend analysts and organisational learning specialists form a cross-sector community of practitioners to share insights, explore key trends and develop relevant strategies.

The platform also produces a series of biannual publications aimed at sharing key insights from its thematic discussions with practitioners, strategists and leaders in the wider international civil society sector. The first looked at the implications of the [global rise of China](#), and the second shared insights for civil society [strategic decision-making in a 'whirly world'](#). It also shares regular futures and organisational strategy content through the Centre's [blog](#) and '[Civil Society Futures and Innovation](#)' podcast platforms.

Visit <https://icscentre.org/our-work/scanning-the-horizon/> to find out more.

How you can get involved as a project partner

Three main types of partnerships support the delivery of Scanning the Horizon projects:

1. *Content partners* share their thematic experience to support the community with new insights and entry points to inspire practical changes in strategic thinking and practice and enhance collective sense-making on a specific topic.
2. *Inclusive tools partners* have developed participatory methods to enable diverse, online community engagement in collaborative futures thinking and alternative scenario development.
3. *Resource and network partners* financially support the project and help the community connect to potential new content contributors, or reach out to new audiences to deepen the quality, relevance and application of the work.

Members of the Scanning the Horizon community share their organisational experiences and learning, provide peer advice and support online events and collaborative exercises.