

iiied

annual review  
2020



# Reflections on a year of change and challenges ahead



Za'atari refugee camp near Mafraq, Jordan. United Nations Photo via Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

# From our director



**2020 disrupted our plans, changed our ways of working and challenged our thinking. We learned to work differently and to respond to new, unexpected demands. But there is one thing that the pandemic has not altered: IIED's fundamental commitment to delivering positive change by working in partnership.**

The stories in this brief review of 2020 show how we collaborate with our partners around the world to find solutions to complex global challenges and how we delivered impact in a time of crisis.

During 2020 we worked with displaced people living in informal settlements, with women and young people planning climate action and with fishing communities managing their livelihoods in a fragile ecosystem. We generated robust evidence to inform policy at local and national scales and presented our research at high-level international events.

I'm hugely proud of the way IIED has stepped up through the year and kept all of its work programmes not just going but accelerating and powering forward. This wouldn't have been possible without the amazing efforts of our partners all over the world, particularly in the global South, who are stepping up to deliver change in new ways.



“ Last year shone a light on the absolute extent of inequality in our worlds and how a crisis like COVID really highlights the cracks in the system. And what we know is that the next crisis — whether it is climate- or biodiversity-related — will highlight these same cracks, the same people will be vulnerable, the same people will need extra help. So I feel that all of this reinforces the approach that IIED has been taking over the years and makes it even more relevant for the years ahead.”

Tara Shine, chair, board of trustees

## Looking forward

We know that the pandemic is worsening health, wealth and social inequalities. Our response must be to work harder to build more equitable and resilient societies. We must also urgently address the triple crises of climate change, nature loss and debt.

2021 has been hailed as a 'super year' because it will see a series of landmark multilateral and intergovernmental summits that will bring nations together to set the agenda on climate and nature for a decade to come. IIED and partners will work throughout the year to influence key discussions with evidence-based research and examples of locally generated solutions to global problems, supporting strong and urgent action to build a green, safe and fair recovery for all.

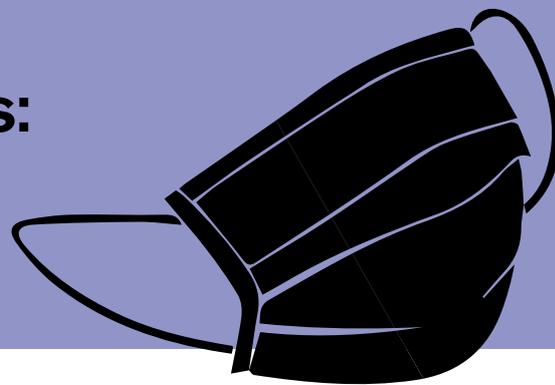
**We hope you will join us.**



Andrew Norton,  
director, IIED

- Read Andrew Norton's assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on IIED's strategic approach and the pandemic's implications for our five global challenges [www.iied.org/making-change-happen-era-covid-19](http://www.iied.org/making-change-happen-era-covid-19)
- Read more about how IIED plans to work with partners throughout 2021 to highlight and address these interconnected crises [www.iied.org/iied-2021-super-year](http://www.iied.org/iied-2021-super-year)

# The power of partnerships: collaboration underpins our COVID-19 response



**IIED brought all its strengths — research, deep partnership and innovative communications — to its work on COVID-19. IIED began reporting on the pandemic as early as February. Our networks and long-term partnership approach allowed us to react quickly to bring Southern voices to the fore and report on how communities were responding to coronavirus.**

“ One of IIED's hallmarks, even before COVID, was longstanding relationships, which are equal, which seek to respond to demands that we make, or identify challenges that they see which are coming our way. And, as a trustee here as well as in other places, you realise that that's quite a remarkable relationship.”

Sheela Patel, IIED trustee and founder and director of the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC)

We worked closely with local partners in Africa, Latin America and Asia to deliver information in a variety of innovative formats, making it easy for people at the grassroots to report on their experiences and working with them to make their reports available to the widest international audience, from policymakers to practitioners. Our coronavirus web content gained more than 112,000 page views.

IIED's researchers quickly realised there was a growing need for distilled assessments of how coronavirus was affecting communities in the global South, how communities were responding and the wider socio-economic impacts. Our synthesis series 'Beyond COVID-19: grassroots visions of change' brought together and analysed the research, opinions and learning from a range of people and organisations in the global South, highlighting transformative approaches and vital lessons for the future.

Our analysis got noticed: after her synthesis on displacement and the pandemic was published on the IIED website, UNHCR invited IIED researcher Deena Dajani to present her work to UN member states at a briefing on progress since the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

We linked the pandemic to other global challenges: our August 2020 podcast considered the lessons of COVID-19 for managing the risks of climate change in cities. The same month, we highlighted the gender and other social inequalities laid bare by the pandemic. The October 2020 issue of *Environment & Urbanization* included research on the lessons of pandemic response in informal settlements.

We expanded our online events programme, inviting people working at the grassroots to share their local experiences with global audiences. We increased our outreach approximately five-fold and our events garnered audiences in more than 90 countries.

- Explore our series synthesising experiences and lessons from the pandemic: 'Beyond COVID-19: grassroots visions of change' [www.iied.org/beyond-covid-19-grassroots-visions-change](http://www.iied.org/beyond-covid-19-grassroots-visions-change)
- Listen to the Make Change Happen podcast 7: 'Shared vulnerabilities? Connecting climate and health in cities' [www.iied.org/shared-vulnerabilities-connecting-climate-health-cities-make-change-happen-podcast-episode-7](http://www.iied.org/shared-vulnerabilities-connecting-climate-health-cities-make-change-happen-podcast-episode-7)
- Read the October 2020 issue of *Environment & Urbanization* <https://journals.sagepub.com/loi/eaui>
- Watch our webinar 'Thriving and just societies: integrating climate, nature and development in a COVID-19 green recovery' [www.iied.org/thriving-just-societies-integrating-climate-nature-development-covid-19-green-recovery](http://www.iied.org/thriving-just-societies-integrating-climate-nature-development-covid-19-green-recovery)

# International investment treaties: changing the narrative



**International investment treaties can make it more expensive for countries to take urgent climate action. And the way investment disputes are settled marginalises the voices of local communities.**

**We wanted to change the narrative.**

“ We did research, analysis, generated evidence, resulting in peer-reviewed journal articles and in research reports. But we also wanted to use blogs, photos, videos, a full-fledged documentary to provide a space for different voices to be heard in relation to the changes needed in this policy arena.”

Lorenzo Cotula, principal researcher in law and sustainable development, IIED

International treaties on foreign investment are primarily about protecting the rights of foreign investors, such as multinational corporations and wealthy individuals, and mainly centre on the relationship between the investor and the state (protecting investments from state action that can adversely affect them). The system for settling disputes is asymmetric: it grants multinationals special rights without corresponding obligations and compounds power imbalances between businesses, governments and communities.

But investments can also affect the rights, livelihoods and environment of many other actors, yet the impacts on and perspectives of local communities are invisible in this system.

Protections afforded to investments can also make it more costly for states to take public-interest action — for example, to move away from fossil fuels. In 2020, we created a new database to quantify the legal risks governments face if they phase out coal power plants to mitigate climate change. We found that the vast majority of known foreign-owned coal power plants around the world are protected by investment treaties. Unless we reform the system, transitioning away from fossil fuels might come with a very big price tag.

We published a report on our findings ahead of key talks at the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), the multilateral forum for discussing the reform of investor-state dispute settlement. Our report received significant media attention and interest from climate groups.

We also provided a space for the voices of communities marginalised by investor-state disputes: the local people living and depending on natural resources to support life, livelihoods and, in some cases, their sacred beliefs. We published blogs, films and a widely read multimedia long read, supporting people living in the shadow of multiple investment disputes to tell their stories of how the disputes affect and exclude them.

- **Download our research report: 'Raising the cost of climate action? Investor-state dispute settlement and compensation for stranded fossil fuel assets'** [pubs.iied.org/17660iied](https://pubs.iied.org/17660iied)
- **Discover our multimedia long read about mining environment and livelihoods in Colombia: 'Investment disputes from below: whose rights matter?'** [www.iied.org/investment-disputes-below-whose-rights-matter](http://www.iied.org/investment-disputes-below-whose-rights-matter)
- **Visit the project page about our ongoing work on these issues** [www.iied.org/rethinking-investment-treaties-dispute-settlement-light-sustainable-development](http://www.iied.org/rethinking-investment-treaties-dispute-settlement-light-sustainable-development)

# Planning for climate action: ensuring all voices are heard



**Women and young people are often left out of decisions about how to respond to the climate crisis. We worked with communities in Tanzania and Zanzibar to develop a new toolkit that can change this.**

“Some organisations or some cooperatives have changed their leadership structure, because you can find that in some cooperatives there was not even a single young person in the leadership structures — but now, there are men, there are women, there are young men, there are young women as well. So this showed that the toolkit has positive impact to these cooperatives.”

Rashid Mwinyi Rashid, chairperson, Pamoja Youth Initiative

Climate change impacts men and women and young people in different ways, depending on their social roles and local norms. To unite communities behind climate action, all members of the community must be heard.

We worked with partners and communities across five locations to create, test and develop a toolkit for ensuring that Tanzanian and Zanzibari women and youth are fully involved in climate-resilience planning. Local communities developed and tested a simple and affordable methodology; it works by challenging assumptions and creating safe spaces for everyone to share their concerns and priorities in community discussions about climate responses.

We published two versions of the toolkit: one for cooperatives and one for rural communities. Both versions are available in Swahili and English, to ensure the most inclusive reach. Despite the pandemic, local people and grassroots partners were able to guide the rollout, ensuring this resilience toolkit will have a sustainable life of its own.

We delivered training for local officials and cooperatives, and all the cooperatives that have used the toolkit have committed to implementing changes identified in their action plans. Zanzibar's Department for Cooperatives has expressed an interest in integrating the toolkit directly into their guidance for all new cooperatives.

We invited our grassroots partners to present the Pamoja Voices toolkit at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Community-based Adaptation to Climate Change, the leading practitioner-oriented conference on climate adaptation. It had an excellent response and, globally, we are now engaging with a number of organisations to help promote the toolkit and encourage wider uptake.

Previously marginalised people are being heard in their communities, and they are endorsing and sharing this methodology peer-to-peer around the country. The leadership network of women and youth, rural communities and cooperative leaders and others can tell the stories of their success to inspire others; they are now the experts.

- **Read the full story about how the Pamoja Voices toolkit is strengthening local voices**  
[www.iied.org/strengthening-voices-women-young-people-shaping-local-climate-action](http://www.iied.org/strengthening-voices-women-young-people-shaping-local-climate-action)
- **Download a copy of the Pamoja Voices climate-resilient planning toolkit for rural communities**  
[pubs.iied.org/10204iied](http://pubs.iied.org/10204iied)
- **Download a copy of the Pamoja Voices climate-resilience planning toolkit for cooperatives**  
[pubs.iied.org/10205iied](http://pubs.iied.org/10205iied)

# Sharing nature-based solutions for a more resilient future



**IIED research shows how nature-based solutions can tackle the biodiversity and climate crises together, and we are getting this evidence recognised in national and international policy forums.**

“ Our farmer seed networks have a different coordinator in different regions. The local coordinator linked to the communities that collect their stories, support them, follow them, and then to give them suggestions to meet their needs and interests. And those processes are recorded and collected and videoed by IIED nature-based solution groups, and then distributed and diffused to other areas at global level.”

*Yiching Song, senior researcher and program leader, Farmer Seeds Network in China and Chinese Academy of Science*

In 2020, we worked with partners across different landscapes to produce compelling evidence of how nature-based solutions can tackle three critical global challenges: the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and poverty.

We collaborated with the China Farmer's Seed Network, which supports farmers in remote mountain communities to work with nature to adapt to climate change, for example by operating seed banks. These farmers are from some of China's poorest ethnic minority communities — as IIED research has shown, climate change and biodiversity loss hit the poorest people first and hardest. We supported the Seed Network to gather evidence of how working with nature can help communities respond to climate change, slow biodiversity loss and reduce poverty. This evidence was especially significant because it was generated in collaboration with the communities themselves.

When the coronavirus pandemic struck, the farmers showed how working with nature helped them respond to a crisis: conserving and breeding their own seeds enabled them to grow a wide range of foods when other food chains were heavily disrupted. Policymakers in China are taking note.

Throughout 2020, we continued to build our research on how nature-based solutions were helping communities respond to COVID-19.

We brought our evidence and the voices of marginalised communities to national policy discussions and global forums. At the International Conference on Community-based Adaptation to Climate Change, CBA14, we led a workshop that brought together almost 90 participants from communities, government, UN agencies, NGOs, researchers and the private sector to share lessons on community-led nature-based solutions for climate adaptation.

2021 has been dubbed the 'super year' for climate and nature, and we will continue to work with our local partners to produce evidence on the benefits of nature-based solutions, urging policymakers to deliver more finance and support.

- **Discover how we are improving the evidence on biodiversity and development** [www.iied.org/nature-4-development-improving-evidence-dialogue-biodiversity-development](http://www.iied.org/nature-4-development-improving-evidence-dialogue-biodiversity-development)
- **Read about how we worked with partners to strengthen the organisations of forest and farm producers to deliver climate-resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods** [www.iied.org/forest-farm-facility-phase-ii](http://www.iied.org/forest-farm-facility-phase-ii)
- **Read our blog on how working with nature offers lessons on how to build back better from COVID-19** [www.iied.org/working-nature-build-back-better-covid-19-inspirations-farmers-china](http://www.iied.org/working-nature-build-back-better-covid-19-inspirations-farmers-china)
- **Read our article about community solutions for a nature-based, resilient future beyond COVID-19** [www.iied.org/community-solutions-for-nature-based-resilient-future-beyond-covid-19](http://www.iied.org/community-solutions-for-nature-based-resilient-future-beyond-covid-19)

# Making the business case for sustainable fisheries



**Overfishing can have a catastrophic effect on ecosystems and livelihoods. In Myanmar, we made a strong, evidence-based business case for affordable, sustainable fisheries management systems that protect both people and nature.**

“ IIED presents compelling evidence of a project working closely and successfully with a wide range of host country institutions. It gives the clear impression that the partnerships are strong and well maintained, and as such, represent an outstanding achievement for the project.”

The Darwin Initiative

Myanmar faces a common challenge: lifting its people from poverty while also protecting biodiversity. In the Ayeyarwady Delta, reliance on one fish species, the hilsa, has caused overfishing, an unsustainable trend that threatens the ecosystem. But top-down regulatory approaches such as fishing bans would jeopardise the income and nutrition of tens of thousands of poor fisher families.

After three years of research with local partners, we designed an incentive scheme that would see fishers compensated for supporting ecosystem recovery. In basic terms, the scheme envisages providing compensation to fishers to offset the costs of complying with new fishing regulations, meaning that the fishers become part of an inclusive regional effort to support the health of the whole delta.

In 2020 we worked with our partners to finalise our design for the compensation scheme. We made a bold, evidence-based business case for action: we demonstrated the huge value of artisanal hilsa fisheries, previously unaccounted for by the government.

We also demonstrated that with some reform to existing tax and revenue systems, our proposal could pay for itself many times over.

We validated our research in workshops with both the national government and local authorities from every district in the Ayeyarwady Region. Together with our partners, we presented preliminary recommendations to regional government representatives. They were positive and have invited a full proposal; success at a regional level would make the case for scaling up and potentially offer a proven model for other nations to protect people and nature.

We played to a key IIED strength: building connections between officials and local NGO partners that will outlive our involvement. This success was noted by our main funder for this work, the Darwin Initiative.

Although COVID-19 and recent political events have created many uncertainties in Myanmar, we are hopeful that there is enough local ownership of this approach to eventually allow opportunities for next steps.

- **Read more about our work to introduce incentive-based fisheries management** [www.iied.org/carrots-sticks-incentives-consume-hilsa-fish-myanmar](http://www.iied.org/carrots-sticks-incentives-consume-hilsa-fish-myanmar)
- **See all our work on fisheries** [www.iied.org/fisheries](http://www.iied.org/fisheries) and the inclusive blue economy [www.iied.org/inclusive-blue-economy](http://www.iied.org/inclusive-blue-economy)

# Giving displaced communities a voice in urban development



**Globally, urban areas are increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and disasters. At the same time, conflict and violence create millions of displaced people, most of whom move to towns and cities. In 2020, IIED provided evidence on creative ways to support displaced people in urban areas.**

“The goal of the project is to compare protracted displacement populations, how they’re faring when they’re living in camp settings compared to urban settings, and what we want is to produce evidence that shows how different actors can support the best strategies towards self-reliance, wellbeing, livelihoods, so that it benefits not just the displaced but also the communities around them.”

Nassim Majidi, founder and director, Samuel Hall

Early in 2020, we marked the tenth anniversary of the Haiti earthquake by publishing an online archive that documents community planning undertaken after the disaster. The 2010 earthquake killed hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed large swathes of the city of Port-au-Prince. The Haiti Community Planning Archive documents the huge range of community activities undertaken as part of the urban rebuilding process. It will be a vital resource for urban planners, educators, students and people working in disaster response, providing detailed insights into the realities of post-disaster community planning.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, we were able to begin work on a major new study that will compare the experiences of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in cities and camps in Afghanistan, Kenya, Ethiopia and Jordan. Housing people in camps remains the default response to new displacement crises — but most displaced people don’t want to live in camps, and estimates suggest more than half of all refugees and IDPs live in towns and cities.

This project is the first large-scale study to compare experiences of protracted displacement in cities and camps and will create a significant body of evidence on the merits of hosting displaced people in camps versus urban areas.

In Kenya, we supported a shift in the narrative around urban refugees, helping our local partner, SDI Kenya, create and launch a hard-hitting film in which urban refugees describe the challenges they face.

We emphasised the need for displaced people to be able to live a dignified urban life when we made a submission to the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement. Co-authored with UN-Habitat and the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS), our submission called for a fundamental re-evaluation of how local and national governments, donors and NGOs can work together to address urban displacement.

We are now organising a series of consultations for members of the High-Level Panel to meet mayors from around the world and are planning an event to discuss how best to support displaced people in urban areas.

- Explore the Haiti Community Planning Archive [www.iied.org/learning-community-planning-following-haiti-earthquake](http://www.iied.org/learning-community-planning-following-haiti-earthquake)
- Read more about our study: Responding to protracted displacement in an urban world [www.protractedisplacement.org](http://www.protractedisplacement.org)
- Watch the film ‘Protracted displacement and urban crises’ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_-N9RhACful](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_-N9RhACful)
- Read our submission to the High-Level Panel [www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/sites/www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/files/published\\_iied\\_jips\\_unh\\_submission.pdf](http://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/sites/www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/files/published_iied_jips_unh_submission.pdf)
- Listen to our podcast: ‘Reimagining refugee futures: cities, not camps?’ [www.iied.org/reimagining-refugee-futures-cities-not-camps-make-change-happen-podcast-episode-6](http://www.iied.org/reimagining-refugee-futures-cities-not-camps-make-change-happen-podcast-episode-6)

## Find out more

The IIED website provides detailed, current information about who we are and how we work.

### Our operations

We have a clear plan to reduce our carbon emissions and environmental impact, and to work responsibly. Read our latest reporting at [iied.org/responsible-operations](https://www.iied.org/responsible-operations)

### Our funding

We are committed to financial transparency. Up-to-date detailed financial information, including current and past donors, can be found at [iied.org/finance](https://www.iied.org/finance)

### Our trustees

Meet the IIED board and access trustees' reports by visiting [iied.org/people/board-trustees](https://www.iied.org/people/board-trustees)

### Our people

Find out more about the research interests and current work of IIED staff and associates at [iied.org/people](https://www.iied.org/people)





Fisher women catching small shrimp and fish close to shore in Bagamoyo, Tanzania.  
Samuel Stacey, WorldFish, via Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0



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IIED is a policy and action research organisation located in the UK and Europe. We promote sustainable development to improve livelihoods and protect the environments on which these livelihoods are built. We specialise in linking local priorities to global challenges, working with some of the world's most marginalised people across Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific. Together, we seek to strengthen their voice in the decision-making arenas that affect them — from village councils to international conventions.

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