Annual review 2022
Snapshots of impact in our 50th year
Inequality was one of many obstacles to sustainable development in 2022. Uneven COVID-19 recovery, rising sea levels, conflict, extreme flooding in Pakistan — every challenge struck the least powerful communities hardest. Meanwhile, global summits offered uncertain progress for real action on the climate and nature crises. But in this complex landscape, IIED can bring its best assets to bear.

In our 50th year, our locally rooted evidence supported movement on entrenched issues, including loss and damage. We powerfully advocated for local leadership and funding — priorities reflected in the UN biodiversity summit (COP15) outcomes. Our drive for innovation supported community climate action in India and set a course for more inclusive cities. And we challenged ourselves to be more diverse and inclusive.

All this has been made possible by IIED’s strong global network of partners, by our connection to movements ranging from the high-powered to the unheard, and by our funders and supporters.

Thank you.

This review offers a snapshot of our action and impact in 2022, with stories chosen to illustrate how we are tackling the biggest issues, championing what works, challenging injustice and making opportunities for action.

“We need to work across whole systems globally through radical collaborations [and] deep partnerships to make sure we can bring the best solutions to bear ... and maximise the impact on the communities that we work with.”

— Tom Mitchell, executive director, who was welcomed to IIED in September 2022
IIED in numbers

Income for 2021/22
£18.2 million

56% of our publication downloads in 2022 came from the global South

Around 150 employees globally

142 active projects

Over 120 partner organisations in more than 80 countries

Over 155,000 social media followers
Tackling the big issues

We delivered evidence-based ways forward on two huge roadblocks facing the Majority World: climate-driven loss and damage, and national debt.

In 2022, our decades-long collaboration with climate-vulnerable countries on loss and damage saw IIED effectively support lobbying by the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group. Ahead of the UN climate summit, COP27, we arranged an international press briefing for the LDC Group Chair; their priorities were echoed by IIED researcher Ritu Bharadwaj on BBC’s Newsnight and by senior fellow Simon Anderson in dialogues with the Scottish Government. The latter culminated in a commitment for a further £5m for loss and damage.

We also published a major study on the risks, solutions and costs of loss and damage, using a methodology that brought lived experience to policy spaces. A new animation also captured those realities: co-created with Nepali climate activist Sherya K.C., it was retweeted by Greta Thunberg to five million followers.

Together, we were heard: COP27 delivered a groundbreaking, if imperfect, loss and damage fund. And after the summit we kept the debate moving: publishing studies on non-economic loss and damage with Bangladesh’s International Centre for Climate Change and Development.

“This is the first time in many years that our nations do not come out of a COP empty-handed … The decision [to establish a fund for loss and damage] responds to one of our Group’s biggest demands over the past decades.”
— Madeleine Diouf Sarr, Chair of the LDC Group

To tackle developing country debt — another stubborn barrier — we continued promoting ‘debt swaps’ that redirect repayments towards climate and nature action and seek to promote gender equality. Our analyses laid the facts bare, including that countries most vulnerable to climate change can borrow less than 15% of what is needed to adapt before hitting debt distress.

We won over major financial bodies: the African Development Bank quoted a ‘how to’ guide created by IIED, Potomac Group LLC, UNECA, UNESCOWA and UNDP; and the IMF cited our research. Government interest came from Lao PDR, Jordan, Egypt, Kenya and Gabon; and we gave evidence to the UK’s International Development Committee. Theory became practice in January 2023, when the governments of Cabo Verde and Portugal announced a groundbreaking debt restructure to create an environment and climate fund — an agreement that IIED helped facilitate.

This success has spurred on another innovative, scalable project: biocredits for nature conservation and poverty reduction, which was a collaboration with ECOTRUST and UNDP. Our emerging lessons report, published ahead of the UN biodiversity summit (COP15), was downloaded over 800 times in one week. At COP15, the final text of the global framework on biodiversity specifically recognised biocredits’ potential contribution.
Championing what works

There is no time for half measures. We must tackle the climate and nature crises together, letting local experts direct joint action and funding. To get ‘money where it matters’, we are developing tools and evidence for local leadership.

Our wide-ranging ecosystem-based adaptation research project came to a close in 2022, having proved that locally-led initiatives harnessing biodiversity and ecosystem services often offer cost-effective climate adaptation. With UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, we engaged stakeholders across 12 countries, shared over 200 tools and methods, and provided evidence for Nationally Determined Contributions from Peru, Uganda and South Africa.

We took this message to influential spaces: the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency asked IIED for practical recommendations on driving locally-led change, presenting them at Stockholm+50. At a ‘roundtable’ organised by IIED and the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, negotiators, community representatives and international nongovernmental organisations working on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework discussed the need for finance to reach local people, support local spending decisions and be transparent. Two of those notions — enhanced transparency and easing access to finance — were reflected in the final framework text.

In 2022, IIED demonstrated that between 2014 and 2018, less than 10% of verified climate adaptation funding from OECD countries also supported outcomes for nature in the 46 Least Developed Countries.

Duncan McQueen also made the case for ‘money where it matters’ to the FAO's Committee on Forestry. Representing the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) partnership, he explained how big climate funds often impose barriers, which limit access to finance for local organisations of Indigenous Peoples and forest and farm producers, despite evidence that small producer organisations, federated over enormous scales, are highly effective agents of climate and development action. As FFF's knowledge generation partner, IIED will compile and share further evidence in 2023.

We also developed an interactive map profiling funding mechanisms that support local leadership. Each initiative shown exemplifies the widely adopted principles for locally led adaptation that IIED helped define and which Sonam P. Wangdi, former Chair of the LDC Group described as "a serious and meaningful response to the LDCs’ ask of the international community." Additionally, our 'Good climate finance guide' highlighted investment-ready mechanisms to inspire funders, governments, nongovernmental organisations and civil society.
Challenging injustice

As an IIED study confirmed rising global inequality, we worked with partners to counter this. New initiatives included exploring how the development sector can be more inclusive of and learn from LGBTQI+ individuals and communities.

We reviewed how far IIED's own communications acknowledge, omit or feed racism and coloniality, and examined our partnership approach to root out intersectional inequalities. Sharing our learning will be part of IIED's wider contribution towards challenging development sector power dynamics.

Our commitment to gender equality was at the forefront of a partnership with EnGen Collaborative, funded by Climate Investment Funds. Seeking to understand and overcome barriers to women's climate leadership, we brought together women climate leaders at the 16th International Conference on Community-based Adaptation to Climate Change (CBA16) and shared their five recommendations.

“Women from Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities experience mutually reinforcing structural forms of discrimination … Despite this, they make invaluable contributions to climate change mitigation and adaptation … These systemic barriers must be addressed.”

— Omaira Bolaños, director of Latin America and Gender Justice Programs at the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), speaking at CBA16 on climate leadership

We challenged unmet promises: our ‘fair share’ analysis showed that donors are providing barely half the money promised for climate adaptation in the hardest-hit countries. We also showed that the people most vulnerable to climate change will get just US$11 each per year to adapt to climate change by 2050. Our paper stressing poor progress on the Paris Agreement’s long-term goal on climate finance supported LDC Group negotiators at COP27.

Land rights, which can make or break social and economic justice, emerged as a major issue in our investigation of what limits female smallholder farmers’ participation in global value chains. Ahead of COP15, we made an evidence-based call for negotiators to protect the land rights of Indigenous mountain communities, working with the International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples. To support action by others, we contributed to a community of practice: providing a searchable land rights knowledge hub with Namati and the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment.

Following a two-year campaign for greater equity in the global framework on biodiversity, working with partners representing Indigenous Peoples and local communities, we welcomed reference to greater equity and participation in the final text in December. IIED’s executive director said: “The agreement rightly places the needs, rights, interests, cultural values and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities at its heart.”
Making opportunities for action

For swift change at scale, IIED finds opportunities to work through or further develop established systems. We act in partnership, harness technology and consider not just what works, but what will work.

In 2022, IIED shared lessons from the pilot of a digital climate tool. Developed by IIED and the Madhya Pradesh Council of Science and Technology, it allows communities to share information, predict extreme weather and prioritise resilience projects. As part of our project to embed climate justice in India’s nationwide social protection system, we were able to leverage that infrastructure to swiftly introduce the technology to rural communities, including marginalised groups. Recognising potential for securing livelihoods and reducing migration, the government intends to share the tool more widely in 2023.

“With [this] tool we are all technical experts … We choose the land and where and what type of structure to build. We are no longer dependent on outsiders. This is better because we know what is best for us.”

— Sardar Singh Barela, resident of Bisanjpur Tandi, an approximately 300-household village in Narsullaganj Block, Madhya Pradesh

Another innovative idea focused on insuring farmers suffering crop damage by wildlife. Where cumbersome government-run schemes faltered, we worked with the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka and AB Consultants in Kenya to pilot more agile responses from private insurance companies. This sparked interest: we are now working in Malaysia with the Sabah Biodiversity Conservation Association (Seratu Aatai) and a Thomson Reuters Foundation article was picked up by European and African media.

As home to half the world, cities are arguably where the struggle for inclusive and just approaches will be decided. Last year, IIED argued that better cities are possible if transformative ambition is embedded across city planning. We highlighted priorities for action and named the tools needed: better data, local leadership and nimble finance. Including residents in city planning also arose from our groundbreaking study comparing displaced people’s wellbeing and opportunities in camps with urban areas. We are working in four countries with eight partners; findings are due in 2023.

Growing evidence suggests that working at the local level with authorities and communities can achieve timely action. Indeed, working with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and others, we documented hundreds of actions taken by cities, local governments and communities to reduce inequalities. By launching the report at the UCLG 7th World Congress and Summit of Local and Regional Leaders — the world’s largest gathering of local and regional leaders — we again brought powerful local solutions to global attention.
IIED is a policy and action research organisation promoting sustainable development and linking local priorities to global challenges. We are based in London and work on five continents with some of the world’s most marginalised people to strengthen their voices in the decision-making arenas that affect them.

With fresh thinking on strategy and direction from executive director Tom Mitchell and the launch of major research by IIED Europe, 2023 is an exciting time to connect with us as a partner, funder or concerned citizen.

The 2022 IIED annual review is online here: www.iied.org/iied-annual-review-2022

This PDF is a summary alternative for accessible downloading.

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Cover image: Madhya Pradesh, India. Community members in Puddar village piloting new climate-resilience technology co-created by IIED. Credit: H&K Communications;

below image: West Bengal, India. Small-scale fishermen in Kolkata haul in their catch. Credit: Shibasish Saha/Climate Visuals