



Programme Strategy

Environment Programme

Latest update: 1 September 2023

**Safeguarding our future by
restoring our connection to
nature, and changing the ways
we feed and fuel our world**



We have a responsibility to take care of our planet for future generations.

Today, the place we call home is under threat. We face a climate emergency, our natural life support systems are collapsing, and inequality is tearing at our social fabric.

But solutions to these problems exist.

Communities often have the knowledge and practice to sustainably care for our oceans, forests, and the lands we need to grow food. Increasingly some businesses are taking important steps to reduce the harm they cause. Indeed, some are driving exciting new innovations in cleaner, safer technologies. But, we are just not moving fast enough.

To safeguard our future, we must rapidly reduce climate pollution from fossil fuels and reverse biodiversity loss. We need to cultivate new food systems based on safe and healthier practices that bring security and sustainability.

To stop polluting our bodies and oceans with plastic, we should eliminate single use products and promote practices of refilling and reusing plastic products. To reverse land degradation and increase prosperity, we can adopt sustainable land use policies and end the trade in endangered species, while promoting policies to sustain biodiversity.

The actions we take today can revive the planet's health for the future. This will require bold, inspirational leadership. Philanthropy, civil society, business, communities, and political leaders can come together to define a shared vision to repair the damage we have done to our home. This vision should be grounded in the lived experiences and needs of people and communities to ensure that the solutions are inclusive, fair, and lasting. Working together, we can ignite hope and catalyse change that restores our connection to nature and heals our planet's health.

Read the document about our people-centred approach for more information.

In response to the lessons learned from [an evaluation of our grant-making](#) and from the wisdom of our partners, this five-year strategy (2021-2026) focuses on safeguarding our future by restoring our connection to nature, and changing the ways we feed and fuel our world.

Our approach

Our work and our funding centres people and communities **at the heart of our strategy**. Through the power of people and communities, our partners have what they need to drive broad scale systems change.

Overall, our approach includes the following principles. We will:

- place people and communities at the centre of our work;
- seek opportunities to harness the collective power of people acting together;
- support solutions and people on the frontlines who drive transformations across the fields of climate change, biodiversity, human health, and livelihoods;
- leave behind the old approach of focussing on single-issue silos in favour of funding work with the most potential to have co-benefits and impacts across multiple issue areas;
- be courageous in our grant-making and willing to test ideas that might scale to the enormity of our challenge; and develop trust-based accountability measures that allow us to fail, learn, and course correct fast.

Three systems

The strategy has evolved from a sectoral approach, which focused on climate change, marine conservation, and wildlife trade and conservation, to a global systems-transformation approach.

While ensuring that people and communities are at the heart of our strategy, we have chosen to focus on three systems that present the greatest transformative opportunities:

Energy, Food, and Nature.

Each of these systems is vital to our future as a human species and the [global commons](#) upon which we all depend. We recognise that these systems overlap and are connected; therefore, we strive to work together as a team across our programme.

Systems change captures the idea of addressing the multiple root causes, rather than the symptoms, of societal issues, such as the ones that drive the collapse of our ecosystems. Importantly, it allows us to see the inter-connections between these challenges and to envision solutions that address several issues at once. In our interpretation of what is needed for systems change, we take an intersectional approach that connects movements, ideas, knowledge, and the issues that people face on a local, national, and global level.

We also embrace innovation, greater risk taking, and bold approaches, working in a collaborative way to have an impact across many issue areas.

Energy:

Changing how we fuel our world

The pace in ending dependence on fossil fuels has been unacceptably slow but progress towards clean power is accelerating in exciting ways. Recognising the need to cut fossil fuel use in half by 2030 and to zero by 2050, we support organisations and diverse movements working to accelerate this transition. Climate justice is at the heart of our work, and we engage at the intersection of race, equity, gender rights, and social justice.

In the energy system, our grant-making focuses on six systems of influence: oil, gas, plastics and petrochemicals, clean power, transport, and sustainable cities. Our approaches include using finance as a lever for change, and strategic communications and movement building to achieve accelerated and lasting impact.

To that end, we support efforts that:

- **Support a rights-based clean energy transition** (e.g., supporting communities impacted by increased mining for minerals and understanding their needs). This includes building the social license for a just and equitable transition away from polluting fossil fuels.
- **Invest in partnerships that rapidly deploy and scale clean energy technologies.** This includes encouraging adoption of clean energy technologies at scale in a just and equitable manner by prioritising universal access to energy and transitioning away from fossil fuels, incorporating the views of communities who dependent on it. This includes support across various energy sectors (e.g., power, transportation, buildings, cooling, and other industries) that have a positive impact on livelihoods, nutrition, clean air, water, and biodiversity.
- **Reduce production and pollution of plastics and promote much more circular economies.** This includes eliminating the mountains of unnecessary single-use plastic products and reduce oversupply of such plastics while supporting communities impacted by plastic pollution.
- **Transform systems of finance.** This includes influencing and transforming systems of finance as a critical lever to challenge the fossil fuel and food sectors, and accelerating the shift to clean, safe, and equitable power. We support efforts that use innovative and disruptive finance strategies to end public money for coal, oil, and gas expansion or production, and instead drive transition finance towards affordable, clean, and healthier energy.

- **Create zero-carbon, resilient, and healthy urban environments.** This includes assisting the movements and policies that are critical to reimagining urban futures and building zero-carbon, resilient, and healthy cities. We support and work alongside local community groups to transform our cities into places that are resilient to extreme events, where nature thrives, and where it is safe to walk children to school, or cycle to work.



Where we fund

We support efforts in Brazil, China, Europe, India, and Southeast Asia. We also support intermediaries that operate on a global level.

Food:

Changing how we feed our world

No other sector has a bigger impact on the health of our climate, our oceans, our land, our forests, and our own health and wellbeing. There is an unprecedented opportunity at the global level to have an impact by bringing together movements including environment, human rights, human health, and labour movements, with campaigners focused on food, including farmers, fishers, and Indigenous peoples. Under our strategy, we support efforts to ensure that food is produced, harvested, processed, distributed, eaten, and disposed of in a way that promotes health, biodiversity, human rights, and animal welfare, all while staying within the boundaries of our planet's life support systems.

Our strategy involves engaging in areas to bring about a healthy, sustainable, and just food system, including:

- **Support healthy, just, and sustainable food.** This includes seeking to shift food environments that promote healthy, sustainable, and just food production practices. This includes support in Europe

where there is an opportunity to transform food systems and dramatically improve Europe's global impacts.

- **Transform the wild food supply chain and support the governance of small-scale fisheries.** This includes building on the historical strength of the work of our programme in tackling industrial seafood production. This will be done while supporting the governance of small-scale fisheries in their management and stewardship efforts of all fish caught in the wild, particularly initiatives rooted in social justice. This also includes work to stop the harvesting and trade of wild animals for food. This area of support builds on the lessons of Covid-19 to drive policy and consumption changes that reflect the health and ecosystem risks of intruding on wilderness habitats to harvest and trade wild animals for food.
- **Promote justice, equity, and inclusion in the ocean economy.** This includes enabling seafood to recover and be harvested sustainably, while ensuring the food security of coastal and Indigenous communities.
- **Increase fisheries transparency and reduce labour rights abuses.** This includes a focus in the nations with the biggest fishing fleets and the murkiest practices.
- **Support regenerative agriculture.** This includes supporting farmers to adopt farming practices that bring life back into degraded soils, improve soil fertility, and produce healthy food for human wellbeing. In addition, this work involves strengthening social environmental movements to lobby and advocate for policies and land tenure systems that help accelerate agriculture practices to transition to regenerative approaches.



Where we fund

We support global efforts, in particular in Africa, Asia, Brazil, China, Europe, and India.

Nature:

Changing how we live with nature

Wild places, such as savannas and forests, protect both the wildlife and human beings that call them home. Wild places drive the Earth's systems of regeneration. Our work and grant-making focuses on the connectivity between people and their wild places.

By supporting and lifting up the voice of communities, democratising access, increasing connectivity, and encouraging systemic thinking among ourselves, youth, Indigenous communities, women, and traditional leadership, we can find harmony in which all life, oceans, and wild places thrive.

We support efforts that:

- **Support the rich biodiversity of "living landscapes".** Living landscapes is the term we use to describe a conservation approach that supports productive, resilient rural networks of people who are able to deter over-exploitation, while safeguarding wildlife and wild places. Our work in living landscapes also considers nature's borders, such as river basins, and supports symbiotic relationships whereby community development, employment, and livelihoods can be provided while biodiversity can also thrive.
- **Support local and regional projects that put people at the heart of conservation.** This includes supporting women, youth, farmers, and herders, and other traditional leadership to: strengthen rural collectives and improve the distribution of benefits from natural wealth (e.g., nature-based tourism and sustainable harvesting of wild species); and connect networks that share socioecological and conservation aims, and promote new thinking among funders and decision-makers about conservation projects that do not isolate wildlife and wild places from the people who live in and around them.

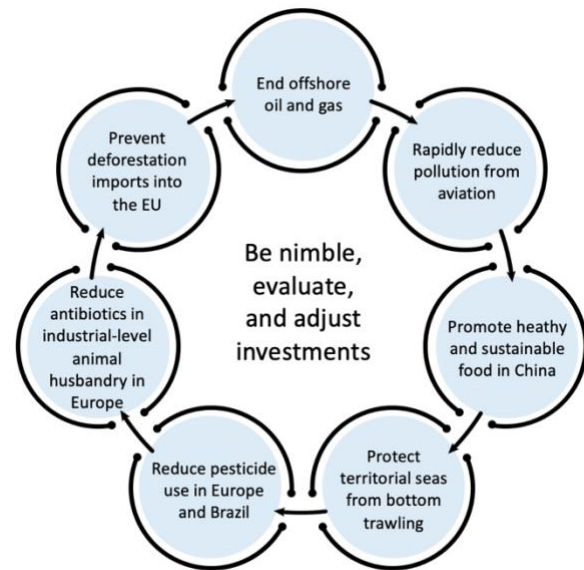
- **Build effective land and wildlife management programmes.** This includes supporting individuals and collectives to create economic opportunities and align economic incentives that neither industrialise or overexploit the landscape, nor lead to the loss of social or natural value (e.g., the loss of Indigenous cultures, traditional knowledge and technologies, species, or rivers due to pollution).
- **Disrupt and reduce the illegal wildlife trade globally.** This includes establishing regional response networks with enhanced capabilities and better resilience to disruption. We understand the importance of anticipating and responding to the criminal networks as they get displaced and working with grantees who have the flexibility to follow the networks to ensure they are constantly disrupted.
- **Restore degraded landscapes and ecosystems.** This includes supporting landscape restoration and rewilding activities for the benefit of both people and wildlife in Southern Africa. Efforts aim to improve biodiversity, water, and soil conservation, mitigate climate change, diversify community livelihoods, and create economically resilience farming communities. We support work that respects and protects peoples’ rights to and interests in natural resources. This includes listening to farmers as they are the ones who know how to conserve the soil the best.



Where we fund

We support efforts in Southern Africa, Southeast Asia, and globally.

Seven campaigns



As a complement to our annual grant-making programme, we have been supporting seven campaigns designed to accelerate the implementation of our new strategy, and improve our ability to nimbly evaluate and adjust investments. The campaigns aim to:

- end offshore oil and gas;
- rapidly reduce pollution from aviation;
- promote healthy and sustainable food in China through catalysing leadership from e-commerce, retailers, and consumers;
- protect territorial seas from bottom trawling;
- reduce pesticide use in Europe and Brazil;
- reduce antibiotics in industrial-level animal husbandry in Europe; and
- prevent deforestation imports into the EU.

Our roadmap

Together with our partners, other funders, business, communities, and political leaders we can revive the planet’s health for the future. This strategy offers us a roadmap to support our partners in their efforts to build a thriving and healthy future for all people and wildlife.

For more information, please read our [funding criteria](#) on our website.

How we work with our grantee partners

Application process

Our grants are usually multi-year and long term (about three years). Through our grant-making, we often fund via intermediaries and re-granters. This expands our ability to design and implement ambitious strategies, while keeping staff count, and some other costs, low.

When we formally invite an organisation to apply for a grant, we discuss the size of the grant and whether it will be project support or core support (i.e., flexible and unrestricted funding).

We work with organisations to develop the application in partnership, ensuring we communicate consistently about when and who will make the decision on a grant, how the application process works, and how long it will take. We also discuss the possibilities of renewal well in advance of the end of a grant. We consider all renewals as distinct and separate grants. [Download this document to learn about the grant-making timeline and process.](#)

Communications

We believe that the best relationships are built on trust, and we foster that in our relationships over time. We maintain a relationship with our grantee partners throughout the lifetime of the grant to share learning and impact with other grantee partners and the foundation.

We value honest, open, and frank exchange and invite feedback on how we can be better grant-makers. We will ask for formal reports on an annual basis. At the start of the grant, we

Our annual budget is currently USD 60 million. As a small team, we can only make up to 60 grants per year. This means that we have to turn down many requests that come our way, despite alignment with our strategy. Organisations that fit our current strategy can submit an enquiry through our website: <https://oakfnd.org/submit-enquiry/>

discuss the regularity of our communications and communications preferences. For example, we can offer a meeting every six months by telephone. We strive to visit our grantee partners in person when possible. In addition, we commit to sharing our strategies and approaches, as well as where a grant fits within broader efforts at the start of the grant.

Events and partner convenings

Where practical, we attend events organised by grantee partners to listen and learn from their experience. We also explore opportunities to convene and consult our grantee partners to better inform our grant-making and foster joint learning and connections.

Strategic partnerships

We believe strongly in building, convening, networking, capacity strengthening, and strategic partnership building. We bring a unique, often behind-the-scenes, leadership to our work. You will not see us advocating directly for the causes we support. We do this so that we can concentrate on what we do best – building bridges and connections with partners and other funders. We do this by building and engaging with networks and funder collaboratives, for example.

We can also act as a catalyst to create new fields and initiatives that are then supported and co-funded by others.

Our budget and requests for support

We know it can be challenging for organisations with limited resources to connect with funders, and we do value and consider all submissions, but an enquiry does not guarantee a formal invitation to apply for funding. In addition, we only approve a few submissions through our online letter of enquiry process each year.

Our team and structure

We have a diverse team based in Geneva, London, India, and Zimbabwe to support and deliver on the vision of our Trustees across the following sub-programmes:

- energy
- food
- wildlife conservation and trade
- regenerative landscapes

Contact us

If you would like to speak to us, please email us on info@oakfnd.ch.

Connect with us on social media

Through our social media channels, we amplify the voices of our grantee partners and support the work of our programmes. We want to inspire hope and possibility.

Our grantee partners

For information on our current grantee partners, visit our grant database on our website or read our annual reports. Visit our website page to learn more about our partners' work. We publish stories on a regular basis that help explain our grant-making approaches.