

External Review of WRI
Final report

13 December 2021

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Table of acronyms

AUDA NEPAD	African Union Development Agency – the New Partnership for African Development
ACE TAF	Africa Clean Energy Technical Assistance Facility
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CBD	Central Business District
CEIA	Clean Energy Investment Accelerator
COP	Conference of the Parties – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
CRP	Climate Resilience Practice
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CUT	Coalition for Urban Transitions
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAE	Energy Access Explorer
ETF	Equity Task Force
ER	External Review
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLW	Food Loss and Waste
FOLU	Food and Land Use Coalition
GCA	Global Commission on Adaptation
GEP	Gender Equity Practice
GFW	Global Forest Watch
GGTTT	Global Go To Think Tank
GHG	Green House Gas
GHGP	Green House Gas Protocol
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GLAD	Global Land Analysis and Deforestation
GSE	Gender and Social Equity
HR	Human Resources
HLP	High Level Panel
IO	International Office
KP	Knowledge Products
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MfR	Managing for Results
NCE	New Climate Economy
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee

PACT	Project for Advancing Climate Transparency
PGSE	Poverty, Gender, Social Equity
PMEL	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
RDI	Research Data Innovation
SBTi	Science Based Targets
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound
TASCA	Tracking and Strengthening Climate Action
UN	United Nations
WRI	World Resources Institute

Executive Summary

The External Review (ER) of WRI’s 2018-2022 Strategic Plan took place April to November 2021. The objective was to provide a high-level assessment of WRI’s progress implementing the Plan. The ER covered work undertaken by WRI’s Programs, Centers, International Offices, Delivery Platforms, and Core Functions. It included an assessment of the integration of the cross-cutting themes of poverty, gender, and social equity within WRI’s work. The ER also included an in-depth review of the Africa strategy.

Methodology

To answer the ER questions,¹ the ER team collected data using the following instruments and used the data in combination where possible, to ensure that inferences from the data, and responses to the Review Questions, were as robust as possible.

- **Document Review:** We reviewed multiple WRI documents, including team strategies, annual plans and the Progress Against 5-Year Strategy documents, which comprise targets and indicators on desired outcomes, using an adapted version of a World Bank methodology.²
- **Interviews:** We conducted semi-structured interviews with 59 WRI staff and 4 Board members. We also conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with individuals external to WRI including: (i) Donors (9); (ii) NGOs/CSOs (9); (iii) Private Sector (5); (iv) Multilaterals (5); and (v) Policymakers (12).
- **Focus Group Discussions:** We conducted 11 internal Focus Group Discussion(s) (FGD) involving 104 people and 1 external FGD with francophone stakeholders in Africa.
- **All-Staff Survey:** We designed and distributed a confidential all-staff survey via SurveyMonkey to gather perspectives on the Review Questions. The survey received 520 responses, which amounted to an effective response rate of 33%.

Note: By analyzing and aggregating results across all of WRI’s teams’ progress reports, the ER team was able to provide WRI, for the first time, with a single quantitative and synthetic snapshot of its progress towards achievement of the 2018-22 Strategic Plan

We found that WRI remains a critical player in the global environment and development space as a source of energy and ideas, a communicator of insights and priorities, and a convener of actors through its Programs and Platforms. It is truly a key player in the global effort to resolve issues affecting humanity and our planet. WRI “shoots for the stars” and must not lose this ambition, even this means that it will tend to fail more often than other organizations.

However, there are risks and tensions that need to be addressed in the next Strategic Cycle. First, with the rapid growth in size and the expansion in its reach, the risk of losing focus has increased just as time is running out and the world needs unprecedented focus. WRI thus needs to prioritize so that it can both maintain standards, including excellence in research, and act with urgency. Second, much of what WRI achieves is only possible because of its access to unrestricted funding which funds core functions and other vital activities. Yet WRI core functions are failing to keep up with the growing demands of delivery

¹ The External Review questions were designed to throw light on the OECD DAC principles of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and equity.

² Results in this External Review are considered achieved where X (denoting results) $\geq 100\%$ (of target); on track where $75\% \leq X < 100\%$; mostly on track where $50\% \leq X < 75\%$; partially on track where $25\% \leq X < 50\%$; and off track where $X < 25\%$.

and financial reserves are still only 11% of budgeted expenses i.e., 1.3 months' worth of budgeted expenses – well short of the Board's (already modest) 15% (two months) target.

WRI also needs to think deeply about how it measures its results more meaningfully, including vital information on behind-the-scenes advocacy and influence, and its contribution to key higher level outcomes that matter. This is not an easy challenge. WRI's challenge is to develop a way of measuring its impact that recognizes the organization's upstream position in the overall development value chain while providing a reliable measure of accountability. WRI occupies a special niche in the environment/development space often working as a broker at the interface between multiple other partners. It is more "B2B" than "B2C". As such WRI and its funders may need to look more at the number and quality of its institutional relationships (is WRI dealing with the right organizations in the right way? Is it influencing and activating them?) rather than 'retail' level results on the ground that are often not within WRI's gift.

With power and influence comes responsibility. There is a disconnect in some instances between how WRI sees itself, and its mode of working in partnership, and how external partners describe it especially partners with less power and influence but valuable and important contributions to make. Yet WRI risks losing its innovative edge unless it connects better with partners outside of established/conventional networks. WRI should have the confidence to be humble, to push for radical transparency in areas where it fails and to continue to learn and improve. It risks not knowing what is working and what is not unless it strengthens its ability to monitor and evaluate its impact.

Review Question 1 - Results

The 2018-2022 Strategic Plan is 'Mostly on Track'. Across the Programs, Centers, Core Functions, and International Offices, WRI had achieved 71.4% of its targets by end-October 2021. Given that the 5-Year Strategic Plan is in its fourth year, WRI is only slightly below expected progress for this point in time. Forests (95.9%), Oceans (77.0%), Food (76.8%), Finance (75.0%) and Business (72.8%) have performed particularly strongly. The India office stands out as the International Office that has progressed the most (92.6%). Underpinning WRI's results is the production of knowledge products (KP). Some 80% of WRI's 2020 Top Outcomes were squarely rooted in knowledge products. A similar percentage of staff feel that their Team's KPs have influenced official policymakers (and 72% and 57% respectively in the case of CSOs and businesses). Many external stakeholders confirmed the importance of these KPs.

WRI faces several medium-term challenges as it seeks to further improve these results. Ambition should be coupled with realism when it comes to targets. Too many targets (over 15%) in the current Results Frameworks are unachievable or otherwise difficult to measure and hence not useful. In addition there is a need to: (i) ensure that there is a more coherent and effective alignment of strategy, budget, and people across teams in order to support WRI's delivery around the world at global, national and local levels; (ii) ensure that Programs and Centers work towards joint targets to reduce the tendency to operate in silos; and (iii) partner more with local and community organizations in the Global South that can help WRI convert its upstream influence into concrete and sustainable impact on the ground.

Review Question 2 – Core Functions

WRI has invested heavily in its Core Functions over the course of the Strategic Plan, with many new staff being hired and processes and systems strengthened. The Core Functions have made good progress towards their strategic objectives with 60.2% achievement. Yet, capacity in the Core Functions has generally not kept up with growth elsewhere in WRI. There is thus a need for new instruments and approaches to increase unrestricted funding to help WRI keep pace with growing Program demand.

Other priorities include: in Communications, improving timeliness to better influence decision-makers; in HR, increasing transparency around promotions; and in RDI (Research Data Innovation), improving research skills for more staff upstream and the placement of staff with “sign-off” capabilities directly within the Programs, Centers and International Offices (IOs). WRI also needs to better capture and report the impact of its work including through evaluations that promote learning and course correction. To address this, donors should support a step-change in resourcing of PMEL (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning), and in Managing for Results (MfR) in its capacity as the function that can support this. Funding for MEL needs to be directly integrated into Program budgets. There is also a need for a rapid systemization of data collection and mandatory roll-out of the new DevResults system. There is also a need for better networking across core functions to optimize delivery of WRI’s strategic imperatives e.g., Operations with MfR to create a project database.

Review Question 3 – Poverty, Gender & Social Equity (PGSE)

Evidence of commitment to PGSE has been growing rapidly in recent years. However, teams reported that they were not methodically collecting quantitative and/or qualitative data to measure the impact of WRI’s work. There is a need for greater baseline understanding, and contextual analysis of, poverty, gender, and social inclusion in the areas (thematic and geographical) in which WRI operates. Applying more meaningful indicators would allow WRI to better track and access progress towards PGSE outcomes. The annual top outcomes and outcome celebration event could be utilized more to convey WRI’s contribution to social equity outcomes, to reflect the elevation of equity as a key focus area of WRI.

The Equity Task Force (ETF), now subsumed into the Equity Center, offers great potential to ensure that PGSE is fully embedded across and throughout the organization. The objective of the ETF must be to ensure that *all* staff understand that they have an important role to play in WRI’s PGSE agenda. To ensure this is realized, the capacity and resources of the ETF and related initiatives must be bolstered. Tools and indicators being developed by the ETF together with MfR must also become a priority ask for both Directors and the Board –to serve as an accountability mechanism for WRI.

Review Question 4 – WRI in Africa

WRI Africa’s office is ‘mostly on track’ to achieve the ‘we will’ statements set out in the WRI in Africa strategy, meeting 62.7% of its targets. The Energy and Cities Programs have had the greatest success among Programs in terms of results achieved. Staff involved with Africa work feel that the Africa office has done well at developing partnerships with pan-African, regional, and local organizations, and excelled at being inclusive. It has done comparatively less well in stabilizing the number of countries in which WRI is engaged in Africa, as well as promoting South-South cooperation. The former is a particularly important structural point. Although WRI Africa has developed a regional strategy, and invested heavily in technical capacity and operational support, it has few tools available to ensure that wider WRI programming is aligned with the priorities of the Africa strategy (e.g., limiting its engagement to a select number of countries). Despite strong progress, feedback from interviews as well as self-assessment in the Building Block process indicate that further strengthening of the Core Functions of the Africa office, especially in Program Management (including PMEL capacity), Development, and RDI, is still needed.

Review Question 5 – Delivery Platforms

WRI’s Delivery Platforms generate momentum and provide a rhythm to WRI’s work and that of their partners. They are important mechanisms for creating intellectual and social capital of lasting value and for delivering on and scaling up initiatives for greater impact and we saw many individual examples of

impact (e.g. NCE, GFW, AFR 100 and others). Most platforms, however, do not have well developed targets. Better tracking and demonstrating results in platforms are therefore a priority. Other areas where WRI can improve its management of Platforms, include: (i) strengthening oversight of the number of Platforms and quality of their results; (ii) integrating poverty and Gender and Social Equity (GSE) more systematically; and (iii) diversifying the range of stakeholders engaged with by the Platforms.

Top 10 Recommendations

(a long list of recommendations, of which these are the most important, is included at the end of the Conclusions section of this report)

- WRI should explore how to better align strategy, budget, and people across the organizational matrix to achieve a more coherent and cohesive offer that meets demand at global, national, and local levels as effectively and efficiently as possible. Core functions need to be better networked e.g., Operations with MfR to develop an integrated project database that supports WRI's strategic imperatives.
- To ensure adequate, unrestricted funding to support the new Strategic Plan, and financial reserves, WRI should consider convening a roundtable of current and potential bi/ multilateral funders, as well as other mechanisms, to grow this critical resource.
- WRI needs to energetically implement the key proposals of the Equity Task Force, including the use of Markers for gender and social equity, to help ensure that success is recognized; top outcomes reward contributions to equity; and efforts to bolster staff capacity and capabilities are sustained.
- WRI should rethink the targets it uses to measure organizational progress under the Strategic Plan, including developing meaningful measures of higher-level impact, as well as better ways of aggregating the results of Teams' 5-Year plans.
- There is a need for a step-change in funding, resourcing, and support for MEL across the organization. All grant agreements should include provisions for MEL; Directors should be held responsible for integrating MEL into their programs' work; and projects and programs should be required to use DevResults, the system that WRI has already invested in, to ensure consistently high standards across the matrix.
- WRI should undertake a review of its governance arrangements, including its IO Boards, to ensure that they have the diverse perspectives, skills, fundraising capabilities, and experience to ensure WRI remains equipped in the face of its growing global agenda.
- There is a need to strengthen organization-wide capability to manage the appropriate overall balance between research quality and timeliness of WRI knowledge products.
- WRI should explore developing a WRI Africa Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Partnership comprising leading NGOs in countries of focus in Africa to stimulate demand for implementation of policies/plans and act as a bridge to Development Banks and other funders.
- There should be a presumption of a time limit to WRI's involvement in all Platforms, which would then require an explicit decision to extend its role at a formal mid-term review.

- WRI should increase the transparency of its promotion decisions including ensuring that promotion criteria are objective and well understood, and that the application of these criteria is seen to be fair.

Introduction

This Report has been prepared by Agulhas Applied Knowledge and OpenCities (External Review Team). It provides a high-level assessment of WRI's progress in implementing its 2018-2022 Strategic Plan. The Review also generates learnings and makes recommendations to support WRI's future program delivery and impact.

Scope as set out in RFP

WRI's Request for Proposal (reissued on January 15, 2021) set out the scope of the Review as follows:

'The external review will provide a high-level assessment of WRI progress in implementing the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan. The effectiveness, relevance, coherence, and efficiency of WRI's implementation of the programmatic work will be assessed. The findings of the review will inform WRI's ongoing implementation of the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan as well as the development of the upcoming 2023-2028 Strategic Plan. The Review will include the following components, with indicative level of effort in parentheses:

1. A high-level assessment of WRI's progress implementing its 2018-2022 Strategic Plan: (80%) including programmatic strategies for delivering on the seven global challenges, covering work undertaken by WRI's Programs, Centers, International Offices and delivery Platforms; programmatic results to date against the outcome indicators and targets specified in the Results Framework of the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, with particular attention to how and to what extent the Platforms³ contribute to the targets and outcomes in the Results Framework; an assessment of the inclusion of the cross-cutting issues of poverty and gender; and recommendations on improving programmatic and implementation effectiveness in achieving Outcomes. Further, included in this assessment will be a review of the effectiveness and efficiency of WRI's Core Functions (Communications, Development, Human Resources, Managing for Results, Operations, and Research, Data and Innovation) in contributing to and supporting delivery on the seven global challenges. Where appropriate, comparisons with peer organizations may be helpful.

2. An in-depth review of the Africa Strategy: (20%) an assessment of progress implementing "WRI in Africa," its 5-Year Strategy; including the cross-cutting themes of poverty and gender; and how effective the Global Programs, Centers and other relevant WRI-hosted Platforms were in contributing to WRI Africa's Outputs and Outcomes.

³ The assessment of Platforms contribution to WRI's Results Framework includes those Platforms that are WRI-owned (e.g. Aqueduct, Global Forest Watch, etc.) as well as those that are co-owned by WRI (e.g. AFR100, Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA), the Partnership for Accelerating a Circular Economy (PACE), the NDC Partnership (NDCP), the Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G), the New Climate Economy (NCE), the Coalition for Urban Transitions (CUT), the New Urban Mobility Alliance (NUMO), the Science Based Target Initiative (SBTi), and the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), etc.)

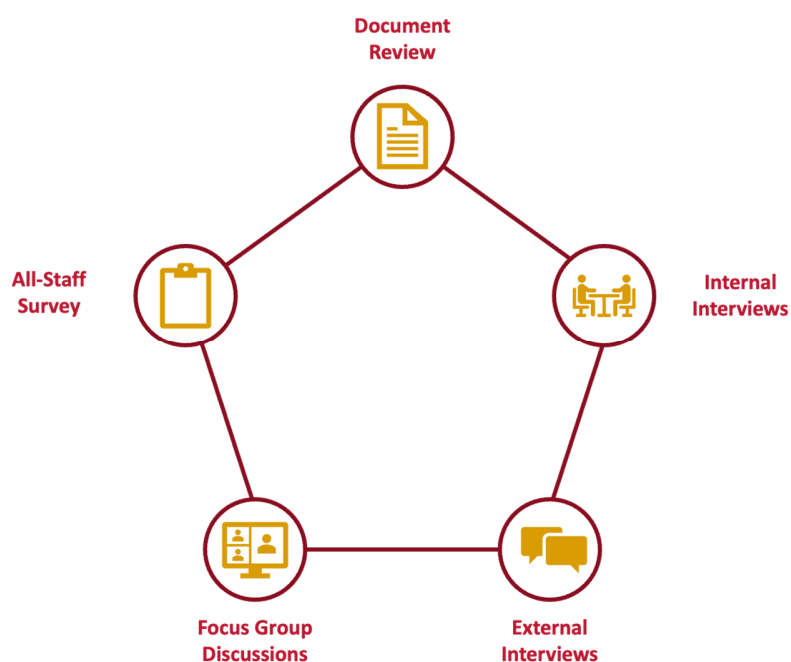
In the above components, the review will provide an assessment of WRI's response to, and progress made against, the recommendations outlined in the 2016 External Review with special attention to the inclusion of the cross-cutting issues of poverty, gender, and rights.

COVID-19 Implications: With the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, WRI has embarked on a serious effort to shift and adjust to the new realities and ways of working to achieve our objectives. While the overall transformations that need to take place remain the same, the strategy to achieve those transformations is different. COVID-19 implications should be taken into account in the external review, where possible, including in assessing WRI's response and agility in shifting strategy to meet new realities.'

The Review had three phases: (i) an Inception Phase from April 2021 to June 2021, (ii) a Data Collection Phase from June 2021 to October 2021, and (iii) a Drafting, Quality Assurance, and Validation Phase during October and early November 2021.

The inception phase began in April 2021 following approval of the Agulhas Applied Knowledge/OpenCities proposal and ended in late June with the delivery and approval of an Inception Note. The initial scope was refined during the inception phase in meetings with WRI and Core Donors, as well as through detailed written feedback on an initial draft of the Inception Note. The Inception Note also set out an approach for the Review that was agreed between WRI and the External Review Team. This approach has closely guided the work of the External Review Team during the research and drafting phase.

Figure 1: Methodology Components



The ER Team adopted a participatory and transparent approach throughout the process. This approach included multiple discussions with WRI's Executive and Management Teams and other staff at the beginning of the process, during the evaluation, and at the end to share and validate findings. The ER

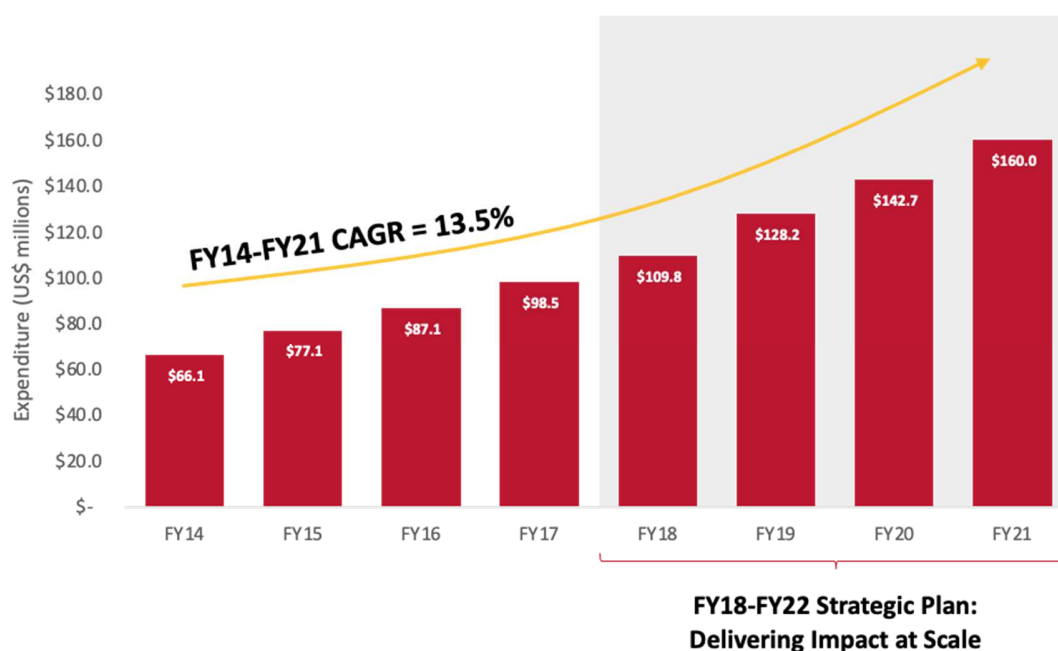
Team has been ably supported by the Managing for Results Team throughout the process, particularly Becky Marshall, Nina Ullery, and Stephanie Victoria.

The key elements of our methodology are summarized in Figure 1 above. Further detail is provided in the Technical Annex.

Context

Nearly four years after the Plan was written, COVID-19 has pushed many economies, social norms, and health systems to breaking point and changed some of the underlying assumptions upon which the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan was based. It has also overlaid, and in many cases compounded, the Challenges that lie at the heart of WRI's core mandate and is expected to have a profound impact, which may include some positive opportunities, on the landscape for the organization's work. The impacts of the pandemic will be felt long into the future and will have consequences for WRI's ability to address the Global Challenges that underlie its ambitious mission.

Figure 2: Comparison of WRI Growth in Spending during the Current Strategy period with Previous Strategy period⁴



WRI has grown rapidly during the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan period, including throughout the period of the pandemic, with annual spending increasing from US\$110 million in FY18 to a projected US\$160 million in FY21 (see Figure 2). Reviewing the extent to which WRI's Core Functions have responded to this growth have formed an important component of this Review.

⁴ Source: Presentation to External Review Team by WRI on April 1, 2021

The 2018-2022 Strategic Plan

The 2018-2022 Strategic Plan seeks to address seven **“Global Challenges”** relating to: Food, Forests, Water, Energy, Sustainable Cities, Climate, and Oceans (adopted at the outset of the current Strategic Plan). These Challenges are all, individually and jointly, profoundly significant for the health of the planet.

Key to the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan is WRI’s “Count It, Change It, Scale It” approach which aims to address the political and financial barriers, psychological inertia, vested interests, and outdated infrastructure that are major barriers to progress. WRI explains the approach as follows:

- **Count It:** WRI starts with data and information as the foundation of its work and conducts independent and unbiased research to identify pressing issues, design, test and evaluate proposed solutions, and share findings with target audiences and the public.
- **Change It:** WRI works with leaders in the public and private sector to enable change, testing their ideas in complex, messy, real-world situations in order to assess and apply what “works” and make recommendations for more effective policies and programs.
- **Scale It:** Solving today’s pressing “Global Challenges” requires an organization that can work at pace to scale what “works”. WRI identifies and overcomes barriers to change so that proven solutions spread quickly and widely.

As noted further in this report, including in the annexed section on methodology, the Review has sought to assess WRI’s approach and performance with respect to building local ownership and fostering the rapid spread of solutions.

WRI has also identified seven **“hallmarks”** of successful programming for its current Strategic Plan:

- Focusing on **catalyzing the systemic changes** required to address urgent global challenges;
- Increasing focus on **jobs, health, gender, social equity, and human security**;
- Being at the forefront of the **data revolution**;
- Making the best use of WRI’s **global network**;
- Being **disciplined** in choosing what we do, creating clear strategies for turning ideas into action;
- Acting with more **agility**, accepting more **risk**, and managing it better;
- **Equipping for the “new world”** in which WRI operates.

Report Structure

The main body of this report is structured around five key review questions:

1. What outputs and outcomes has WRI already achieved? Which are on track, partially on track, or off track from the Strategic Plan? To what extent are GSE reflected in these outputs and outcomes?

(Related OECD DAC criteria: effectiveness and equity.)

2. How effective and efficient are WRI's Core Functions in supporting delivery of the seven Global Challenges? How well have they supported consolidation of growth to date and how well-placed are they to help support future growth in funding and staffing for WRI overall; and WRI in Africa?

- 2.1 To what extent have WRI's knowledge products advanced WRI's goals and been impactful? How can WRI ensure that the knowledge products are disseminated and utilized for maximum benefit? To what extent are GSE reflected in WRI's KPs?

- 2.2 To what extent do current planning, monitoring, evaluating and learning approaches support performance in WRI? How well has WRI responded to changing donor reporting requirements? To what extent are GSE reflected in WRI's MEL practices?

(Related OECD DAC criteria: effectiveness, efficiency and equity.)

3. How and to what extent do the cross-cutting themes (poverty, gender and social equity) inform and influence all of WRI's work?

(Related OECD DAC criteria: equity.)

4. What outputs and outcomes has WRI achieved in the area of "WRI in Africa," its 5-Year Strategy (2018-2022), including the cross-cutting themes of poverty and gender?

- 4.1 How effective were the Global Programs, Centers and other relevant WRI-hosted Platforms in contributing to WRI Africa's Outputs and Outcomes?

- 4.2 What has WRI learned from its experience under the 2018 WRI in Africa Strategy, including where it added most value?

- 4.3 How have the lessons learned from the previous strategy been applied in the new "Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation So Africa's People and Landscapes Flourish, World Resources Institute (WRI) Strategy for Africa"?

- 4.4 How are these lessons affecting the integration of GSE in WRI's work in Africa?

(Related OECD DAC criteria: relevance, cohesion, effectiveness and equity.)

5. How and to what extent are Platforms contributing to WRI's Strategic Plan? To what extent are GSE reflected in these contributions?

(Related OECD DAC criteria: relevance, cohesion, effectiveness and equity.)

Annexes are contained in a separate report and provide further detail on: i) methodology; ii) Team strategic plan results; iii) interviews undertaken; and iv) uses of core funding.

1. What outputs and outcomes has WRI achieved? Which are on track, partially on track, or off track from the Strategic Plan?

Overview of Section

The 2018-2022 Strategic Plan is ‘Mostly On Track’. Across the Programs (or “Global Challenges”), Centers, Core Functions, and International Offices, WRI had achieved 71.3% of its targets. Given that the 5-Year Strategic Plan is in its fourth year, WRI is only slightly below expected levels in linear terms. The International Offices have made substantial progress, having achieved 77.1% of their objectives. The Programs and Centers have achieved 70.3% and 61.8% of their objectives, respectively.

Part of the reason that the International Offices appear to perform more strongly is because their objectives are more specific, making measurement easier and progress more attainable. Out of the International Offices, the India office has performed the best. Within the Programs and Centers, Forests, Oceans, Food, Finance and Business are particularly strong performers. Some of the Programs and Centers are affected by poor MEL systems (e.g., Cities and Governance), but have nevertheless made significant strides in meeting their global agendas.

WRI also faces four medium term challenges as it strives to deliver results:

- As WRI grows, and the urgency of addressing the Global Challenges increases, it risks losing its connection to the strong research roots that made it unique in the first place, unless it carefully manages this tilt.
- WRI has also in recent years rapidly scaled up its international presence, but it is still striving to strike an appropriate balance in the relationship between WRI Global and the International Offices.
- WRI also faces the challenge of realizing synergies across the seven Global Challenges and the Teams working towards these challenges.
- Partnership is core to the way WRI works, but it should do more to partner more widely, outside its usual circle, to maintain innovation and build capability on the ground.

Progress Against 2018-2022 Strategic Plan Outcome Targets

Overall, the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan is ‘Mostly on Track’ in terms of achievement. Across the Programs (or “Global Challenges”), Centers, Core Functions,⁵ and International Offices, WRI had achieved an estimated 71.3% of its targets (see Figure 3).⁶ Given that the 5-Year Strategic Plan is in its fourth year, WRI is slightly below where it should be. This is, of course, not how all WRI’s work is delivered. Sometimes Teams achieve their outcomes in non-linear ways. Certain outcomes may have prolonged gestational periods and then pivot points in the closing stages of the Strategy. Hence, there is still time for WRI to deliver on the full ambition of the Strategic Plan.




























Out of the Programs, Food, Forests and Oceans stand out as performing particularly strongly. The Forests Team, for instance, has achieved 95.9% of its targets. Indeed, it had already fully achieved its objectives in terms of strengthening accountability in the forest sector using Global Forest Watch (GFW); encouraging responsibility in supply chains; empowering forest defenders to combat deforestation; and in restoring forests. Food, on the other hand, has been successful in convincing businesses to tackle Food Loss & Waste (FLW) (e.g., via Champions 12.3) and influencing governments to develop action plans to create more sustainable food and land use systems through the Food &



⁵ Results for the Core Functions are presented in detail in Review Question 2



⁶ Please refer to Annex 2 for full detail of the methodology used to assess achievement of results.


Land Use Coalition (FOLU). Likewise, Oceans has successfully convinced 14 heads of state to commit to sustainably managing their water resources by 2025. Cities, Climate, Energy and Water have all had more muted success, but still nevertheless have attained areas of major achievement.

Figure 3: Progress Against 2018-2022 Strategic Plan Outcome Targets as of November 2021⁷

Team	Score	Judgement	Team	Score	Judgement
2018-2022 Strategic Plan	71.3%		International Offices	77.1%	
Programs	70.3%		- Africa	62.7%	
- Cities	58.6%		- Brazil	86.0%	
- Climate	63.6%		- China	82.4%	
- Energy	71.9%		- Europe	50.0%	
- Food	76.8%		- India	90.3%	
- Forests	95.9%		- Indonesia	82.2%	
- Oceans	77.0%		- Mexico	68.5%	
- Water	60.1%		- United States	85.4%	
Centers	61.8%		Core Functions	60.2%	
- Business	72.8%		- Communications	76.4%	
- Economics	N/A	N/A	- Development	55.9%	
- Finance	75.0%		- Managing for Results	N/A	N/A
- Governance	44.0%		- Operations	83.3%	
			- Research, Data & Innovation	63.9%	

 = Achieved
  = On Track

 = Mostly on Track
  = Partially on Track

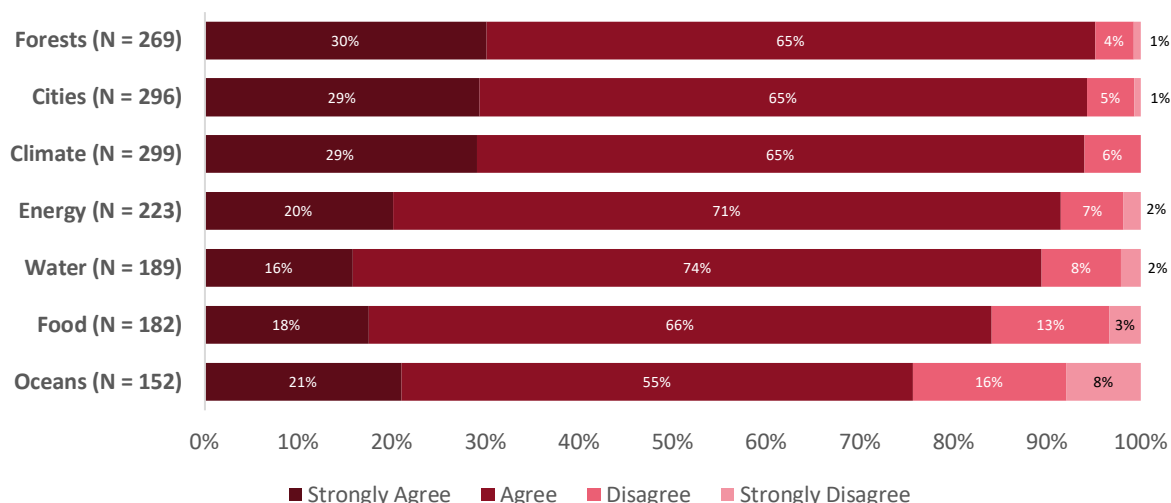
 = Off Track
 N/A = Document Unavailable

Interestingly, our analysis of the Progress Against 5-Year Strategy documents does not always match staff perceptions of where WRI is having the most impact. For example, staff felt that the Cities and Climate Programs were making some of the strongest contributions to outcomes in the countries or regions in which they work in contrast to the picture that emerges from our analysis above (see Figure 4). This potentially points to varying strengths of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) functions across the Teams. Forests, which comes out top both in terms of strategic results and staff perceptions, is the *only* Program with a dedicated MEL staff member, enabling the team to better capture the progress it is making in its results framework. Cities, on the other hand, has 12 non-Verifiable indicators in its framework, which reduces the ER team's ability to assess to progress completely. See Section 2 for a more a detailed discussion of MEL practices across WRI.

⁷ Figure 3 presents the External Review Team's assessment of the overall progress of each of the Programs (or "Global Challenges"), Centers, Core Functions, and International Offices based on their Progress Against 5-Year Strategy documents. As per the methodology outlined in Annex 2, scores are calculated by taking an average of *all* progress against individual Outcome targets weighted equally within each Team. If, for instance, a Team's Progress Against 5-Year Strategy document contained five individual Outcome targets that had been 0%, 20%, 40%, 60%, and 80% achieved, the score is simply calculated as the average of these five numbers – that is, 40%. Note that 'Non-Verifiable' targets are specifically treated as 0% achieved according to this methodology, whilst Outcomes that are overachieved are capped at 100% in order to remove the influence of outliers on the assessment. The overall score is then assessed against an adapted version of the World Bank's methodology for assessing progress against country strategies. If $S < 25\%$ the Team is judged to be "Off Track"; if $25\% \leq S < 50\%$ the Team is judged to be "Partially on Track"; if $50\% \leq S < 75\%$ the Team is "Mostly on Track"; if $75\% \leq S < 100\%$ the Team is "On Track"; and if $S \geq 100\%$ then the Team has "Achieved" its targets.

Figure 4: WRI Staff Perspectives on Program Performance⁸

"Since 2018, WRI has contributed significantly to important outcomes in the countries/regions in which I work in the following programs."



Out of the Centers, Finance and Business stand out as performing particularly strongly. The Finance Team has achieved 75.0% of its targets as of October 2021. It had, for instance, fully achieved its ambition of building three developing countries' capacities to plan, seek, and mobilize finance for more effective Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) implementation (Fiji, Guatemala, and India). The Business Team, on the other hand, has achieved only 72.8% of its targets but has made significant progress in its Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) where it has influenced 1,878 companies to adopt an SBT at the time of writing, and 934 of them have been approved. Governance lags Finance and Business, with an achievement rate of 44.0%. As in the case of Cities, a significant determinant of Governance's score is the inclusion of several non-Verifiable indicators in its results framework. It has made the most progress within its Climate Resilience Practice (CRP), where it influenced Costa Rica and India to commit to transformative adaptation through new plans, policies, strategies, and other mechanisms for addressing the impacts of climate.

Progress as measured at the level of the International Offices appears to be more substantial than progress as measured at the individual Program/Center level. According to the Progress Against 5-Year Strategy documents, the International Offices have achieved 77.1% of their targets. Part of the reason that the International Offices appear more successful than the Global Challenges/Centers may be because their objectives are more specific and less ambitious, making measurement easier and progress more attainable. The India Office has been the most successful, making significant strides in areas such as restoration and cities, where the mobility agenda has been particularly welcomed. Brasil, China, Indonesia, and the United States have performed similarly well. Africa, Europe and Mexico have performed somewhat less well. In Mexico, performance has been undermined by several lagging indicators contained within the 'Climate' workstream, as well as the 'Economic Development & Land Use' and 'Mobility' workstreams. The latter is surprising given the office's roots in Embarq. In Africa

⁸ Source: WRI All-Staff Survey

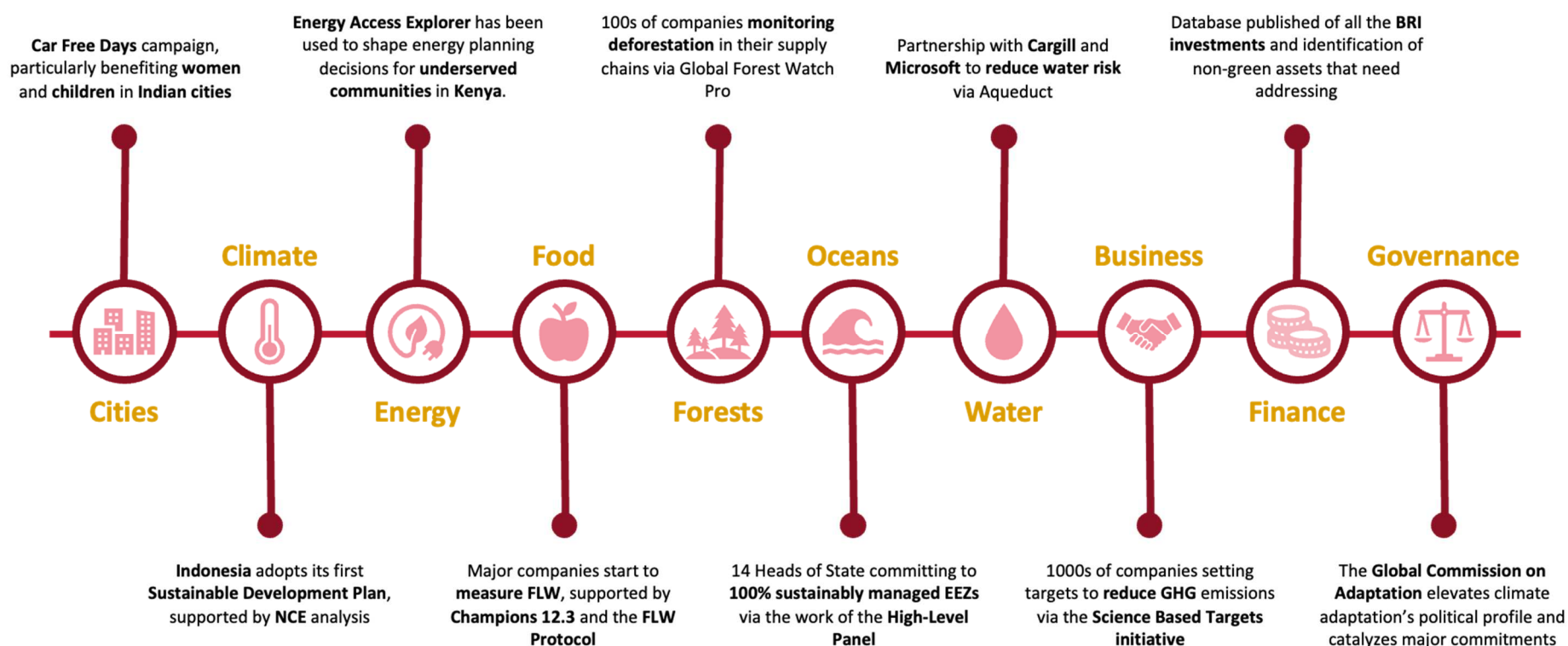
and Europe, on the other hand, performance has been undermined by the inclusion of several non-verifiable indicators rather than any marked difficulties in delivering their work Programs.⁹

However, the Progress Against 5-Year Strategy documents on which the above analysis is based, does not always fully capture the full scope of WRI's work. There are numerous other examples of important outcomes which the External Review Team has been able to validate via external interviews (see Figure 5).¹⁰

- **Cities:** Several of the Cities Team's 'Mobility' Initiatives have proven popular in the International Offices. WRI India, for instance, praised the 'Streets for All' campaign in its reimagining of streets as spaces for people instead of vehicles. Dovetailing with the 'Streets for All' work is that of 'Car Free Days'. Since the launch of Car Free Days in Gurgaon in 2013, the initiative has expanded to almost 75 Indian cities. It is a simple measure, requiring only the closing of a small number of streets. Yet, its simplicity is what makes it so effective as a conversation starter. The Car Free Days Initiative has helped city officials and pedestrians imagine what cities may look like without cars. Cities such as Bhopal have now created dedicated cycling infrastructure based on the Gurgaon model.
- **Climate:** One major outcome that was frequently lauded by internal and external stakeholders was the New Climate Economy's (NCE) support to Indonesia to develop a Low Carbon Development Plan. The project was initiated by the Indonesian government to identify development policies that maintain economic growth, alleviate poverty, and help meet sector-level development targets, while simultaneously helping the country achieve its climate objectives and preserve and improve the country's natural resources. As a result of WRI's assistance, the Government put climate at the core of its 5-Year Plan and, for the first time, monitored greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions along with traditional indicators such as GDP growth, inflation, poverty reduction, and employment.

⁹ Note that in the case of Europe the Progress Against 5-Year Strategy document includes a total of two indicators with one of them non-verifiable. This immediately limits its score to a maximum of 50% based on the methodology as detailed in Annex 2 and the footnote above. Clearly, this does not provide a complete and accurate picture of all progress to date in the Europe office. Europe's relatively low score is therefore more a reflection of poor-quality outcomes and indicators chosen at the time of preparing its Progress Against 5-Year Strategy document.

¹⁰ The following bullets provide detail on outcomes brought to the Review Team's attention as part of its Outcome Harvesting approach. For each of the Programs/ Centers, the outcome represents the one most frequently cited by external stakeholders during interviews or Focus Group Discussions. They are the clearest examples of WRI's achievements to the outside world, though may not necessarily represent the areas in which it has had the most impact in practice. Nevertheless, many of the following outcomes do align well with those picked during WRI's Top Outcome process over the course of the Strategic Plan suggesting that they are particularly striking examples of the Institute's work. For more detail on the Outcome Harvesting approach please see Annex 2.

Figure 5: Selection of Outcome Harvested Results across WRI Programs and Centers¹¹

¹¹ Source: ER Team Analysis of Results Frameworks, Interviews, Focus Group Discussions

- **Energy:** The Energy Team's Energy Access Explorer (EAE) Platform is used to visualize the state of energy access in unserved and underserved areas, putting economic development and equity front and center in the energy agenda. The tool has been especially helpful for developing countries, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Through the EAE tool, WRI has been able to map out the demand-side of the energy experience in Africa and identify the many institutions and individuals that lack access to energy. This has provided important direction for energy planners aiming to increase access to electricity for hard-to-reach populations. In Kenya, for instance, the EAE tool has been used to develop sub-national energy plans. The Energy Team specifically assisted with the development of the Kitui and Narok counties' plans.
- **Food:** Champions 12.3 is a coalition of governments, businesses, international organizations, research institutions, and civil society organizations dedicated to mobilizing action toward SDG Target 12.3. WRI's Food Team acts as the Secretariat for the Platform. WRI was praised by external stakeholders active in the Food Loss and Waste space for its clear-sightedness to spot an emerging opportunity to take the lead in terms of SDG Target 12.3. Champions 12.3 is now positioned as the primary initiative to achieve change in the food loss and waste space and was complimented by one stakeholder for its ability to convene an "incredible" network of actors. Another important innovation of Champions 12.3 has been the "roadmap" of milestones based on the Target-Measure-Act that countless businesses have endorsed – an example of WRI not only identifying problems, but also identifying solutions.
- **Forests:** Global Forest Watch Pro is one of the Forest Team's most recent initiatives. It was cited as an important tool in monitoring supply chains by members of the business community interviewed by the External Review Team. Major producers such as Mondelez, Unilever, and Walmart are now using GFW Pro to track deforestation in their supply chains. In particular, the tool has helped them understand the impact of palm oil mills on deforestation and help shift their use to other alternatives. These corporations have also pressured their suppliers to be on the GFW Pro system, setting up a cascade of suppliers using the tool. One major international food corporation interviewed indicated that information that the GFW Pro provides on land-use change and deforestation is truly invaluable.
- **Oceans:** The Oceans Team's High-Level Panel (HLP) for a Sustainable Ocean Economy has been one of WRI's most successful initiatives over the course of the Strategic Plan. Its inclusion as one of WRI's 'Top Outcomes' in 2020 is due to a commitment made by 14 heads of state to sustainably manage 100% of their Exclusive Economic Zones by 2025, guided by the development of Sustainable Ocean Plans. These Sustainable Ocean Plans will cover nearly 30 million km² – an area the size of Africa. If other leaders of coastal and ocean states respond to the High-Level Panel's call for further commitments, its potential to establish a sustainable ocean economy globally will be even greater.
- **Water:** Aqueduct is the Water Team's flagship initiative aimed at identifying water risks such as water stress, variability from season-to-season, pollution, and water access. Today, Aqueduct is being used regularly by 50+ major corporations. Recently, the Water Team has been able to attract Cargill and Microsoft to the Aqueduct Platform to set next-generation water targets. The use by some of the biggest corporations in the world sends a powerful signal to others to step up and use the Platform. One major corporation interviewed stated that WRI is the world leader in this space, setting the bar for best practice. The Water Team has also partnered closely with Cargill

in order to expand the Aqueduct Platform to identify water-related threats to and opportunities for agriculture and food security.

- **Business:** The SBTi provides companies with a clear methodology to understand how much of a reduction in carbon emissions is “enough”. It is a platform that is co-owned by WRI and others such as CDP, the United Nations Global Compact and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). One external interviewee indicated how the initiative is at the bedrock of how a company like Walmart operates. Walmart was the 26th company to set emissions reductions targets in line with the SBTi. Most of Walmart’s emissions are in its value chain, so the SBTi has inspired the company to put pressure on its suppliers via Project Gigaton. Project Gigaton now comprises more than 3,100 individual suppliers. Walmart has turned to WRI via Project Gigaton to further inform practices that they encourage suppliers to do and to create tools for suppliers.
- **Finance:** As part of its work on China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), WRI’s China office has briefed the Chinese Government on the proportion of fossil fuel-related investments made by BRI investors. The intention is to bring the issue to the Chinese Government’s attention in order to spur greener investment. This was done through the assistance of the Finance Center, which has published a database of all BRI Investments and identified which stakeholders are investing in non-green assets.
- **Governance:** The Global Commission on Adaptation is seen by external stakeholders as instrumental in shifting the pendulum in terms of the attention and finance that adaptation has within the climate space. It is still less than the attention given to mitigation, but WRI’s work is starting to change that. At COP26, adaptation and resilience formed a major part of the agenda, something for which WRI can, at least in part, take credit. Beyond raising the profile of adaptation, the Global Commission on Adaptation is also lauded for its mainstreaming of economic development and equity.

1.1 To what extent are cross-cutting themes reflected in these outputs and outcomes?

WRI aims to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include the themes of poverty reduction, gender and social equity at their center. In practice, and in response to the statement *“Since 2018, my team has had a significant positive impact on the following targeted communities/regions in which I work”*, teams do not yet feel they are having impact on cross-cutting themes through their work – reflecting the real challenges involved in mainstreaming cross-cutting issues, as well as a lag between investment in capacity and achievement of results.

Few of the 2018 five-year strategies and Annual Progress Against 5-Year Strategy documents contain many direct references to poverty, gender, or social equity related concepts. Strategic references to poverty, gender or social equity are summarized below:

The Governance Center’s strategic reporting, exceptionally, includes multiple references to poverty, gender, and social equity, consistent with the team’s explicit focus on such concepts. For example, the Governance Team supported the Energy Team’s work on expanding the use of Energy Access Explorer, though this is relatively new workstream (beginning in c. Nov 2021) so its contribution is not yet fully clear. The Governance Team is also aiming to enable communities to act on technical and policy based environmental information to address their concerns around poor environmental management. This was

meant to occur using the STRIPE methodology in such communities and the Governance team has fully achieved its ambition in this respect.

The integration of GSE concepts across WRI is another important goal of Governance’s work, although only partially on track in practice. The Governance Team did successfully integrate GSE approaches in three initiatives against a target of two: the new Africa strategy, the Cities’ program and the Cities4Forests platform. Ambitiously, the Governance Team also aspires to having 100% of WRI’s programming include social inclusion and equity. The Progress Against 5-Year Strategy document did not include data that could fully verify progress towards this target. However, according to WRI’s Publication Tracker, some 17% of publications, as of 2020, included GSE themes to a “strong” degree. Meanwhile, the ETF’s Project Mapping exercises showed that 60% of projects surveyed had attempted to address inequitable access to goods and services, but as few as 7% addressed other themes such as racial or caste-based inequality. The Governance Team also aimed to have WRI’s tools influence socially inclusive and equitable approaches to environmental challenges. However, the team recognized that this was unrealistic in practice. It was also non-verifiable because of a lack of both targets and data.

Among other Centers, Business has integrated poverty, gender, or social equity related concepts in its strategy and results framework to a moderate extent. It addresses all three concepts through an outcome aimed at enabling at least five industry-leading companies to double the proportion of their revenue generated from re-use business models that are explicitly designed to address climate change, poverty, and gender equity. The Business Team has found it difficult to track this target, but generally the re-use market is showing significant growth, though how much of this is related to integration of such concepts into business models is unclear. The Business Team also included a further outcome calling for WRI to set a new agenda prompting companies to look for systemic change rather than addressing symptoms of inequity. This was to be achieved through its Supply Chain Equity work and related reports. The Business Team is not yet able to track outcomes, as the workstream is still nascent.

The Finance Center has an outcome targeting one to two countries to develop insurance-related initiatives to strengthen their climate resilience, including to protect vulnerable populations. The team fully achieved its ambition in this respect. The Drua Incubator was relaunched in Fiji through the Finance Team’s research and support. The Finance Team worked with Fiji to create a new plan for the incubator and to access finance for the initiative, which seeks to coordinate access to disaster risk finance for Fiji.

The Cities program references equity in two outcomes in its reports on Progress Against 5-Year Strategy. These targeted: (i) changes in the narrative around social equity in cities driven by the World Resources Report; and (ii) the use of the World Resources Report by urban change agents to achieve more economically prosperous, environmentally sustainable and socially equitable cities for all. However, these outcomes were not associated with targets. The Cities Team ran several workshops to disseminate the findings of the World Resources Report to urban change agents, but there appear to be no data evidencing the impact of these workshops and their contribution to outcomes in the Cities Team Strategy.

Within Energy, the team’s report on Progress Against 5-Year Strategy document contains one reference to poverty. This consisted of an outcome on the use of the Energy Access Explorer tool to identify opportunities for investment in renewable energy to improve development outcomes and alleviate multi-modal poverty. The External Review Team found that the Energy Team had successfully encouraged some 73 sub-national, national, and global actors to use the tool against a target of 20, significantly overachieving in respect of the ambitions of the Strategic Plan. Interviews with the Energy Team and

external stakeholders confirmed the importance of the tool in alleviating the poverty and achieving equitable access to energy. (See Annex 3 for further detail on the achievements of the Energy Team in this respect.)

The Water program’s 5-Year Strategy Progress reports contain one reference to poverty. This consists of an outcome targeting US\$1 billion in development aid to countries most vulnerable to conflict and migration pressures due to water risk. In practice, the Water Team has only been able to raise and catalyze US\$10 million i.e., 1% of its target, although there is an aspiration to access additional foundation funding soon to catalyze further aid contributions.

Although cross-cutting themes were not well integrated into 5-year strategies and accompanying results frameworks, these themes clearly do feature centrally in many WRI engagements. The ER Team was able to collate examples of this work through focus groups, interviews and documentation. Examples include the following:

- **Gender Inclusion in Mobility Accelerator:** An accelerator program on Gender Inclusion in Mobility for mobility start-ups that are led by women entrepreneurs, promote women’s livelihoods, or provide transport services tailored for women’s travel partners and safety.
- **WRI Indonesia One Map:**¹² Supporting implementation of One Map at local jurisdiction through collaborative efforts, with the aim to accelerate equitable land distribution and to support local governments and private sectors to implement sustainability principles in activities.
- **Energy Access Explorer:**¹³ An open-source platform illustrating the state of energy access in unserved and underserved areas. Users of the platform can create custom analyses to identify and prioritize areas where energy markets can be expanded.
- **Transformations for a Sustainable Ocean Economy:**¹⁴ A Vision for Protection, Production and Prosperity: Ocean Equity forms one of the five identified critical areas required to achieve a sustainable ocean economy as part of the broader High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy.
- **Restoring Landscapes in India for Climate and Communities; Key Findings from Madhya Pradesh’s Sidhi District:**¹⁵ This report forms part of the Global Restoration Initiative within the Forest Program. The report authors integrated cross-cutting themes throughout the report; focussing on how restoration of landscapes can provide social benefits to the society.
- **The Global Commission on Adaptation; Principles for Locally Led Adaptation:**¹⁶ The eight principles for locally led adaption, co-developed with partners under the Global Commission on Adaptation. Over 70 organizations have joined WRI in endorsing these principles, committing to making changes and strengthening existing efforts to meet the urgent adaptation agenda.
- **Setting the Paris Agreement in Motion:**¹⁷ Key Requirements for the Implementation Guidelines: A working paper published as part of the Project for Advancing Climate Transparency (PACT). The working paper emphasises the need to review gender considerations, as well as assessment of the

¹² *One Map Initiative at the Local Level/Inisiatif Satu Peta di Tingkat Tapak*, WRI Indonesia, [link](#)

¹³ *Energy Access Explorer*, [link](#)

¹⁴ *Transformations for a Sustainable Ocean Economy: A Vision for Protection, Production and Prosperity*, High Level Plan for A Sustainable Ocean Economy, [link](#)

¹⁵ *Restoring Landscapes in India for Climate and Communities: Key Findings from Madhya Pradesh’s Sidhi District*, WRI India, [link](#)

¹⁶ *Principles for Locally Led Adaptation Action Statement of Endorsement*, Global Commission on Adaptation, [link](#)

¹⁷ *Setting the Paris Agreement in Motion: Key Requirements for the Implementation Guidelines*, Project for Advancing Climate Transparency (August 2018), [link](#)

integration/acknowledgement of indigenous, traditional and local knowledge in adaptation policies and actions.

There is also clear evidence of engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders, in particular Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and research institutions. For example, under the multi-year partner project on delivering water sensitive urban design demos in New Delhi, India, and the US Electric School Bus Initiative. Teams also stressed the importance and effectiveness of WRI equity work in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic and, in FGDs, said that they felt that WRI's contribution on equity issues, to combat aspects of the pandemic, has been significant. Crossing-cutting themes were found to be better reflected in team Annual Plans; particularly FY22. This is reflective of the concerted efforts WRI have made and invested in as part of WRI's narrative to *Build Back Better*, following the global pandemic in which COVID-19 has compounded challenges including gender and social equity.

1.2 Results: Additional insights

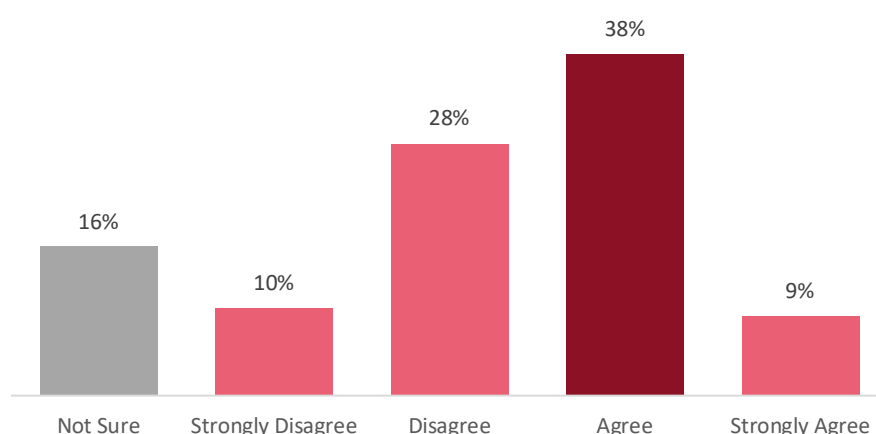
As WRI grows and the urgency of addressing the Global Challenges increases, it risks losing its connection to the strong research roots that made it unique in the first place. WRI's reputation and success have for years been grounded in its role as a trusted provider of independent, science-based, policy-relevant research and tools. WRI is regularly complimented by external stakeholders for its strength in producing compelling research, enabled by the expertise of its staff. WRI has a clear ability to turn its knowledge into action by making it easy to act on by decision-makers. This expertise is clearly complemented by WRI's access to decision-makers at the highest levels, enabling it to raise the profile of issues and set the agenda where it counts most. However, as WRI has grown and its focus dulled, there is a risk that its systems cannot ensure the same quality of research as expected of it. Staff's time is spread more and more thinly across an increasing number of Projects, undermining their ability to ensure work is backed up with quality research. Likewise, WRI has increasingly entered the world of donor-funded projects with its opportunities and challenges, including an urgency to deliver under timeframes that do not lend themselves to intensive research processes. Yet, at the same time, WRI needs ensure to that it is acting with the urgency required of the Global Challenges. Some staff felt that WRI's research is not as responsive to emerging themes and priorities as it could be. It should not let 'perfect be the enemy of the good' in this respect. There is a need for this trade off to be managed carefully, if WRI is to retain its reputation as a trusted source of credible information, whilst at once addressing the Global Challenges with the urgency they require.

WRI has also in recent years rapidly scaled up its international presence, but it is still striving to strike an appropriate balance in the relationship between WRI Global and the International Offices. WRI has invested heavily in realizing the "World" dimension of its name and it now has a major presence in nine countries, which distinguishes it from many other NGOs. Its Global Network enables the International Offices to benefit from shared expertise and offers opportunities to learn from one another. It also enables WRI to be connected to crucial issues in the environment-development space, driving change where it is needed the most. Yet, several International Offices see the relationship between the WRI Global and themselves as unclear. Programs that are being delivered within countries where WRI has an International Office, often appear to be owned primarily by WRI Global. The International Offices still have a culture of dependence on WRI Global, fostered by centralization of fundraising capacity and budgets within Washington DC. This has sometimes created an environment of competition between the International Offices for support from WRI Global. To make the best use of its International Offices, WRI needs to ensure that budgets and expertise are appropriately distributed across WRI in ways that foster collaboration and a less centrally driven environment. This will allow the International Offices to operate

more autonomously, decreasing transaction costs between them and the WRI Global. It will also allow them to offer more specialised expertise, ultimately improving their offerings within the countries in which they operate.

Figure 6: WRI Staff Perspectives on Collaboration across WRI¹⁸

"Collaboration between teams across the matrix is strong at WRI." (N = 469)



WRI also faces the challenge of realizing synergies across the seven Global Challenges and the teams working towards these challenges. That WRI can work across so many different subject areas is highly valued and there are good examples of strong cross-matrix working. The Cities4Forests Platform, for instance, integrates work across Cities, Forest, and Water. The new WRI Africa strategy organizes its work around three interconnected pillars for a more integrated approach. Yet only 47% of staff feel that collaboration between teams across the matrix is strong at WRI, compared to 38% who disagree (Figure 6).¹⁹ There is no obvious coordination mechanism or incentive to drive the sort of collaboration across teams that is expected in a matrixed organization. Though WRI is seeking to address this through a strengthened Annual Planning process, it is unlikely that this process alone will be sufficient in addressing the issue. Silo-ing is fundamentally being driven by WRI's funding model. Teams are responsible for their own fundraising and so they are reticent, or unable due to earmarking, to provide funding to other arms of WRI. This undermines WRI's ability to work on issues collaboratively. This is also true of country-led programs driven by the International Offices and the global initiatives driven by Platforms, Programs and Centers. It is therefore vital that WRI raises more unrestricted funds or otherwise finds opportunities for more flexibility, if it is to deliver a truly integrated approach.

Partnership is core to the way WRI works, but it could do more to partner more widely, including with the Global South and more community-based organizations. WRI is an expert in forging partnerships with governments, businesses, CSOs, NGOs, research institutions, and other actors in pursuit of its agenda. However, several external stakeholders criticized WRI during the ER for its tendency to work with

¹⁸ Source: WRI All-Staff Survey

¹⁹ Note some Teams felt very strongly that collaboration between teams was not strong at WRI – e.g., Governance. Full breakdowns of survey results by Team are available from the External Review team on request.

the same core partners repeatedly. WRI risks losing its innovative edge through an over-reliance on established actors. If WRI is to maintain its identity as an innovator, it needs to be open to partnerships with emerging, innovative thought leaders, particularly in the Global South. Indeed, there is *already* a sense among some stakeholders that WRI is losing its innovative edge. Part of WRI's challenge is proving that it is still innovative, despite its growth. Some senior staff also highlighted the need to engage local institutions in the Global South more especially on the ground, community-based organizations²⁰. As WRI increasingly moves into an implementation role, this sort of partnership will become a prerequisite for success.

²⁰ Internal Interview

2. How well have [the core functions] supported consolidation of growth to date and how well-placed are they to help support future growth in funding and staffing for WRI overall; and WRI in Africa?

Overview of Section

WRI has invested significantly to upgrade its core function capabilities, but this investment has failed to keep up with growth elsewhere. WRI has hired new staff and strengthened processes and systems, including in planning and monitoring of core functions. However, growth of non-core functions has outpaced growth in all core functions, especially Communications and Development.

Overall, the core functions are making good progress towards the objectives set out in their strategic plans. They have achieved most of the targets set out in those plans, although somewhat less than would be expected at this stage of the 5-Year Plan. To some extent these results reflect the variations in ambition of the different core function plans.

The Communications Team is well on track (76%) to achieving its 2018 5-Year strategic goals. The Communications Strategy aims to: i) advance and consolidate WRI's shift towards a global network, ii) enhance WRI's digital presence, and iii) sharpen WRI's focus on big, game-changing ideas. There is significant over-achievement in the case of increasing digital presence. WRI staff are also broadly positive about their interactions with the core Communications function, although in some instances teams feel that Communications has been too slow to engage and/or approve communication products.

The Development Team has achieved most of its goals, albeit somewhat less than would be expected at this stage of the Strategic Plan. This achievement is particularly impressive given that the Development Strategy is arguably the most ambitious of the core function strategies in terms of the number of objectives and indicators, as well as scope. More generally the rapid and sustained growth in WRI's income over the last seven years is testament to the effectiveness of WRI's Development Team. The fact that growth continued through the COVID-19 pandemic, and indeed accelerated, is even more impressive.²¹ Despite its success in achieving most of its strategic goals, WRI staff in general rate the Development core function relatively poorly across a range of questions and the team is clearly under great pressure to keep up with growing demands. Solutions including initiatives to reduce WRI's operating cost base as well as new approaches to raising funds, such as increasing the number of development specialists including in IOs.

The Operations and HR Team have a high rate of achievement (83%). However, they also had the most modest of the core function strategies in terms of the number of SMART targets - just two - that are capable of being monitored. Both targets relate to the overall goal of strengthening the capacity and autonomy of International Offices. Within the people-related questions in the survey there was a range of responses. The most positive feedback was in relation to how the HR core function had supported teams through the pandemic and management support to diversify the workplace. The least favorable responses were in relation to the transparency of promotion decisions.

²¹ Anecdotal evidence suggests that during the previous US administration, WRI (and other organizations) may have benefited from the availability of highly qualified staff who might otherwise have stayed in/joined the administration.

The RDI Strategy has achieved 64% of its 5-Year strategy, which aims to put in place a global Science and Research function in WRI's International Offices and to support high quality data projects across WRI through Resource Watch. Staff rate RDI highest across the core functions in terms of their support for teams across the organization. They feel that research is an integral component of their work; and they are broadly satisfied with the feedback they receive from RDI as part of the knowledge product review process. Indeed, there has been a marked increase in participants in RDI briefings from 26 in 2019 to 402 in 2021 (to September).

Most of the core functions developed and finalized 5-Year strategies that supported WRI's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan. WRI has five core functions: Communications, Development, Managing for Results, Operations & HR, and Research, Data and Innovation that support the work of their Programs, Centers and International Offices, and contribute to addressing WRI's seven Global Challenges. Core function strategies included 'we will' statements that set out what the relevant core function would do during 2018-2022, as well as a select number of desired institutional outcomes to be achieved by 2022. As with other teams at WRI, core function teams reported progress against annual milestones each year and defined new annual milestones. Teams also reported progress in March 2021 against their 5-Year strategic targets and again in September 2021. Note that Managing for Results is not scored and therefore no judgement applies.

Figure 7: Core Functions Progress against WRI's 5-Year Strategy²²

Team	Score	Judgement
Core Functions	60.2%	
- <i>Communications</i>	76.4%	
- <i>Development</i>	55.9%	
- <i>Managing for Results</i>	N/A	
- <i>Operations</i>	83.3%	
- <i>Research, Data, and Innovation</i>	63.9%	

Overall, the core functions are making good progress towards the objectives set out in their Strategic Plans. They have achieved most of the targets set out in those plans, although notably somewhat less than would be expected at this stage of the 5-Year Plan (see Figure 7). To some extent these results reflect

²² Source: ER Team assessment of Core Function progress against 5-Year Strategy documents

the ambition of the different core function plans. For example, the Development Team had by far the most ambitious plan, even though its completion rate is less than 60%. By contrast Operations had a very high completion rate of 83% but based on a much more limited and less ambitious set of indicators.

Communications (76% achieved)

The Communications Team is well on track to achieving its 2018 5-year strategic goals. The Communications Strategy aims to: i) advance and consolidate WRI's shift towards a global network, ii) enhance WRI's digital presence, and iii) sharpen WRI's focus on big, game-changing ideas. These three outcomes have already been fully achieved with significant over-achievement in the case of increasing digital presence. The Strategy further aims to increase the funding for communications by integrating this into project and program budgeting and this achievement has been on track, with Program and Center revenue covering 41% of the communications budget (against a target of 50%). The goal of increasing the overall coherence of WRI's branding (e.g., through the production of key guidelines) has also been primarily achieved, as it remains unclear how far the new guidelines have been adopted by senior management. Two additional objectives in the 2018 Communications Strategy were subsequently dropped: expanding human storytelling and doing more to map and understand the dynamics of social, political, and economic change. Both appear to be covered to some extent by the remaining objectives.

WRI staff are broadly positive about their interactions with the core Communications function. Respondents felt that the core Communications Team was broadly effective in supporting them to shape their messages appropriately, that WRI's digital presence was also effective, and were satisfied in general with the training provided by the Communications staff, although less so with specific respect to the use of digital analytics. We heard occasional frustration about the length of time needed to obtain Communications Team sign off for shorter, just-in-time outputs. Other comments focused on the need to reach beyond traditional centers of power and to do more to include groups outside the 'global elite'.

Development (56% achieved)

The Development Team has achieved most of its goals, albeit somewhat less than would be expected at this stage of the Strategic Plan. This achievement is particularly impressive given that the Development Strategy is arguably the most ambitious of the core function strategies in terms of the number of objectives, indicators, and scope. The team has had greatest success in winning larger grants notably by winning 13 eight-figure, multiyear financing commitments from government partners (against a target of 4) as well as securing a US\$100 million grant from the Jeff Bezos Earth Fund (a nine-figure sum from an individual donor against a target of winning one eight-figure sum). The team also had great success expanding and diversifying WRI's funding base beyond its traditional European donors. Notable achievements included the addition of eight new bilateral grants of US\$10 million plus (against a target of two) to support in-country work in Africa, Indonesia, and India; six additional European government ministries providing at least US\$500,000 in non-ODA funding (against an updated target of three) and 19 new non-U.S.-headquartered corporations added to WRI's family of donors (against a target of five). The Development Team had relatively less success in those areas that sought to leverage and/or facilitate fundraising at a devolved level through the organization (i.e., through International Offices, Programs and Centers.)

Despite its success in achieving most of its strategic goals, WRI staff in general rate the Development core function relatively poorly across a range of questions. This is particularly the case with respect to support provided to teams to identify and raise new funds. These responses perhaps highlight a difference in understanding about the relative responsibility for raising funds between Development and the rest of

WRI, as well as the relatively limited size of the Development Team. WRI Africa, however, has been well supported as highlighted by the WRI Africa Development Team: *“There is great collaborative spirit within WRI. Africa gets “more than enough” support from Global ... there have been many instances where the Development team in Africa has been overwhelmed and has subsequently received support from Global.”*

Operations and HR (83% achieved)

The Operations and HR Team had by far the least ambitious of the core function strategies in terms of the number of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) targets - just two - that are capable of being monitored. Both targets relate to the overall goal of strengthening the capacity and autonomy of International Offices. The first target, which has been fully achieved, was for four legally independent IOs (Brasil, India, Indonesia and Mexico) to cover their operational costs out of indirect cost rates. The second target was for all IOs to have an active risk log with no more than three high risk items for which mitigation strategies are in place. The latest data suggests that four of the IOs meet this standard.

WRI staff rate the support received from the core Operations function very highly. They know who their Operations point of contact is and have sufficient access to people and resources when they need help. The key shortfall is in terms of operations capacity within the international offices where opinions are less positive.

Within the people-related questions in the survey there was a range of responses (see Figure 8). The most positive feedback was in relation to how the HR core function had supported teams through the pandemic as well as management support for efforts to diversify the workplace. The least favorable responses were in relation to the transparency of promotion decisions, the extent to which the core function helped share HR best practice across the organization, and the degree to which people felt able to transfer across International Offices. Issues of pay and training also, on average, attracted somewhat negative responses. These responses varied little, on average across teams, with energy somewhat more positive in general about people issues, and food and governance teams marginally less so.

RDI (64% achieved)

The RDI Strategy replaced the original four objectives in the 2018 Strategy with two new ones. The first; putting in place a global science and research function in each of WRI’s International Offices, has been almost achieved, with China as the notable exception. The RDI team’s second objective is to support high-quality data projects across WRI through Resource Watch. Indicators measuring progress towards this objective all related to the adoption or use of Resource Watch data, whether internally within WRI or externally e.g. media stories. Three of these six indicators are already achieved or are on track. However, the remaining three are non-verifiable, as no target was set against which to measure progress.

Staff rate RDI highest across the core functions in terms of their support for teams across the organization. Staff as a whole feel that research is an integral component of their work; and they are broadly satisfied with the feedback they receive from RDI as part of the knowledge product review process. However, survey responses also clearly indicate that RDI has made (relatively) less headway helping teams to recruit external research talent and in integrating poverty reduction and gender and social equity into their knowledge products.

Figure 8: Survey Assessment of HR by Program and Center²³

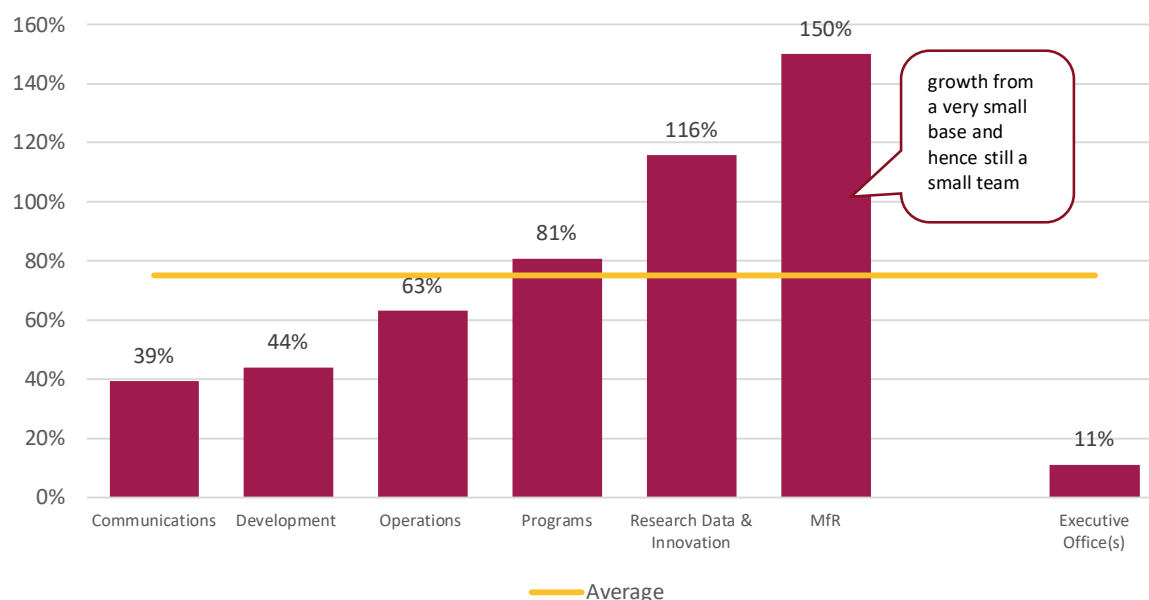
Core Functions	Food	Governance	Economics	Forests	Cities	Water	Oceans	Climate	Finance	Business	Energy	Average
Transfer Across IO's	-1.4 (N = 5)	-1.3 (N = 8)	1.0 (N = 2)	-0.6 (N = 37)	-0.9 (N = 63)	-0.6 (N = 9)	-0.9 (N = 10)	-0.7 (N = 34)	-0.7 (N = 7)	-0.1 (N = 9)	-0.9 (N = 37)	-0.8 (N = 199)
Transparency of Promotion	-0.7 (N = 7)	-0.5 (N = 11)	-1.4 (N = 5)	-0.8 (N = 40)	-0.8 (N = 73)	-0.3 (N = 13)	-0.4 (N = 11)	-0.5 (N = 43)	-0.4 (N = 10)	-0.8 (N = 16)	-0.7 (N = 15)	-0.7 (N = 244)
Clarity of Promotion Policy	-0.6 (N = 7)	-0.6 (N = 11)	-1.2 (N = 5)	-0.8 (N = 48)	-0.6 (N = 79)	-0.6 (N = 12)	-0.3 (N = 12)	-0.5 (N = 46)	-0.8 (N = 16)	-0.6 (N = 16)	-0.5 (N = 17)	-0.6 (N = 263)
Sharing HR Best Practice	-0.6 (N = 5)	-1.0 (N = 10)	-1.0 (N = 4)	-0.7 (N = 39)	-0.3 (N = 67)	-0.5 (N = 11)	-0.6 (N = 7)	-0.3 (N = 40)	-0.2 (N = 5)	-0.3 (N = 13)	-0.5 (N = 13)	-0.4 (N = 214)
Culture of Training	-0.3 (N = 6)	-0.4 (N = 10)	-1.0 (N = 5)	-0.2 (N = 49)	-0.1 (N = 87)	-0.1 (N = 12)	-0.2 (N = 9)	-0.2 (N = 47)	-0.2 (N = 9)	0.2 (N = 18)	0.5 (N = 20)	-0.1 (N = 272)
Appropriate Level of Pay	-0.3 (N = 7)	-0.4 (N = 11)	-0.2 (N = 5)	0.2 (N = 48)	-0.1 (N = 81)	0.1 (N = 13)	0.1 (N = 11)	0.0 (N = 47)	0.1 (N = 10)	-0.7 (N = 14)	0.4 (N = 20)	0.0 (N = 267)
Training Satisfaction	-0.2 (N = 5)	-0.1 (N = 10)	-0.3 (N = 3)	0.0 (N = 41)	0.1 (N = 74)	-0.3 (N = 11)	0.0 (N = 11)	0.2 (N = 42)	0.4 (N = 9)	0.7 (N = 13)	0.9 (N = 21)	0.2 (N = 240)
Diversity in the Workplace	0.2 (N = 6)	0.8 (N = 11)	1.0 (N = 4)	0.5 (N = 50)	0.8 (N = 79)	0.8 (N = 10)	0.5 (N = 10)	1.0 (N = 50)	0.7 (N = 10)	0.9 (N = 16)	1.1 (N = 21)	0.8 (N = 267)
HR Support in the Pandemic	1.0 (N = 6)	0.9 (N = 10)	0.6 (N = 5)	0.5 (N = 44)	0.7 (N = 77)	1.0 (N = 11)	1.3 (N = 12)	0.8 (N = 44)	0.9 (N = 8)	0.9 (N = 7)	1.3 (N = 22)	0.8 (N = 243)
Average	-0.3	-0.3	-0.3	-0.2	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	-0.1

2.1 How well have [the core functions] supported consolidation of growth to date and how well-placed are they to help support future growth in funding and staffing for WRI overall, and WRI in Africa?

WRI's operational budget grew at an average annual rate of 17.5% from a level of US\$66 million in 2014 to a projected US\$160million in 2021. This compares with average real growth of 6.5% in the environmental sector over the same period (slightly higher in nominal terms, given modest price rises over this period).²⁴ WRI's growth has therefore been exceptional relative to the environment sector which, in turn, has grown faster than the economy more broadly. The organization's headcount has similarly increased from 738 staff in 2017 to 1556 staff in 2021. All core functions have grown over this period (see Figure 9). However, most core functions have grown more slowly in staffing terms than Programs and Centers. While many of the core functions will exhibit fixed costs and increasing returns to scale, these figures illustrate why the core functions - and particularly the M&R, Communications, and Development teams - are feeling under pressure. M&R shows a decline in satisfaction over time as WRI grew, as one of the weaker core functions.

²³ Source: WRI All-Staff Survey. Figures represent a weighted average of opinion where "Strongly Agree" is weighted with 2; "Agree" with 1; "Disagree" with -1; and "Strongly Disagree" with -2. Scores of $1 \leq X \leq 2$ are interpreted as highly satisfactory/ effective; $0 < X < 1$ as satisfactory/ ineffective; 0 as neutral; $-1 < X < 0$ as unsatisfactory/ ineffective; and $-2 \leq X \leq -1$ as highly unsatisfactory/ ineffective.

²⁴ *Environmental economy - statistics on employment and growth*, Eurostat, 2021, [link](#).

Figure 9: Growth in WRI Staff in Core Functions compared to WRI as a whole in 2018-21²⁵

The Development Team plays a core role mediating between donors and other contributors to WRI, and the Programs, Centers, and International Offices. The rapid and sustained growth in WRI's income over the last seven years is itself prima facie testament to the effectiveness of WRI's Development Team and fundraising skills of WRI's Program and executive leadership. The fact that growth continued through the COVID-19 pandemic, and indeed accelerated, is even more impressive. But the team is clearly under considerable pressure. In part, this pressure reflects the rapidly expanding demand by governments, corporations, foundations, multilateral banks, individuals, and others for solutions to the pressing threats facing the world today. More specifically, however, there may be aspects of WRI's delivery design that increase its cost base, and which may benefit from reconfiguration to lower costs. These include: i) the transaction costs of fundraising, which in turn is a result of the number and average size of projects that WRI is delivering, ii) the degree to which core function staff located in International Offices are constrained from supporting colleagues elsewhere even when their workloads permit it, iii) the extent to which HR and finance are not sufficiently networked to enable optimal project costing (indirect) rather than charging a flat rate across projects, and iv) the sheer number, range and (in some cases) scale, of donors/contributors that stretches development efforts and raises transaction costs.

The ER Team also heard several suggestions for ways to increase resource mobilization: i) some senior leaders are already generating significant funding for their teams and similar efforts could be duplicated by other leaders to develop and capitalize on key relationships, ii) WRI staff do not always 'know what they know', although Salesforce is helping to systematize knowledge about opportunities; iii) greater recognition, on behalf of WRI's contributors, that earmarking contributions and forcing low overheads means that WRI must struggle to find the resources to invest in its central systems while 'free-riding' on

²⁵ Source: WRI Data of Staff Numbers. Note that the growth rate for MfR is exaggerated considerably by its low base. The Function has grown from three staff members to five over the External Review period. This number is still extremely low relative to the overall size of the organization.

those contributors that do not restrict their funding; and iv) , iii) establishment of a funding roundtable may help to overcome these free rider issues.

The tilt towards advocacy and away from research? There is a range of views across WRI on the appropriate balance between high quality, peer reviewed research and more advocacy related work. While some see this as a problem, others are more comfortable with this trend. In the view of the ER Team, WRI's ever increasing agenda, and the urgency of that agenda, has almost certainly increased the risk of WRI-attributable statements or actions that are insufficiently grounded in sound analysis. Whether this level of risk is acceptable to WRI depends on its risk appetite. The ER team heard that an organization-wide assessment of the desired balance between the quality and quantity of WRI Knowledge Products may be helpful. We also heard that the Global and IO Boards currently lack research champions (or research sub-committees) charged with ensuring that the balance between research quality and timeliness is appropriate. In addition, WRI could ensure that other factors (such as the average size of projects and programs) are consistent with incorporating and resourcing research review capabilities at the Program level and, perhaps, strategic monitoring of the WRI 5-Year Plan. (See further discussion below under Knowledge Products.)

Risk management is an important component of WRI's preparedness in the context of its rapid organizational growth. WRI has a well-developed, three-tiered approach to risk management:

- **At Tier 1 (Organization-wide):** WRI identifies key risks (operational, personnel, financial, reputational, compliance, business continuity, security, succession, conflict of interest and others) and develops mitigation strategies (such as reviewing global security protocols, annual planning processes, annual institutional audit, and discussing these at quarterly Audit and Risk Management Committee meetings of the Board);
- **At Tier 2 (Team level):** Teams assess risks relating to program delivery, personnel, financial, governance risks in Programs, Centers, and International Offices and develop appropriate mitigation strategies (such as quarterly review meetings with each Program; Center and Office - including Building Blocks Assessment);
- **At Tier 3 (Project level):** project managers identify risks (such as project deliverable risk, project schedule risk, project financial management risk or resource allocation risk) and conceive mitigation responses (project level risk logs that are regularly reviewed; 30+ independent project audits requested by donors; and monitoring, evaluation and learning framework).

To cope with its exceptional rate of growth, WRI has invested significantly to upgrade its core function capabilities (see Box 1). WRI also conducts annual external audits. While there is no formal internal audit function, there appears to have been some preliminary discussions around this.

Box 1: Examples of WRI's investments in Core Function Capacity

- **Hired core function staff** responsible for accounting, human resources, grants and contracts, managing facilities etc. for International Offices (e.g., Colombia and Africa) and the DC office provided them with training to build and manage core functions in these offices.
- Revamped **Mission, Values and Approach** workshops in 2019 to provide an opportunity to talk to staff about "how" WRI works and facilitate deeper understanding about its approach; **Internal communications** (e.g. Banyan Intranet) etc has also been strengthened. An **induction program** for new staff now incorporates a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) focus.

- Established an **advanced planning process** with clear timelines for forecasting for the individual teams which has made planning more effective across WRI. This provides a moment of reflection and a stock-take of how the Programs have grown.
- Designed a **New Lines of Work Process** to help program teams avoid developing proposals that duplicate existing work or that are not aligned with the Strategic Plan.
- Developed the **‘Building Blocks’** process; a self-assessment against multiple metrics for each of the core functions – anchored by the global operations team. This is used in weekly global meetings across core functions to identify gaps between required and actual capacity. A **core function annual retreat** undertakes a comprehensive assessment of progress.
- Sought to make the planning process more **“holistic”** across WRI with greater integration between the core functions, and less siloing between the Programs and budget development.
- Developed in 2018 an **“Operations Bootcamp”** to share knowledge and build capacity in topics such as accounting, financial management, grants, etc. With a virtual format, participation has increased from approximately 15 to 90 individuals.
- Set up a **Large Proposal Review** process as a standardized mechanism for reviewing proposals of more than US\$1 million. This is used to review strategic alignment and identify operational issues before money is even discussed.
- **Used a Quarterly Review** to assess risk in every IO and Team. Teams are asked to complete and add more texture as to what they’ve found from a financial perspective and the results are presented to the Investment Committee.
- Launch of a **Top Outcomes** process that recognizes and incentivizes institutional outcomes to create a culture of institutional excellence.

Source: Executive Team

Introducing better processes will require a cultural shift within WRI. In the words of one interviewee: “one reason that there is a lack of systematization within WRI is that there is not a culture of procedure. WRI is not directive. However, for certain aspects of running an organization like WRI you need to have clear procedures in place – e.g., Development/ Operations”.

The effort to hire core function staff in each of the International Offices is an important contribution to strengthening the autonomy of International Offices. Capacity in core functions that are operational pre-requisites for the opening and basic functioning of the offices - IT and security, financial management, grants and contracts management, and human resources - has generally been prioritized over other less operational functions. These operational core functions are priorities when International Offices are first established, and are generally staffed before RDI, Communications, and Development.

How well the effort to build capacity in IOs is progressing can be assessed through the Building Blocks assessments that were first instituted in 2016. IOs regularly assess their own capacity in each of the core functions based on a range of underlying factors. This assessment is undertaken through WRI’s Building Block assessments which are completed annually and are currently in their fifth generation. Each generation of the assessment has evolved so comparisons across time frames are difficult. In addition, not all offices are expected to possess the same level of capacity making direct comparisons difficult.

Taking these caveats into account, an analysis of the 2020 Building Block data shows that IO capacity in essential operational core functions (HR, FM, G&C, IT) is generally rated relatively highly (2020 Building

Blocks). This is potentially because these operational functions have had longer to become established than non-operational functions. In the same vein, ratings in long established offices are generally higher across all functions than in newer offices, reflecting a level of growing pains that is to be expected, especially in remote offices. An exception to this is the India (C2) office established in 2011, which continues to assess its core function capability quite low. Generally, offices in East and South Asia (China and Indonesia) have the greatest capacity; offices in South Asia and Africa have less capacity; and offices in Latin America (Mexico and Brasil) lie somewhere in the middle.

Programs and Centers also depend on the core functions particularly in the context of WRI's recent growth. The staff survey indicates that staff feel relatively positive about RDI, Operations (including Finance), and Communications. Three functions/sub-functions perform relatively less well in the survey: Development, Managing for Results, and Human Resources which, in the survey, comprises a set of questions some of which, such as pay policy, go well beyond the exclusive responsibility of the HR core function. Respondents in the Governance, Water, and Food Teams appear less positive about core function support overall. The Governance Team appear to feel that Development could do more to support fundraising in their area and that the Managing for Results team could likewise do more. The Water Team feels equally strongly that Development could do more to support them. Both the Water and Food Teams returned relatively low scores for people-related questions. Specific issues in relation to the ability of each core function to support the growth of the Programs and Centers in WRI are set out below.

2.2 To what extent have WRI's knowledge products (KP) advanced WRI's goals and been impactful?

Overview of Section

The production of impactful knowledge lies at the heart of WRI's mission and there is good evidence that WRI's knowledge products have directly and indirectly contributed to impacts. 80% of WRI staff feel that their team's knowledge products have influenced policy makers, falling to 72% and 57% in the case of CSOs and businesses. Externally, one interviewee summed up the prevailing view as follows: *'Their research, policy papers and advocacy [are] definitely the comparative advantage they have.'*

WRI is ranked in the top ten think tanks globally for its environmental policy work, its transdisciplinary research and its quality assurance and integrity processes. One view in WRI is that the organization is gradually slipping towards a model that prioritizes timely advocacy over research quality. For some this could presage a more serious decline in reputation and, ultimately, effectiveness. For others it is not a cause for concern because the premium on action is arguably greater than ever. Wherever the current and appropriate future balance lies, this is clearly a fundamental issue that requires regular monitoring at Board level.

Where teams look to RDI to provide quality assurance this can result in delays. This may be due to limited capacity within RDI which, in turn, causes staff frustration and potentially missed opportunities to influence WRI's target audiences. RDI oversight adds some time, but it is the process of responding to comments (both RDI's and reviewers') that adds the most time. In principle, RDI could expedite its review process (of Knowledge Products produced outside of WRI) if it had assurance that suitably qualified staff had already signed off Knowledge Products and is in the process of rolling out a WRI-wide roster of staff with sign-off capabilities.

The production of impactful knowledge lies at the heart of WRI's mission. As noted on the WRI website *'The foundation of WRI's work is producing high-quality research, including reports, issue briefs, working papers, guidebooks and other products and initiatives that capture and/or disseminate WRI's research, data and insights.'* These products and initiatives can be understood as the tangible outputs, activities and/or services including the sharing, or application of information and knowledge contents.²⁶

WRI's knowledge products have contributed to impact directly and indirectly. Internal analysis of WRI's 2020 Top Outcomes found that 81% of WRI's top outcomes were centred by WRI knowledge products. Key examples given included Oceans: 14 World Leaders Commit to a Sustainable Ocean Economy, for which WRI provided analytical inputs and authored three reports related to a blue covid-19 recovery, climate change solutions and sustainable ocean economy. Knowledge Products also supported the Food Program's top outcome: Nearly 200 Food Suppliers Commit to Cut Food Loss and Waste in Half, with suppliers using WRI's Food Loss & Waste Protocol to measure, identify and act on food loss and waste hotspots. Finally, WRI co-developed and co-authored the World Bank's flagship report on Nature-based-solutions, *Integrating Green and Gray*, which led to a top outcome of the World Bank unlocking \$2 Billion for Integrated Green and Gray Infrastructure. 80% of WRI staff feel that their team's knowledge products have influenced policy makers falling to 72% and 57% in the case of CSOs and businesses. Most internal interviewees felt that that WRI's work program is generally well-grounded in research. Externally, one interviewee summed up the prevailing view as follows: *"Their research, policy papers and advocacy [are] definitely the comparative advantage they have."* Evidence from the Global Go To Think Tank (GGTTT) Index Reports survey (see further below) as well as interview evidence and documentary reviews suggest that knowledge products have had a particularly strong impact in climate, food systems, and forests.

WRI has been featured in the GGTTT Index Report since its inception.²⁷ The category in which WRI has consistently been ranked highest is as an environment policy think tank. The 2007 rankings placed WRI third in a top ten ranking of environment think tanks in the US. By 2010 it was ranked top out of 50 environment policy think tanks. It has remained near the top of the chart, even as the number of environmental policy think tanks has grown. For example, in 2017 it was ranked third out of 79 environment policy think tanks. Subsequent years have seen its ranking at third in 2018, fourth in 2019, and eighth in 2020 out of a total of 99 organizations. WRI is also highly rated for its transdisciplinary approach to research, and was ranked fifth or sixth across all disciplines during 2017-2020. WRI has also maintained an impressively high ranking for its quality assurance and integrity policies and procedures: seventh out of 70 organizations (in all disciplines) in 2017 and eighth out of 75 organizations in 2020. Food security, only quite recently included as a category in the GGTTT Index, is another area where WRI ranks high: tenth out of 136 think tanks in 2020. Interestingly, two areas where WRI does not rank at all are in the category for best managed think tank and best institutional collaboration involving two or more think tanks. In one year, 2019, the GGTTT Index also included a category 'Best Policy Study' produced that year. WRI featured twice with Creating a Sustainable Food Future; and Enhancing NDCs: A Guide.

²⁶ *Knowledge products and Services: Building a Stronger Knowledge Institution, Independent Evaluation* ADB, 2012, [link](#)

²⁷ The Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports produced by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania is the most comprehensive assessment of think tanks globally. The Program defines think tanks as 'public policy research analysis and engagement organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis and advice on domestic and international issues, thereby enabling policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy'. Index ranks think tanks around the world in a number of categories ranging from the very broad ('top think tanks worldwide') to the quite specific (e.g., 'top food security think tanks'). The number of categories has grown over time and now numbers 54. Over 4,000 people participated in the nomination process for the 2020 rankings.

Box 2: Keeping 1.5°C Alive

On September 16th, 2021, WRI, together with Climate Analytics, published the report, ‘Closing the gap: The impact of G20 climate commitments on limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C’, which found that if G20 countries, accounting for 75% of global GHG emissions, set ambitious, 1.5°C-aligned emission reduction targets for 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050, global temperature rise at the end of the century could be limited to 1.7°C.

The report was widely picked up by the world’s press in the run up to, and following, the G20 meeting in Rome prior to the United Nations Climate Conference (COP26). For example, France 24 said: ‘*The meeting comes as a new report by the World Resources Institute and Climate Analytics showed that the world is on a trajectory to warm by 2.1 degrees Celsius by the end of the Century under countries’ current reduction commitments.*’²⁸

WRI also participated in the preparation of the Energy Transition Commission’s September 2021 publication ‘Keeping 1.5°C Alive: Closing the Gap in the 2020’s’ through the involvement of WRI President Ani Dasgupta as a Commissioner.²⁹ On October 23, 2021, *The Economist* magazine referred to ‘*what Helen Mountford of the World Resources Institute, a think-tank, calls “keeping 1.5°C alive”*’ in an article on COP26.³⁰

Addressing leaders at COP26 at the first major global gathering since the COVID-19 pandemic, COP President Alok Sharma said: “*The science is clear that the window of time we have to keep the goal of 1.5 °C alive, and to avoid the worst effects of climate change, is closing fast. But with political will and commitment, we can, and must, deliver an outcome in Glasgow the world can be proud of.*”³¹

Publication and/or approval of knowledge products has increased steadily in recent years from 49 per year in 2017 to 93 so far in 2021.³² Google Analytics indicate that there were 33,731 downloads of WRI publications from WRI’s website between April 17 and September 28, 2021. An analysis accounting for 80% of these downloads (186 out of 953 different Knowledge Products) shows a wide range of different types of products are being downloaded externally. They also show that a wide range in the number of downloads by topic, and a few publications, account for a large share of the total downloads for particular topics. Examples in the Global Challenge Food include the publication ‘A Pathway to Carbon Neutral Agriculture in Denmark’ and ‘Shifting Diets for a Sustainable Food Future’ (see Figure 10 below).

Figure 10: Downloads of WRI Publications from WRI’s website by Programs, between April 17 and September 28, 2021³³

²⁸ *World leaders will hold closed-door climate meeting at UN*, France24, 2021, [link](#).

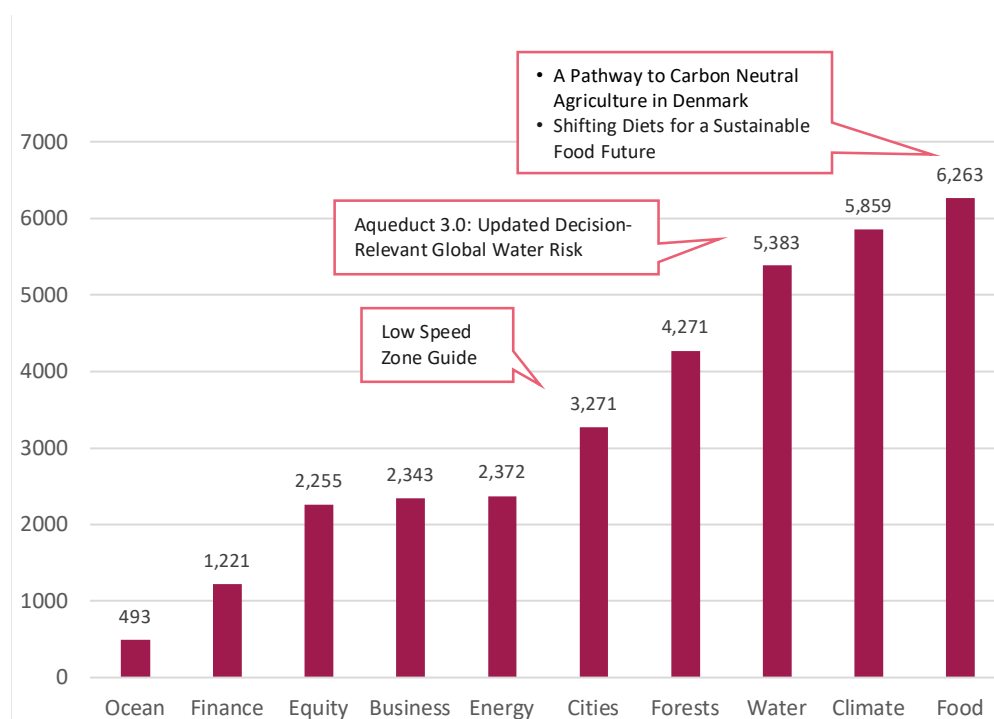
²⁹ *Keeping 1.5°C Alive - Closing the Gap in the 2020s*, Energy Transitions Committee, 2021, [link](#).

³⁰ *Broken promises, energy shortages and covid-19 will hamper COP26*, The Economist, 2021, [link](#).

³¹ *Around 120 leaders gather at COP26 in Glasgow for ‘last, best, chance to keep 1.5 alive’*, UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), 2021, [link](#).

³² In 2018 WRI launched Editorial Manager. This digital quality assurance process has allowed RDI to ensure that all knowledge products start with a publication plan.

³³ Source: Google Analytics data, provided by WRI



How can WRI ensure that knowledge products are disseminated and utilized for maximum benefit?

A crucial aspect of what determines the impact of WRI's knowledge products is the extent to which they are leveraged through WRI's Platforms. Thus, when Platforms, Centers, or Programs launch an initiative based on an underlying piece of research, and that Platform or initiative goes on to have impact, it can be argued that the underlying knowledge product itself has had an impact. An example is 'Creating a Sustainable Food Future' published in 2019.³⁴ This report was a major influence on a non-WRI branded report issued at its inception by the Food and Land Use Coalition. The impact of FOLU is discussed further under Review Question 3.

In practice, the determination in WRI as to whether a particular knowledge product is striking the right balance between quality and timeliness is made at the Program level by Program leads. This may or may not involve anyone with a suitable research background. The exception is products that are directly managed by RDI, or where RDI's involvement has been requested.

All WRI-branded KPs are required to follow a defined review process. But this can also result in delays. While RDI oversight adds some time, it is the time that authors take to respond to comments (both RDI's and reviewers') that adds the most time and this has accounted for the larger part of the increase in process times. Key components of the time spent on the various steps of the review process include: time with signoff (including by the sign off director and RDI, which used to be called S&R); time with reviewers; and time with authors, mostly for revisions. Indeed since 2019 the time from submission of publication plans to approval of guidebooks, issue briefs and reports has increased from 230 days to 335 days; and for working papers, technical notes and Practice Notes from 241 days to 266 days. These increases may

³⁴ *Creating a Sustainable Food Future: A Menu of Solutions*, WRI, 2021, [link](#).

well be a function of the growth of competing demands on authors' time which draws them away from the task of completing knowledge products.

In principle, RDI could expedite its review process if it had assurance that suitably qualified staff had already signed off on knowledge products. The process of obtaining final sign off for knowledge products can be protracted – mostly because of the relatively poor quality of early drafts that are submitted for review. This in turn reflects multiple factors including a lack of dedicated researchers, lack of oversight and lack of dedicated research funds. Meanwhile, however, **WRI** is currently rolling out an organizational-wide roster of staff with sign-off capabilities (i.e., a combination of research backgrounds, knowledge of relevant WRI processes, etc). Developing such a network has the potential to accelerate RDI sign off for knowledge-product quality. Those with sign off rights would need to have attended a short training course under the new system to ensure standards and consistency of approach and sign off thresholds could vary depending on the skills and experience of individuals concerned.

RDI is already working on a set of actions to address these concerns. Its priorities include:

- **Securing more medium- to long-term funding** to allow for careful studies and reviews (may involve finding different funders or educating current funders);
- Strengthening and scaling WRI's Program's **focus on MEL**, especially for implementation work, and conducting evaluations of past policy implementations and sharing lessons to inform WRI's and others future work;
- **Hiring more senior staff** in Programs with research training/experience and providing **basic training** for all who do research;
- Strengthening RDI capacity to provide consistent guidance on **data management processes** for replication, integrity and efficiency;
- **Balancing** oversight and the desire for institutional coherence without introducing processes that are too bureaucratic;
- Improving coordination with **Delivery Platforms**; and
- Increasing RDI **influence over projects before funding** is awarded (and they are therefore difficult to change).

To what extent are cross-cutting themes reflected in WRI's KPs?

Since 2018, the Gender Equity Practice at WRI has been assessing and tracking the integration of Gender and Social Equity in publications on WRI's website. The Gender Equity Practice together with the RDI team have developed the current applied methodology, see below, to assess integration of GSE with more accuracy. The publication review, conducted by the Gender Equity Practice, reviews and scores publications in accordance to a scale of 0 to 4,³⁵ and where not applicable, N/A is awarded.

³⁵ Source: Data obtained from the analysis previously done by the Gender Equity Practice. Note: 0 = no mentions; 1 = only key words mentioned or in the normative/very brief; 2 = GSE mentioned in more detail, but not well-integrated throughout the text; 3 = relevance of GSE explained, but fails to analyze differential effects throughout the text; 4 = has GSE as the primary focus and integral part of the analysis, and analyzes differential affects throughout the text.

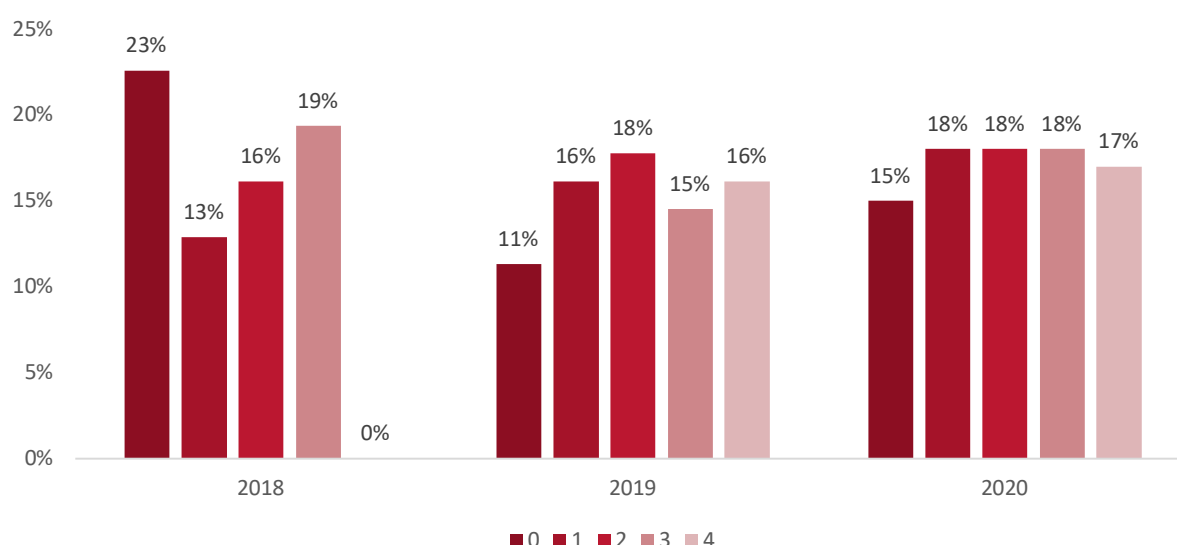
Figure 11: GSE Publication Tracker Analysis (2018-2020)

Figure 11 above illustrates a steady increase in the attention to gender and social equity in publications since 2018. In 2018, 0% of WRI's publications scored a '4', but by 2020, 17% of publications in that year integrated GSE as the primary focus and as an integral part of the analysis. This is testament to the support given to teams by core teams and of social equity individual experts in reviewing publications, but also demonstrative of the greater understanding by teams across WRI of GSE and desire to integrate and address these issues in their work.

This positively advances the methodology for publication review from the previously applied two-tier criteria which assessed publications for whether publication did or did not have GSE mentions. From interview discussions, the ER Team are aware that there is the ambition to further advance the GSE publication review scoring criteria, to maintain the momentum of increased depth in the integration of GSE in publications.

2.3 To what extent do current planning, monitoring, evaluating and learning (PMEL) approaches support performance in WRI?

Overview of Section

As WRI's work has progressed and expanded, the need for strengthened planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL) has become increasingly apparent. This would not only allow WRI to better capture and report the impacts of its work but will also facilitate a more robust evaluation cycle that promotes real-time learning and course correction. This will ensure WRI's continued ability to meet the urgent global challenges.

In WRI there is a need for a step change in the resourcing of MEL across WRI and the position and funding of the MfR team to support this. The Board could task the Executive Team to ensure that WRI develops an overarching set of impact targets for the next Strategic Plan that inform the impact

indicators at Program, Center, and IO level – a cascade down and across the organization. This vital, if challenging, undertaking could help support and enable the matrix approach (and WRI's concept of a collaborative sisterhood among IOs). MfR could be fully integrated as an essential core function, commensurate with WRI's role and reputation as a center of research excellence. There is a need for a rapid systemization of data collection and a mandatory roll out and utilization of the new M&E system in order to better capture contributions to high-level outcomes.

Current planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches are devolved across WRI. The Managing for Results Team provides a support function centrally, reporting to the Chief of Staff (rather than to the MD as they did previously). This Team has a very small budget (c. US\$600k) and staff when compared to the size of WRI (4.5 FTEs, with one individual on a limited term to May 2022). Three of these FTEs have been recent appointments. In 2021, WRI had a budget of US\$160m and 1556 staff. The head of the MfR Team has recently been made a Director, although this is still at a lower level than the Core Functions leads.

The MfR function does not have a line of sight over all planned evaluations, although it started a tracker in early 2020 to try to address this. MfR supports increasing capacity, but it also does not have a line of sight over all proposals and budgets across PMEL for WRI. Instead, it provides a range of support including training, tools, templates, and support to reviewing Theory of Change and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacities in large proposals. MfR have introduced a new M&E system, called DevResults, in Summer 2021. However, it is at present only an opt-in model and is not yet widely used by staff.

In addition to the supporting MfR function, resources are available on Banyan. Staff are encouraged to set their own planning, monitoring and evaluating levels from within their program budgets. However, this is not a requirement, and has relied more on goodwill and efforts by the MfR Team to support this. Across document review and interviews, the External Review Team found that planning and monitoring may be built into program design and delivery (an estimated one third of programming overall according to one interview) but that evaluation and learning was a lower priority. Establishing an evidence base, and then reporting on that, should be a critical priority, rather than relying on narrative reporting. To achieve a rapid systemization and a cultural shift, each project agreement should have MEL funding and incorporate M&E staffing provision through their project fundraising.

Although the ER Team were able, for the first time, to generate this high-level report on overall results at this stage, WRI does not have a formal evaluation or active review policy. It is therefore unsurprising that there is not a strong culture of using MEL to support adaptive management. This was found to be a recurring issue across Platforms and in some countries/regions. Interviewees and FGD suggested that this may be because planning and monitoring are more often a core operations function as part of WRI's delivery in counting outputs e.g. under the Forests global challenge or publications under RDI. This is not the case for evaluation and learning. There is no feedback loop to support this, nor has there been a consistent strong champion for evaluation and learning at the Board, Global Leadership Council, or Executive Team level. Donors have made up the funding shortfall of evaluation work at WRI, including this ER.

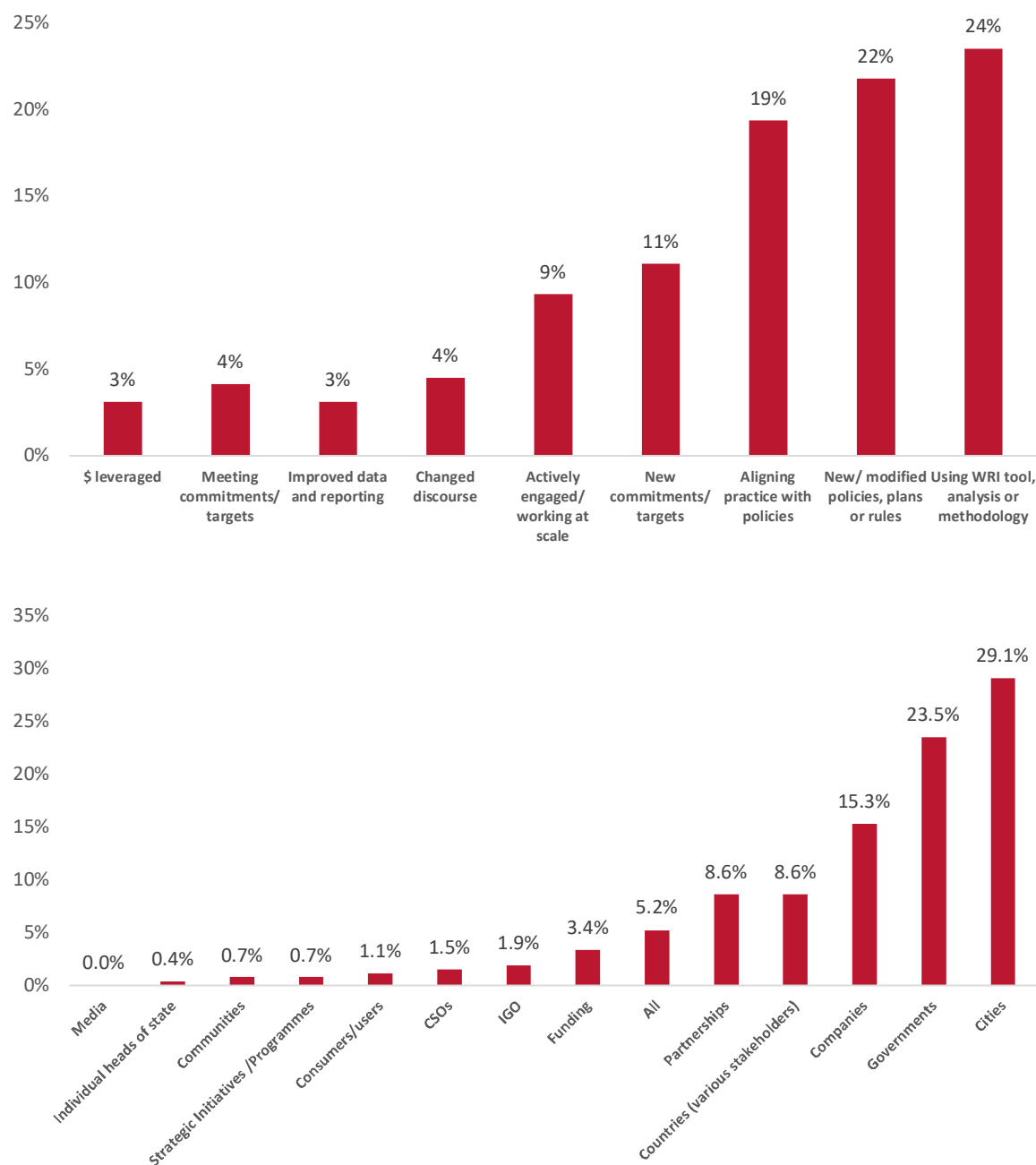
The Review Team undertook an analysis of WRI's indicators, in order to create a taxonomy of WRI's results system. WRI currently buckets its outcomes as: policy changes, shifts in business strategy, shifts in public and private investment, strengthened capacity, and discourse change. The Review Team expanded on those buckets, adding categories which included: using WRI tools, analysis or methodology, aligning

practice with policies, new commitments and targets, improved data and reporting, meeting commitments. The Review Team also analyzed the targets of the outcomes, developing categories such as governments, cities, countries, companies, CSOs, consumers/users. By using these two systems of categorization, by outcome type and target, the Review Team were able to determine the spread of indicators across the organization, and to have an insight into the strategic targets and push of WRI's results system (Figure 12). Cities, governments, companies and countries were most targets for WRI's outcomes, which largely focus on using WRI tools, analysis or methodology; modifying policies, plans or rules; aligning practice with policies; and developing new commitments/targets.

The External Review Team found that WRI does not have a fully developed Theory of Change or a similar overarching framework to support its progress and results tracking and reporting. The taxonomy analysis above illustrates that the results indicators currently employed at WRI do align with the overall strategy of *'Count it. Change it. Scale it'*, due to the spread of policy changes, commitments, and use of WRI knowledge products in order to target decision makers in companies, and governments and both the city and country level. It is much less clear at the impact level, and indeed, WRI identifies top outcomes annually rather than impacts. The annual top outcomes (selected by the Management Team from all Tier 1 outcomes) and the annual 'Outcome Celebrations' have helped WRI to convey an assessment of some of its contributions to higher-level outcomes. The Real World Impact Award is also a move in this direction. What is lacking is a coherent Theory of Change that explains how WRI's activities map through to higher level outcomes and impact and what the risk and contingencies around that mapping are. By developing such a story, WRI may be able to present a more compelling case for being greater than the sum of its parts, using a suite of high-level impact indicators, that would support both the matrix approach and the sisterhood model.

While the hundreds of detailed indicators are helpful at each specific Program, Center and IO level, there is a weak link between these specific frameworks, and the 5-Year Strategic Plan (with over 80 indicators, as discussed in the results section). The External Review Team found that the progress against 5-year strategy documents provided a more accurate reflection of progress than at the level of the Strategic Plan Results framework. This weakens the utility of the Strategic Plan as a measure of WRI's overall achievements. The majority of Program and Center target indicators are in upstream categories e.g., aligning practice with policies. WRI does not rank or weight their outcomes. A key assumption is that by influencing centers of power to use WRI tools, change their plans, and so on, WRI will bring about change including positive change relating to GSE and poverty.

WRI has an opportunity in the forthcoming strategic planning phase to think deeply about what results they measure and how, and how evaluation and learning can help them to do this more effectively. WRI's challenge is to develop a way of measuring its impact that recognizes the organization's upstream position in the overall development value chain while providing a reliable measure of accountability. WRI occupies a special niche in the environment/development space often working as a broker at the interface between multiple other partners. It is more "B2B" than "B2C". As such WRI and its funders may need to look more at the number and quality of its institutional relationships (is WRI dealing with the right organizations in the right way? Is it influencing them) rather than 'retail' level results on the ground that are often not within WRI's gift. WRI must also continue to *'shoot for the stars'* while also recognizing that whatever framework it develops to measure progress must also be realistic and measurable, as well as ambitious, if it is to be meaningful.

Figure 12: Taxonomy of WRI results³⁶

The top outcomes for 2020, were identified using the verbs *commit, ratify, prioritize, commit, ratify, add, accelerate, embrace, support*, and finally, *unlock [US]\$2 billion*. The last of these is a tangible

³⁶ Source: ER Team analysis of WRI Results Framework

impact, the others are outcomes that contribute towards impact. This may go to the heart of WRI's challenge with evaluation and learning, in that WRI is a convenor, collaborator, and change agent with significant influencing power. In its Strategic Plan, this approach is characterized as three common elements; i) rigorous research that is communicated clearly, ii) building coalitions for change, and iii) sustained political and corporate engagement. This does not translate well into a logical framework and results reporting approach. (See further discussion in the next section.)

During interviews, focus group discussions, and emerging findings sessions the External Review Team asked why a think-and-do tank with data and evidence at the heart of its operations is not prioritizing evaluation and learning to support performance. The External Review Team posited this as a puzzle. In FGD, the ER Team shared early findings that WRI urgently need to improve its MEL capacity to ensure that it is fully capturing its progress, to be accountable to itself and others, and to learn from what is not working. Internal interviews and feedback in these sessions found that senior staff are aware and concerned that this aspect of WRI is not well resourced or prioritized, and they recognize that this low level of provision and awareness means that PMEL will therefore struggle to support performance in WRI. The recent rapid growth in WRI, across both Platforms and geographies, and the attention that this required to maintain the services provided by core functions, were offered as reasons for the current situation. This was characterized as WRI 'playing catch up in the engine room' whilst addressing significant growth in staff, funding and operations. The pace of WRI's growth was flagged as a concern in the all-staff survey, along with the need for clarity on the supporting role of MfR, as staff do not always know how or when to draw on their expertise.

Senior staff recognize that this is an opportune time to address this weakness. In discussions in emerging findings sessions, the ER Team characterized this as a core household maintenance issue for WRI, which while it can be under resourced for a few years, over time will affect performance across the organization, reduce effectiveness, and increase risks, including to its reputation.

Overall, the ER Team found four key gaps in evaluation and learning in WRI:

- **Funding:** both the lack of adequate funding and the weak funding model;
- **Staffing:** a very small central MfR Team, with only an opt-in MEL model for Programs, Centers and IOs;
- **Institutional /Governance:** MEL is an opt-in model, there is no formal evaluation policy and the MfR support is not identified or funded as a full core function reporting directly to the MD;
- **Culture:** evaluation and learning is not a priority for WRI given points 1-3 (DevResults is an opt-in M&E system for all teams at no cost to them.)

“There is no one correct path or approach [to instituting results-based M&E systems]. Getting there takes commitment, time and resources. At the same time, one should continue to bear in mind that there are also costs to not instituting such systems and not responding to internal and external stakeholder calls for accountability, transparency and results.”³⁷

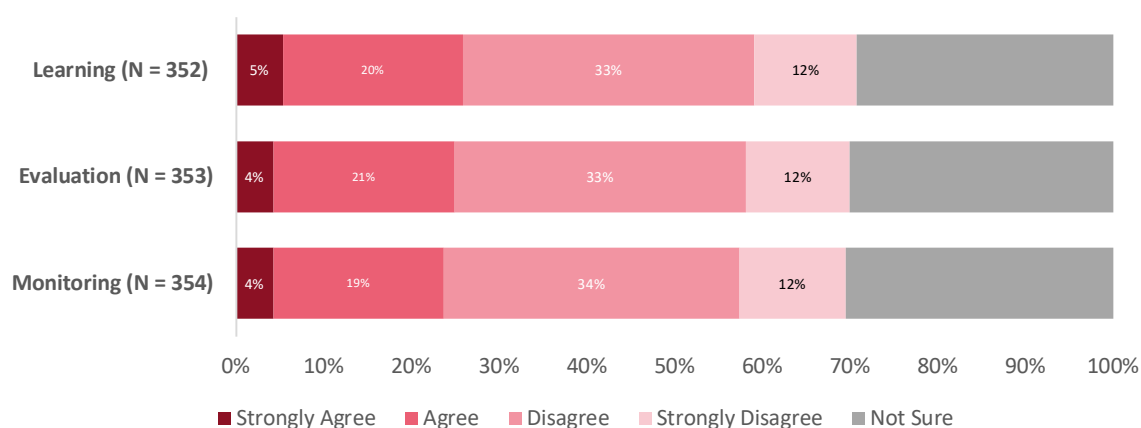
Staff Capacity and Incentives

Another important enabling factor is **staff capacity and incentives to adopt a planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning culture**. 49% of survey respondents agreed that there is a culture of monitoring, with a further 14% strongly agreeing. 45% agreed that there is a culture of evaluation with a further 10% strongly agreeing, and 44% agreed that there is a culture of learning with a further 10% strongly agreeing. Only 41% feel that they have the skills and resources to effectively evaluate their programs, with further 10% strongly agreeing. The survey also found that staff do not have a high awareness of the training opportunities available from the MfR. See Figure 13 below.

This suggests that **below senior management level there is a lack of awareness, or urgency, regarding the low levels of MEL across WRI, and little awareness of the impact that this may be having on WRI’s performance over time**. One working hypothesis that the External Review team tested in emerging findings sessions and follow up interviews, was the lack of effective demand from either the Board, the Global Leadership Council, the Executive Team or core donors to support a culture of learning and evaluation in WRI.

Figure 13: Staff Perceptions of Awareness of Training Opportunities³⁸

"I have a good awareness of the training opportunities provided by the Managing for Results team to increase my team's capacity in the following."



³⁷ *Ten Steps to a Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System: A Handbook for Development Practitioners*, J. Zall Kusek, R.C Rist (World Bank), 2004, [link](#).

³⁸ Source: WRI All-Staff Survey

A World Bank report on results-based M&E systems highlights that human resources are one of the most critical factors in implementing and sustaining effective M&E systems.³⁹ The same report provides a useful checklist for staff incentives that encourage learning oriented, participatory M&E (see Figure 14). These recommendations could be adapted as a potentially useful tool for WRI and its implementing partners.

Figure 14: Checklist for Staff Incentives⁴⁰

Are the following staff incentives in place within the WRI staff and implementing partners?

- **Clarity of M&E responsibility.**
- **Activity support:** such as the financial and other resources required for carrying out project or program level PMEL activities.
- **Personnel and partner strategy:** hiring staff who have an open attitude toward learning and working with implementing partners who are willing to try more participatory forms of PMEL.
- **Program culture:** encouragement for those who ask questions and innovate, ensuring that a PMEL culture is fully embedded into the program.
- **Performance appraisal:** include a focus on staff capacity to learn and innovate.
- **Showing how PMEL is used:** making the data and learning explicit and interesting by displaying it.
- **Feedback:** telling data collectors, information providers, and others involved in the process how their data were used and how it contributed to the program.

How well has WRI responded to changing donor reporting requirements?

WRI received approximately US\$44 million in core funding during 2018-21 from three bilateral donors - The Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark – which make a significant contribution to WRI for Programs, Centers, and IOs. This funding is a crucial component of WRI's overall funding, allowing it to invest in areas that programmatic funding may not. These include: innovation and incubation of new ideas; agility and responsiveness in the face of new opportunities and challenges; developing WRI's global presence, expertise and partnership in ways that benefit all programs; and supporting partners' policy and strategic development. This contribution is further detailed in the Technical Annex.

Donors recognize that:

³⁹ *Ten Steps to a Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System: A Handbook for Development Practitioners*, J. Zall Kusek, R.C. Rist (World Bank), 2004, link.

⁴⁰ Source: WRI External Review Team

‘The problems that WRI aims to tackle are entrenched, interconnected and elude quick fixes. These take time to do right, hence the importance of sustained core funding. Furthermore, receiving multiannual core funds for such transformative work enables WRI to catalyze synergies with other partners and mobilize funding from other donors, such ... a long-term approach is becoming increasingly difficult to implement.’⁴¹

The case for core funding, and reporting of where this funding is allocated, is clearly made and tracked across Programs, Centers, IOs, and institutionally per annum over the SP period.

The External Review Team found that donor expectations on reporting have shifted, particularly in the last year. Concern was expressed about the clarity of WRI’s response to changing donor reporting requirements. More attention is now paid to providing information on evaluation of results, with some interest expressed for increased tracking of results on the ground. This reflects a wider shift on the part of donors more generally, in favor of accountability over learning. This requirement has created challenges for WRI, given the difficulty in activating tracking retrospectively. Efforts were made by the MfR Team to extract data and information from annual plans to work on objective tracking, but it has been challenging given unevenness across WRI reporting and the range of donor expectations. This further flags the need for a more coherent and consistent approach to PMEL across WRI. In addition, it is possible that donor grant agreements may not reflect the most appropriate reporting required for Programs, as they evolve and progress and may need to be updated over time.

WRI has made significant efforts to respond to changing donor reporting requirements given the existing systems in place. Core donors may be able to further assist WRI by asking WRI to better report in aggregate at the outcome and impact level, rather than results ‘on the ground’ at the Program and country levels, since the driving mission of WRI is to achieve global change at scale, working with and through partners. Donors could champion an evaluation and learning approach that was at the heart of an organizational learning process, enabling WRI to develop a better circle of effective organizational learning, making connections between program effectiveness and organizational effectiveness, and driving greater impact.

To what extent are GSE reflected in WRI’s MEL practices?

WRI recognizes the importance of cross-cutting themes, particularly as an imperative in response to world change; with cross-cutting themes being one of the seven hallmarks of the 2018-2022 strategy. Since 2018, WRI’s approach to poverty reduction, gender, and social equity/inclusion has further developed and in some ways expanded in scope - initially focused only on gender, it has now broadened to be inclusive of social inclusion and equity.

Notwithstanding this recent progress from a low base, the External Review Team found that this has not made a strong showing under program monitoring and reporting. Across over 340 indicators (i.e. for Programs, Centers and IOs), GSE features under the Governance Center only three times - under the GSE sub-program, there are also two further references to indigenous peoples. The extent to which cross-

⁴¹ SIDA, WRI Document, Provided to ER Team

cutting themes are included in results frameworks differs and where PGSE is matrixed across teams, those teams express the outcomes differently reflecting their own priorities. The External Review Team found that there is a widespread recognition that WRI needs to step into this area more fully, and that more donor support would be welcome. (This is further reinforced by the findings for cross-cutting themes, see below).

To that goal, the MfR Team has been working closely with the Senior Gender Adviser on gender training, providing support for the Gender Strategy and the recommendations within this, sharing materials, and working on gender markers. There is scattered guidance across Banyan but it is not specifically labelled as GSE and so it is harder to identify and collate.

There are also inadequate systems and mechanisms to track PGSE across WRI e.g., a project database that captures PGSE work, or monitoring of budgets to track integration of GSE work. WRI's new DevResults system will help to address this through the development of gender and social equity markers but WRI lacks expertise and capacity to monitor and report on the impact of PGSE. Measuring change in equity requires innovative approaches to quantitative and qualitative evaluation and commitment from all staff. WRI is currently not systematically 'counting' PGSE and it is therefore unclear how WRI can determine whether it is aligned with its hallmark to '*increase focus on [...] gender and social equity.*'

By ensuring that provision is made at the proposal stage or requiring that evidence on GSE is properly reported and tracked against established markers, core donors could support WRI in advancing the PGSE agenda. The WRI Equity Taskforce has been a helpful driver in this arena, however this has been a largely voluntary⁴² initiative by a small group of mostly female staff. The ETF would benefit from more senior support for dissemination of key messages, including senior staff requiring teams to action key messages, together with additional resource commitments, both staff and funding. (See below for the cross-cutting themes review question). It appears that there is an appetite within WRI for a step change in this area rather than further incremental work, e.g. the recent commitment by WRI Africa to make 10 senior hires for equity. See also useful guiding principles summarized in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Guiding principles to inform a strengthened PMEL framework at the heart of WRI

To ensure the integrity of the refined PMEL framework and to encourage mutual ownership for enhanced M&E and learning across WRI and its stakeholders, the following principles could be applied to guide the approach:

- **Mission Focus:** *meeting the global challenges and the needs of partner countries remains central to the monitoring process.*
- **Prioritization:** *the PMEL framework is built around key WRI goals and objectives at the program level, to facilitate WRI's tracking of progress in the most critical areas.*
- **SMART:** *the proposed impact targets are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. They provide the bridge between implementation of activities and clear reporting of results.*

⁴² Voluntary in that not all members of the Equity Taskforce receive funding from the ETF code, nor do they have work of the ETF formally rolled into their job responsibilities.

- **Consultation:** key WRI stakeholders are engaged in the development and finalization of the PMEL framework.
- **Mutual Accountability:** the framework is developed in a way that allows all WRI stakeholders to hold each other to account for results.

Source: External Review Team

3. How and to what extent do the cross-cutting themes (poverty, gender and social equity) inform and influence WRI's work?

Overview of Section

Evidence of commitment to PGSE at WRI has been growing rapidly over the last couple of years, including over the review period. In early interviews and discussions on PGSE, we noted a frustration among some staff with the difficulties they faced in trying to promote a PGSE-centered approach. They felt that the Gender Equity Practice team members were too few, and resources too little to achieve their goals. Some WRI staff felt that PGSE was “not part of the work” in which they were involved and was something for others to tackle. A fully developed and nuanced, contextual understanding of PGSE shows that this is not the case.

The External Review Team believes that the Equity Task Force, (Now integrated into the Center for Equitable Development) with high-level PGSE champions, offers great potential to ensure that PGSE is fully embedded across the organization by the next review. By then, PGSE may be a central part of WRI's organizational culture. The aim must be to ensure that all staff understand that they have a role in working towards PGSE outcomes and that protection and preservation of the environment is inevitably inextricable from social change. This will not happen if commitment gets stuck at the higher levels of WRI or remains on the ground, among WRI's CSO partners.

Background

The 2016 external review noted the need for strategic plans to ensure that attention to cross-cutting aspects of poverty and gender is more explicitly articulated in all planning documents. Since then, there has been significant groundwork undertaken by the Senior Gender Advisor, appointed in April 2015 and now Director of the Gender Equity Practice (GEP). For example, the 2016 Gender Strategy paper kick-started a strategic approach to gender inclusion. This paper focused on gender, as an equity issue, but in isolation from equity issues more broadly. By 2016, many organizations, following a Rights-Based Development approach, had aligned their gender strategy with strategies to meet a wider rights and social equity agenda.⁴³ WRI's focus on gender alone meant that it was behind the curve.

In 2017 WRI broadened the scope of the strategy to incorporate a wider approach to social equity, in the lead up to WRI's current 2018-2022 Strategic Plan. The revised GSE Strategy adopts a more nuanced poverty reduction, gender and social equity approach, setting target outcomes. In addition, a WRI strategic planning paper on GSE underlined the importance of focusing on equitable and sustainable development.⁴⁴ The 2018-22 WRI Strategic Plan included as a hallmark:

“We will increase our focus on jobs, health, gender and social equity, and human security. We will motivate change with arguments of economic opportunity, health

⁴³ *Climate Change and Gender*, Action Aid (2021), [link](#); *Food and Nutrition Security and Climate Change*, CARE International (2021), [link](#); *Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change*, UN WomenWatch (2009) [link](#); *Training Manual on Gender and Climate Change*, IUCN and UNDP (2009), [link](#); *AR5 Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, IPCC (2014), [link](#)

⁴⁴ *Advancing Social Inclusion and Equity*, WRI Strategic Planning Process Special Topics Paper Outline, 16 February 2017

and social inclusion, in addition to environmental goals. We will begin new work on air quality and on resource scarcity, security and resilience with partners from the security community.”⁴⁵

During the last two years, partly in response to an intensified focus on equity worldwide, and stronger donor requirements on PGSE, there has been an acceleration of PGSE related work at WRI. The Gender Equity Practice (GEP) laid the foundations for this rapid uptick in PGSE work, particularly in providing training to staff, reviewing the inclusion of PGSE in knowledge products and supporting Teams, by reviewing plans etc. The GEP has continually pushed the gender and equity agenda forward. Without this foundational work the recent growth in WRI investment in PGSE work would not have been possible. All these factors, working together, mean that there is now strong buy-in to PGSE from high-level management and a strengthened commitment to meet the Hallmark relating to GSE and meet sustainable development goals. Understanding of the centrality of cross-cutting themes has increased across WRI.

In 2020 WRI established an Equity Task Force, with senior membership from across the organization. The thirteen propositions of the Equity Task Force Action Plan set out similar objectives and ambitions to the GSE strategy. From document reviews and engagement with staff across WRI, the external review concludes that the ETF has been successful, in part because the design of the task force led to greater cross-institute support. In addition, the senior ‘buy-in’ for the ETF has also helped to drive many of the changes to date. In July 2021, as part of the Equity Task Force Action Plan, developed by the Task Force, WRI transformed the Governance Center into the Center for Equitable Development. The Centre was “tasked with coordinating the implementation of institutional measures aimed at centralising equity in all programs[...].”⁴⁶ The role of the Center is to coordinate implementation and provide thought leadership, but programmatic work with equity considerations, happens across WRI.

The “take-off” period has extended to other aspects of the organization with, for example, diversification through a large growth in staff numbers, working across 12 countries. WRI work with partners, including civil society organizations and local governments/policy makers in more than 50 countries. Through the international offices, WRI has expanded work on cross-cutting themes, demonstrating a more ecological model of thinking: that is, a more appropriate poverty alleviation and gender focus, elaborated on local contexts, which can be linked to higher-level strategic and policy influence, pushed from the global office. In this way, WRI can gradually incorporate a “bottom-up” approach to poverty reduction and equity into its higher-level work.

There remains, however, much to be done before WRI can feel confident that understanding of, and appropriate attention to, PGSE is truly embedded in the organization’s culture. WRI does not yet live up to its 2018 strategic hallmark. When this stage is reached, WRI will be addressing PGSE across all aspects of its work. There will be structures, systems and resources in place to ensure that staff can, and do, fully engage with PGSE – from pre-planning through to post-completion follow-up. The following sections assess the extent to which the aspiration reflected in the 2018 strategic hallmark on equity has been translated into practice in WRI’s work. We have made our assessment in line with the minimum standards for gender equality mainstreaming.

⁴⁵ *Delivering Impact at Scale Strategic Plan 2018-2022*, WRI, p.9

⁴⁶ *Overview Institutional Actions to Integrate Equity Considerations*, WRI, p.2

Minimum Standards for Gender Equality Mainstreaming

The Minimum Standards for Gender Equality Mainstreaming set out minimum requirements to reach acceptable standards, in terms of gender rights fulfilment.⁴⁷ As set out in the June 2021 Inception Note, the Review assesses WRI's approach to cross-cutting themes of poverty reduction, gender and social equity in accordance with these globally agreed standards.

Policy⁴⁸

Definitions of terms related to PGSE, and strategy documents (e.g., the Gender Strategy and the superseding GSE Strategy 2018-2021) have evolved rapidly along with new approaches and strategies. Understanding the PGSE policy and strategy environment in WRI is therefore not always straightforward. In the absence of a PGSE policy, or even an agreed lexicon of terminology, work on cross-cutting themes has not been as systematic or rapid as it might have been. The issue of terminology has now been addressed. Under the Equity Task Force Action Plan, written in October 2021, working definitions⁴⁹ of key cross-cutting theme terms were shared, with the Management Team, for review. Definitions were developed and refined in a cross-institute, collaborative manner. This is an important milestone, as the shared lexicon will ensure systematic coherence, application and integration of cross-cutting themes.

The ER team's assessment of teams' strategies and 2018 5-year plans found a wide variation in the extent to which cross-cutting themes were integrated and applied. Team plans show some evidence of incremental progress in integrating GSE, including team plans for FY22. These demonstrate some application of the ecological model⁵⁰ and greater focus on rights-based development. The Brasil 5-year Strategy is an example of good practice in this respect. It includes objectives for mobility, energy efficiency, landscape restoration and climate policies. It has a focus on social equity matters including ensuring inclusive development and contributing to resilient cities work. The strategy expresses strong intent to work on *"on-the-ground projects [...] with transformative potential in a cross-sectoral integrated approach"*⁵¹. This is a good example of WRI applying an ecological approach, which looks at social relationships (and power) across and between all sectors of society.

The 2017 Gender and Equity Strategy update aimed to increase buy-in by WRI by sharing evidence of what works. The Strategy stated that, in order to encourage an organization-wide integration of gender: *"... the gender initiative will maximise buy-in from the organization at large by sharing evidence about the effectiveness of gender-responsive approaches and targeting relevant or catalytic entry points. Criteria for prioritizing entry points include: potential to affect change in gender norms/dynamics and not just meet the basic needs of women; willingness of implementing teams and partners; and funding"*.⁵²

⁴⁷ Gender Practitioner Collaborative, Minimum Standards for Mainstreaming Gender Equality, [link](#)

⁴⁸ Minimum Standards Criterion #1

⁴⁹ Working definitions were developed and refined collectively over time by working groups. WRI members of staff were consulted through focus group discussions, including expert staff from international offices, programs, and centers.

⁵⁰ See Annex 1: Inception Note, p.36

⁵¹ WRI Brasil 5-Year Strategy, p.5

⁵² WRI Gender Strategy 2016-2021 (FY17 update), p.6

In practice, there is little evidence to suggest how the 2017 Strategy has been used to promote change in the regulatory/legal environment, to encourage catalytic engagement for greater gender equality and equity, or to model effective approaches which might be brought to scale. All these are needed to encourage the social changes which lead to equity. In particular, the lack of contextual, Political Economy Analysis (PEA) baseline data on gender, at the outset of programmes and other interventions, has been a barrier to effective implementation of the Strategy (see further Minimum Standard Criteria on Analysis, Data and Indicators, section below).

Fundamentally, the 2018-2021 GSE Strategy, and its Hallmark 2 on equity, were not rooted in an organizational policy on equity – as WRI have not instated an organizational policy for gender nor other equity issues. The GSE Strategy was not translated into WRI-processes, methods or indicators with which to assess the effect and impact of any gender-related work. The Strategy has thus tended to be used, piecemeal, in individual projects rather than becoming an institutionalized strategy, across the organization. Systems are not in place, as yet, to ensure that the Strategy is implemented, in practice. There are no protocols or Standard Operating Procedures to require its implementation, and the GEP does not have a mandate to insist either on use of the Strategy, or on feedback on how it has been used. Currently, there are not dedicated resources to close the Strategy-implementation-feedback loop. As a WRI staff member put it: *"The Center for Equitable Development should develop a PGSE Strategy not just an Equity Strategy. Poverty alleviation is the main objective that ODA seeks to achieve. Poverty alleviation and social equity are of course closely linked. One cannot go without the other. Poverty refers to overall levels of welfare, while equity to the way the benefits of welfare are distributed within a society."*

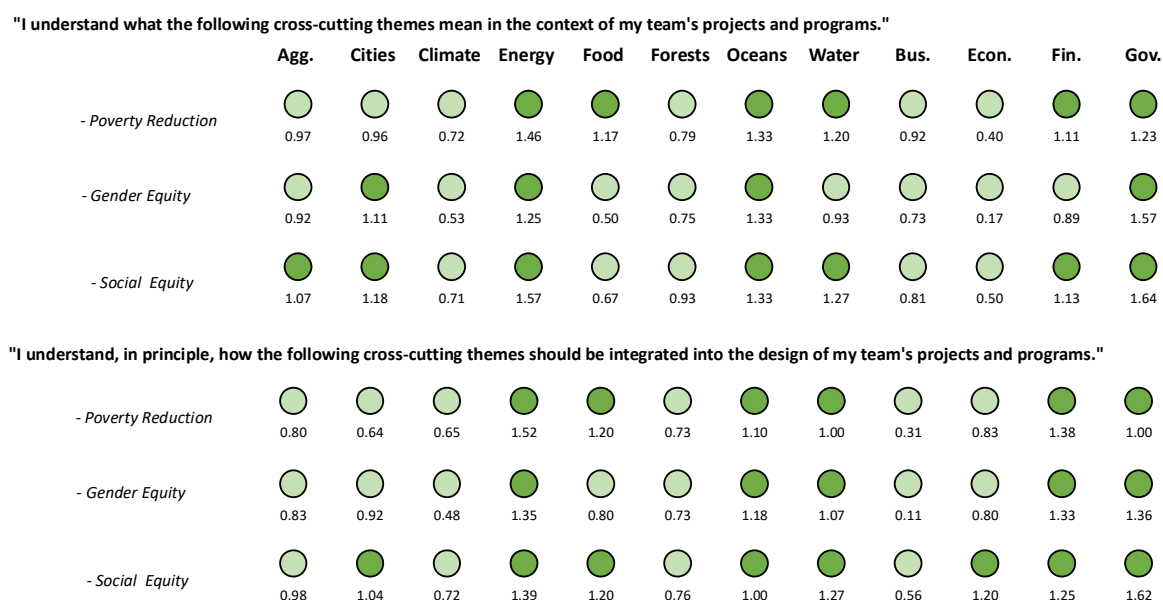
Culture and Capacity⁵³

Culture

Evidence from documentation and focus group discussions showed that PGSE remains a goodwill practice and is not yet well integrated across WRI. It is not yet part of the WRI culture. Despite the provision of training, useful resources and technical advice shared with Teams, discrepancies still exist in the understanding and implementation of this work. (See Figure 16 below for the all-staff survey results, disaggregated by Team).

⁵³ Minimum Standards Criterion #2

Figure 16: WRI Staff Perceptions of Understanding and Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes in Teams' Work⁵⁴



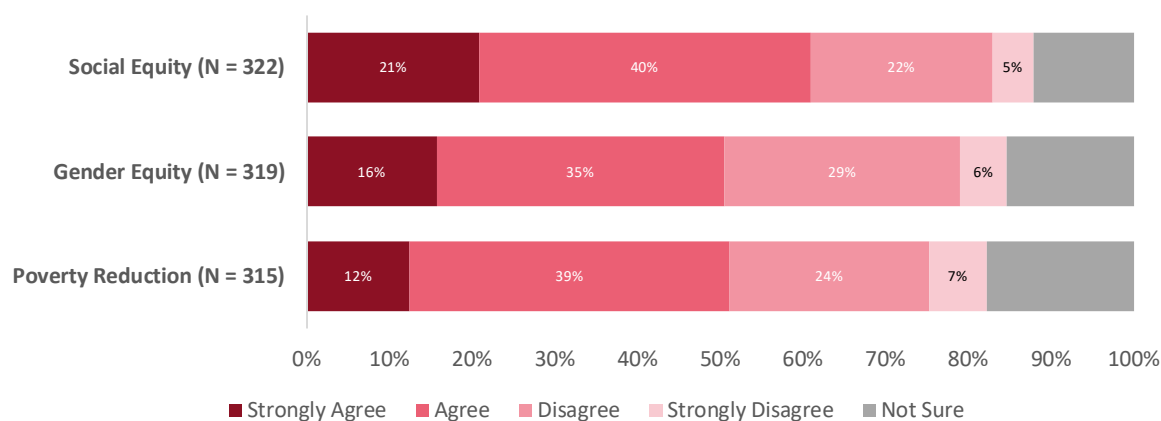
Across WRI, there is a gap between understanding of cross-cutting issues and how they should be integrated in WRI's work, and the level to which they are currently integrated in projects and programs. Most of the Energy, Oceans and Governance (now the Center for Equitable Development) staff expressed confidence in their understanding of the principle of cross-cutting issues. However, that confidence did not extend into the way they design projects and programs. There is some evidence of integration of cross-cutting themes but, from focus group discussions, interviews, and the survey, some staff feel unsure how to integrate PGSE into their work, despite training and resources being made available to staff. The survey also found that majority of staff did not feel that cross-cutting themes were being well integrated into the design of their Team's projects and programs. See Figure 17 below.

The results in Figure 17 are concerning. Half of the survey respondents felt either that the cross-cutting themes of gender equity and poverty reduction are not well integrated in projects or programs, or they were not sure whether they were or not. Over a third of respondents felt the same way about integration of social equity. Some internal and external interviewees felt that WRI was behind other environmental organizations in integrating social equity matters into their work. External stakeholders do not generally view WRI as their 'go to' organization on issues related to GSE although they are recognized for their work on indigenous land rights. These results point to a strong need to increase efforts to ensure integration of all cross-cutting themes.

⁵⁴ Source: WRI All-Staff Survey. The External Review team has calculated a "weighted average" of responses for each of the Teams. The point of using a weighted average is to allow WRI to see immediately where the balance of opinion lies for each of the Teams. The External Review team has weighted the responses as follows: "Strongly Agree" (2); "Agree" (1); "Disagree" (-1); and "Strongly Disagree" (-2). Responses that were "Not Sure" were excluded from this assessment. If the "weighted average" is between 2 and 1 respondents broadly opted for "Strongly Agree"; if it is between 1 and 0 then "Agree"; if it is between 0 and -1 then "Disagree"; and if it is between -1 and -2 then "Strongly Disagree".

Figure 17: WRI Staff Perceptions on Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes⁵⁵

"I feel that the following cross-cutting themes have been well integrated into the design of my team's projects and programs."



Capacity

Across WRI, there is still a lack of capacity to do PGSE work and to ensure the PGSE perspective is present in all work. We note that across WRI, there are only eight staffers serving a core function related to equity work. There are seven additional gender and equity points of contact across WRI who liaise with the Gender Equity Practice and/or the ETF, yet staff did not feel that teams were adequately drawing on the technical expertise of these points of contact. This is, in part, because staff were not aware of who the points of contact were, within their given global challenge. WRI has identified the need to increase staffing capacity for cross-cutting themes, the Review Team notes that this has been an acknowledged drawback since 2016. Though WRI has increased capacity across the organization, recruitment of staff with relevant PGSE expertise and whose job role is predominantly focussed on supporting PGSE work, has been slow. However, as part of the ETF action plan, WRI has set an objective of hiring ten Senior Equity Advisors.

As of December 2021, WRI is in the process of hiring senior equity advisors in India, Mexico and the Global Restoration Initiative. A Learning Manager has just been hired within the GEP, to support institutional capacity building. A PMEL Advisor is being hired in the Africa office and will also have responsibility for equity issues. Drawing on interviews with staff, the Review Team identified the need for a MEL expert and an Equity Advisor to support the international office, but this is reportedly not possible, due to funding constraints. The international office has decided to prioritise the PMEL hire, with the intention to hire a MEL expert with experience of social equity monitoring, who can then support greater integration of cross-cutting themes, generally. Given that sustainable and equitable development is an integral component of WRI's International Offices, however, it is important that WRI prioritize funding for each expertise identified, ensuring adequate resources and support is given to each area of focus.

⁵⁵ Source: WRI All-Staff Survey

The Gender Equity Practice has not grown in line with the rest of WRI. Though the GEP provide training for staff, the small GEP are unable to provide training for a growing WRI. Through Banyan, GEP have provide GSE resources, available to all teams. Gender and Social Equity training has been provided for staff on Challenge Teams (i.e., Economics, Climate, Water) and in the International Offices (including India and Mexico). Click here to enter text. In interviews, staff submit that they felt that comprehensive training has been difficult to implement at WRI, adding that staff felt they do not have the protected time to attend voluntary trainings such as the cross-cutting trainings provided.

The Review found that there is strong staff appetite for greater knowledge-sharing across WRI. This particularly relates to how to integrate social equity into projects across the International Offices and Global Challenges. Groups have been formed to facilitate the desired knowledge sharing and learning, i.e. the GSE Community of Practice and the Cities Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion group, but these forums are not known to all (from interviews and focus groups), and therefore are not being utilized to their full potential. With the recent period of rapid growth at WRI, it is important that staff become aware of the different working groups and teams which have the mandate to ensure PGSE work is being done: i.e. the GSE Community of Practice and the Equity Task Force. Staff need also to know how to join and contribute to these groups – ensuring representation across the groups, including age, sex, geographical location, junior as well as senior members of staff, etc. The monthly GSE newsletter, which is sent to all staff, shines light on some of these good practices.

Under the ETF Action Plan, WRI is in the process of recruiting a Learning Associate who will join the GSE Initiative to support cross-institute capacity building. It is unsurprising that, to date, only a small number of staff have attended trainings. The GEP Team is only 2 people, and there are over 1500 staff in the organization. However, the ETF Action Plan states that the Learning Associate will conduct a training needs assessment, review the current training modules, and identify training gaps and propose new models. The Review Team hopes that the recruitment of the Learning Associate to the Gender Equity Practice will address the needs assessment as a priority issue of concern; ensuring that core trainings such as GSE trainings are made mandatory, and that staff have the time to attend these sessions.

In summary, the Equity Task Force, the GSE Community of Practice, and Cities JEDI are good foundations for building the culture of PGSE into WRI's work, but more is needed. There is a strong need for a more holistic and grounded approach to building the culture. In particular, there is a need for champions throughout all staffing levels. Moreover, skills building needs to go beyond trainings, and be well-integrated into the daily work environment, to ensure that Teams gain an understanding of how to apply cross-cutting themes to their projects and programs. Staff will also need ongoing encouragement and support to see that PGSE is relevant in *all* their work, not just in situations where the interface between people and the environment is immediately obvious – an expressed challenge of integrating PGSE into projects to date.

Data, Indicators and Analysis⁵⁶

The ability to track effectiveness and impact of PGSE work, and the sustainability of PGSE achievements depend, *inter alia*, on three components of MEL:

- **Sound understanding of, and information on, the PGSE situation prior to starting any engagement or work.** Understanding and information derive from a targeted Political Economy Analysis of the

⁵⁶ Combines Minimum Standards Criteria #s 3,5 and 6

context of work. This does not (always) require primary data collection but involves a systematic approach to collation and use of secondary data, with a focus on identified, relevant PGSE issues. This understanding is needed not only for work at local levels, but also at middle levels and higher strategic/policy development levels. Understanding the full interplay of power relations, and the roles (actual and potential) of different stakeholders and institutions, is crucial to optimizing opportunities for influence and change, and overcoming barriers.

- **Design and use of MEL data collection methods (qualitative as well as quantitative)**, which can reliably track, and be used to assess, progress towards PGSE outcomes. Qualitative methods and measures are needed for work at all levels. Participatory, qualitative methods of enquiry are useful, and can produce high quality, robust data, at all levels. However, they need to be a) appropriate to the context and b) well-facilitated, if they are to work well. This means that there is a need for significant, upfront investment (time, training and resources) to ensure that staff values both methods. In addition, competent PGSE indicators need to be set.
- **Belief in the value of PGSE indicators – which may not be “countable”**. To measure social norms change and social change (which are both required for social equity) qualitative indicators, as well as more traditional quantitative indicators must be used. Setting qualitative indicators to assess PGSE issues requires deep understanding of PGSE and MEL. In organizations, there is often initial resistance to working on, and with “softer” indicators, which measure change in “hearts and minds”. But the fullness of achievements in PGSE can be demonstrated only when this type of indicator is integrated into MEL systems. Gender, social inclusion and equity are now priority areas for WRI’s research. *“We will enhance WRI’s research and analytical capacity on the priorities in this strategy including health, social equity and human security through new hires and by bringing top experts to WRI as senior fellows.”*⁵⁷ However, staff suggested that the research process does not allow enough time to do this work well. They also expressed the need to strengthen staff capabilities on equity and inclusion research method. Investing in development of the three MEL components, above, alongside new hires and senior fellows, greatly facilitate demonstration of PGSE impacts.

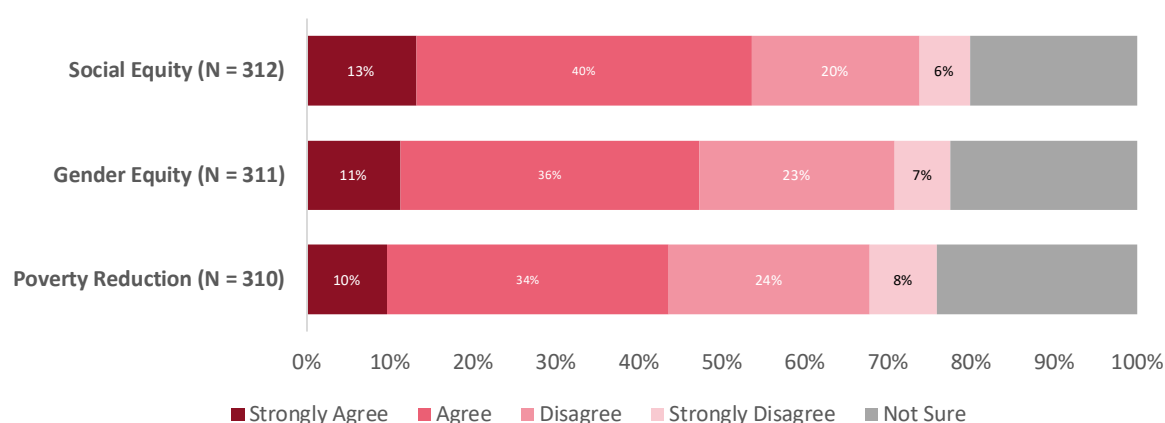
Overall, within the organization, staff do not feel their teams are collecting qualitative and quantitative data to measure the contribution of projects and programs for cross-cutting themes. To date, data monitoring has largely been Platforms-focused e.g. Global Forest Watch data and greenhouse gas emissions data presented through Climate Watch. Less attention has been given to assessing the impact of work on the ground, particularly where WRI are making direct contribution to social equity. There are challenges of attribution versus contribution in measuring the impacts of WRI’s work, but, at a minimum, qualitative research with affected populations would help to capture WRI’s impact – particularly for work

⁵⁷ *Delivering Impact At Scale Strategic Plan 2018-2022*, WRI, p.44

where WRI has had a direct contribution. Civil Society Organizations, which may, potentially, be partners at local levels, are not usually best-placed to carry out in-depth quantitative research and MEL, but they may have capacities to work qualitatively. At higher levels, data monitoring around budgeting and policy change, and, for example, around national campaigns and growth in relevant social movement (youth, women's, environmental) can demonstrate contribution to, and progress towards, PGSE goals. The introduction of DevResults holds the promise of helping to ensure that quantitative data are better captured, tracked, and monitored to complement qualitative assessments of social equity impact. (See Figures 18 and 19 below.)

Figure 18: Staff Perceptions on Collection of Qualitative Data for PGSE⁵⁸

"My team collects quantitative data to measure the contribution of its projects and programs to the following cross-cutting themes."



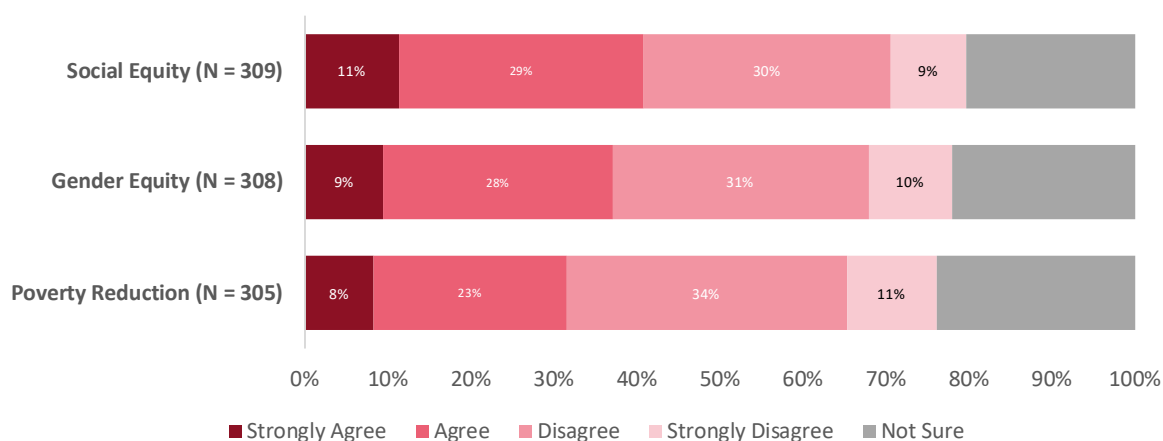
Across all the cross-cutting themes, only one-third to one half of staff responding to the survey felt that their team collects enough quantitative data for adequate measurement of their projects and programmes to the cross-cutting themes.

Figure 19: Staff Perceptions on Collection of Quantitative Data for PGSE⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Source: WRI All-Staff Survey

⁵⁹ Source: WRI All-Staff Survey

"My team collects qualitative data to help assess the contribution of its projects and programs to the following cross-cutting themes."



Do No Harm

WRI can increase the likelihood that it will do no harm around PGSE issues: i) by ensuring that it works with a wide range of stakeholders and build real understanding of the relations of power and vulnerability; by ensuring that its end products are disseminated and can be understood and used by a diverse range of interested organizations and people; and iii) by using its strategic policy influence and think-tank work to promote equitable change in policy and practice.

A Range of Stakeholders

Across its whole portfolio, WRI works with an impressive range of partners and organizations – from international forums, through national governments, civil society, academics and the private sector. To date, however, WRI has not systematically invested in formally building its understanding of power relations in the different contexts in which it works. From interviews, the Review team understands that some staff – largely through experience – have highly developed understanding of the political economies of the context in which they work. They can build partnerships and plans, and design appropriate approaches based on understanding built up during their own engagement in the context. Overall, however, there would be considerable benefit in formalising this process of understanding – particularly through PEAs, started before initiatives reach the planning phase and updated throughout implementation and into evaluation. In this way, a more nuanced picture of power and vulnerability would be built up and the interdependent aspects of PGSE are more likely to be addressed.

User-friendly End Products

The Review team found that there is evidence of thinking through a number of ‘access’ issues in relation to dissemination of its products. For example, knowledge products may be produced in several different languages, access to data platforms is opened, webinars are provided on how to use the platforms. These are very positive moves. However, the extent to which WRI ensures that its products are produced in formats which can be understood by all users, is less clear. For example, we did not find evidence of protocols around ensuring feedback is documented and given, in suitable formats, to communities, about their participation in initiatives. We would anticipate that this sort of feedback would be done with, and

by, civil society organizations, working at community levels. This may not be a very large part of WRI's direct work, but it is still important, and is a means of safeguarding the rights of vulnerable people.

Strategic Policy Influence

There is a strong link between the do no harm aspects of strategic policy influencing, and accountability (see next sub-section). Survey responses from staff indicate that WRI has limited influence on policy makers to account for PGSE issues – in policy development and implementation:

- “Our team came into fruition in 2018 and works with 14 international governments so we as a Secretariat can help them but we don't have influence as a Secretariat on their policies...” (Mid-level staff, Oceans)
- “My team's focus is in [country x and largely at federal level]. I feel that teams and projects that have more localized focuses (e.g. cities, regional energy, local forests) are better able to directly address poverty reduction, gender equity and social equity head-on in their work. If/when advocating for these topics at a higher level (federal, global) it can become less specific/actionable and instead feel a bit token. Poverty, gender and social equity are still challenges for WRI because we have a strong science focus, but a weaker social science focus, and even less focus on qualitative data. Some teams have excelled in integrating these lenses (WRI's behavioural science work is fascinating), but other teams are far behind, yet still trying their best to catch up” (Survey respondent, mid-level staff, Climate team).

There are, undoubtedly, tensions in how an independent organization, like WRI, forms its relationships with governments and works with them at the same time as using its ability to influence on (potentially) contentious issues. PGSE issues are often (mistakenly) seen as “soft” issues. In practice, they are highly politically charged and, if handled inappropriately or worse, ignored, can lead to great harm for people and civil society groupings.

In summary, WRI operates carefully within its chosen contexts, but could do more to formalize, and make more nuanced, its understanding of power relations in those contexts. There would be benefit in WRI being even more clear about when and how it intends to influence, and when it will take a more academic approach.

Budget

Financial resources to help meet the hallmark objective on PGSE across WRI are limited – though flexible funding helps to ensure that work on cross-cutting themes is done and is effective. WRI has invested over \$2.75 million of flexible resources to further the Gender and Social Equity agenda institutionally at WRI during FY18-FY22. These funds supported the hiring of WRI's very first gender and social equity advisor to support the Equity Taskforce Recommendations beginning in 2019-2021.⁶⁰ Approximately \$1.5 million core bilateral funding was allocated for FY18-21, \$1.1m for equity work in FY22 as part of the Equity Taskforce Recommendations, and another \$300k in FY17. Despite this funding the GEP has not grown in line with the rest of WRI - as of December 2021, the GEP comprises of the three full-time core staff members (Director of Gender Equity Practice, a Research Analyst and the new Learning Associate Hire), and one Senior Research Associate with 40% of their time with the GEP team. WRI have pledged to set

⁶⁰ Overview of Institutional Actions to Integrate Equity Considerations, WRI, p.4

aside \$1.5m of institutional funding to support efforts to implement ETF action plan, aimed at further progressing PGSE work across WRI.⁶¹

The incorporation of GSE in project proposals is not necessarily a requirement for accessing bilateral funding for other purposes. The 2016 external review reported that *‘poverty relevance is a key criteria for allocating bilateral funding for projects’*. This is not our finding. As one interviewee put it: “occasionally a note would be included that there was an expectation that bilateral funding requests integrate gender issues. That was not mandatory and rarely were teams denied funding if they did not include gender. Equity (not specifically gender) was signalled to be a priority for funding in the 2022 allocations and seems to have been a factor in many of the funding decision, though not all.” Although some bilateral allocation projects with equity components have received funding – for example, WRI’s investment into its air quality and adaptation work,⁶² the GSE team currently receives minimal funding from the several projects to which they allocate time.

Yet social change towards equality and equity take time and there is a need for project funding to acknowledge this, to ensure that impact can be measured. A lack of accounting codes or other mechanisms to enable tracking of PGSE spending, means that it is not possible to explore this in detail. However staff strongly submit that projects lack the funding to measure impact of cross-cutting matters such as equity. They highlight that longitudinal impact assessments and reporting (methods to assess PGSE impact) require funding beyond the duration of the project.

Accountability

The Review Team sees accountability as a multi-dimensional process. In Terms of PGSE, WRI is accountable upwards (for example to WRI’s Board members, national governments, donors and the global CoP on environmental issues), downwards (for example to the many partner organizations and communities with which it works) and outwards, (to peer organizations and the wider public). Taking this view of accountability and building from the Minimum Standards on Gender Equality, the WRI responsibility to be accountable, in terms of PGSE, can be seen as two-fold:

- 1) It must establish accountability mechanisms to monitor the status of PGSE within organizational practices and programming, and
- 2) It has the responsibility to share its findings on monitoring PGSE, within its practices and programming, with a wide range of stakeholders, invite feedback and respond to suggestions, where appropriate.

Accountability mechanisms

WRI has stated an intention to build monitoring capacities to ensure that staff are doing the ‘count it’ work. This work is underway and will inform the next strategic planning process. However, there is much to do. Setting indicators for PGSE work requires dedicated resources and agreed understanding of cross-cutting terminology. In addition, measuring against set indicators for cross-cutting themes requires engagement over the longer term. In the case of much of WRI’s work, this is beyond the project cycle and requires commitment and careful data storage. WRI is not currently systematically ‘counting’ PGSE, across its portfolio. There are notable exceptions to this, for example the GEP’s work on assessing inclusion of

⁶¹ Overview of Institutional Actions to Integrate Equity Considerations, WRI, p.4

⁶² Email from WRI, 7 October 2021, 15:54, Subject: Overview institutional actions to integrate equity considerations

PGSE in Knowledge Products. This has shown a significant increase in attention to PGSE over the last couple of years. However, it is not clear what is being done with the information, nor whether it is possible to enter dialogue with KP producers who claim that PGSE is not relevant to their product. PGSE measurement systems need more development, and implementation, before WRI can be sure it is on track to “increase focus on [...] gender and social equity”.

As noted above, WRI have not yet made the use of DevResults mandatory across teams. Thus, although the system will allow for better tracking out of outputs and outcomes, until the system is made mandatory, it will remain a challenge to comment with confidence on WRI’s progress towards integrating cross-cutting themes throughout the lifecycle of a project or knowledge product.⁶³

High-Level Influence

WRI is the Secretariat for several Delivery Platforms, which gives it an opportunity to influence GSE at a global scale. As noted elsewhere in this report, the relationship that WRI has with governments needs to be carefully negotiated – so as to optimize its influencing role, yet maintain independence and credibility across civil society. Using this high-level influencing potential is therefore critical if WRI is to strengthen its own, and governments’, accountability towards the public on matters relating to GSE.

Feedback loops

In addition to initiatives to improve the effectiveness of PGSE monitoring, there is a need to reconsider the lines of reporting and reporting requirements. As discussed earlier, there are, as yet, few formal drivers to require full sharing and response of PGSE. From interviews the ER team learned that WRI teams are under no requirement to respond to or action feedback and inputs from the GEP. Equally, they do not have to share experiences when they do respond.

WRI’s Top Outcomes Submission and Awardees

The Top Outcomes process has not done enough to recognize and reward progress in GSE. In the past, the top outcome submission form did not require teams to reflect on *how* their Program/Project/Platform contributed to equity/poverty reduction objectives. The form stated that outcomes should: “*help to advance towards WRI’s ultimate goal, which is longer-term impacts at scale that maintain the environment, enhance equity and expand opportunities for all*”, but left no space to acknowledge progress towards this outcome. In Focus Group Discussions and interviews, staff said that they did not feel that WRI’s annual top outcome celebrated cross-cutting themes outputs and outcomes. Most of the staff participating in the FGDs said they would like to see equity outcomes rewarded. They said that, whilst reaching equity outcomes takes time, progress towards equity outcomes could also be celebrated and rewarded. WRI is now revising the top outcomes selection criteria to place greater emphasis on outcomes that integrate, or directly address, social inequity and/or poverty reduction. WRI is also devising a scoring rubric for the selection criteria of top outcomes, to reflect the elevation of equity as a determining factor for top outcomes. The process is on track to influence 2022 top outcome submissions and selection of award winners.

In summary, in company with many other organizations, WRI has much to do in strengthening its MEL systems before it will be able to showcase the totality of what it does in relation to PGSE. Without exception, all WRI’s work needs to address PGSE issues. It takes innovative approaches to quantitatively

⁶³ See also, the Results Section

and qualitatively analyze collected data – particularly given the challenges of attribution. Social equity change come as a result of myriad other changes. Some of these are exogenous factors beyond WRI's control e.g., cultural traditions and beliefs. However, since WRI is committed to promote social equity, it needs to develop stronger partnerships with organizations whose USP is working for change in social norms and beliefs. This is one way in which WRI can build greater sustainability into its PGSE efforts and optimize the benefits of the PGSE investments it makes.

4. What outputs and outcomes has WRI achieved in the area of “WRI in Africa,” in its 5-Year Strategy (2018-2022), including the cross-cutting themes of poverty and gender?

Overview of Section

Overall, the WRI Africa office has already ‘Mostly Achieved’ the objectives set out in the previous WRI in Africa strategy. With 46 targets, the WRI in Africa strategy had more targets than any other IO. As of October 2021, 62.7% percent of these had been achieved. 12 targets are non-verifiable due to a lack of data. The Energy and Cities Programs have had the greatest success in Africa among Programs in terms of results achieved.

WRI staff working on Africa generally feel that their work in Africa reflects the central operating principles underpinning WRI in Africa. Over half agree or strongly agree that WRI is succeeding in Africa in doing fewer, but bigger, high-quality things; stabilizing the number of countries in which WRI engages; being inclusive, but with a view to achieving greater impact; empowering the previous Regional Director to take the lead; building institutional and programmatic cohesion; Promoting South-South cooperation; and Developing partnerships with pan-African, regional, and local organizations.

Lessons learned include the following: i) Although WRI Africa has developed a regional strategy for Africa, it has few tools available to ensure that the programming developed by other teams in WRI is aligned with the regional strategy, ii) A core challenge for WRI Africa is to identify issues of regional concern while developing solutions that genuinely respond to local needs. To enable this, WRI will need more senior level capacity to enable it to develop relationships at an appropriate level (FY20 Annual Plan), iii) WRI’s work in key countries of focus for WRI such as Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Ethiopia, has also been subject to political upheaval and/or other political changes that have set back progress.

The WRI Africa Strategy Refresh deliberately sharpened the Office’s focus on Gender and Social Equity. As a result of the Strategy Refresh, there is clear evidence of the integration of poverty, gender, and social equity themes across the new WRI Africa strategy. There are also several WRI engagements in Africa that have an explicit social equity focus. The ER team found that WRI has been inclusive in its engagements in Africa, but that this should be developed further, including partnerships with NGOs and other local organizations.

Core functions in WRI Africa are now considerably stronger than they were in 2018. This is particularly true for operations and HR. Nevertheless, critical weaknesses remain. This is particularly the case in the areas of Program Management (including PMEL capacity), Development and RDI (see Figure 21). The engagement and expertise of the regional operations director has been crucial in past years in Africa although challenges remain. It has helped prevent fiduciary risks and build out awareness about the WRI norms and standards.

Background

WRI’s engagement with Africa as a continent has been evolving for nearly a decade. However, as noted by one external stakeholder interviewed by the ER Team, *“there have always been programs of work in Africa, but they had not been embedded into the rest of WRI’s work in a coherent way.”* The 2012 External

Review⁶⁴ recommended that *‘the next priority for WRI should be Africa. Not country programs in Africa but engaging with Africa as a continent’*. The 2016 evaluation⁶⁵ noted that the 2014-17 Strategic Plan had *‘highlighted the need to build an institutional presence in Africa, going beyond its existing programmatic presence in Central Africa focused on Forests. This approach has been actively supported by the Board. At the time of this review, plans were well advanced to establishing a Regional Office for Africa based in Ethiopia, following a detailed scoping exercise.’* This scoping exercise, comprising two visits to the continent which took place in 2013/14, identified an interest on the part of stakeholders consulted in the distinctive features of WRI’s specific offer notably its: (i) independence, (ii) mission-driven ethos, (iii) International Offices in other emerging markets that could provide opportunities for learning, (iv) its integrated approach across the Global Challenges, (v) strong research skills and evidence-based decision, and (vi) links to the private sector.⁶⁶

Africa has also been a central concern for WRI’s core donors although this is now combined with an increased engagement in WRI’s environmental and climate change agenda. The ER Team heard that the priorities of core donors were increasingly aligned with those of WRI as issues of climate change and the green economy were increasingly inseparable from development priorities in Africa. Sustainable agriculture in Africa is an example which has attracted significant core donor interest.

In August 2016, WRI Africa opened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and in 2018, a preliminary strategy, ‘WRI in Africa’, was shared with WRI’s Board. The 2018 Strategy noted that hitherto: *‘our engagement model was based on a project approach, mostly through short-lived engagements (exceptions include forest work in Central Africa) and without connecting the dots across WRI or capitalizing on links between Africa and other IOs.’*⁶⁷ The Strategy further noted that while other organizations had deeper pockets, WRI is one of the few, if not only, advisors perceived as neutral. WRI’s mission to work at the intersection between environment and development set it apart from most other actors that tended to focus *either* on development *or* on environment. The strategy also noted that WRI was valued for its convening power, and the potential for South-South cooperation.

What outputs and outcomes has WRI achieved in the area of ‘WRI in Africa’ in its 5-Year Strategy (2018-2022), including the cross-cutting themes of poverty and gender?

Overall, the WRI Africa office has already ‘Mostly Achieved’ the ‘we will’ statements set out in the previous ‘WRI in Africa’ strategy. With 46 targets, the WRI in Africa strategy had more targets than any other IO. As of October 2021, 62.7% of these had been achieved (see Figure 20). 12 targets are non-verifiable due to a lack of data, also more than any other International Office. If these are excluded, the strategy is 84.8% achieved. This underscores the importance of improving WRI’s MEL systems in order to better capture the progress it is making in practice (see Section 2 above).

The ‘Energy’ workstream was the most successful of those contained within the ‘WRI in Africa’ strategy. The Energy Access Explorer Platform was successfully expanded to include Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Zambia over the course of the strategy, on top of the original countries of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The EAE platform is used to identify opportunities to invest in renewable energies, especially to reach the most vulnerable populations. The EAE platform has proved especially useful in Kenya where it has been used to develop sub-national energy plans, particularly in the county of Kitui as required by the

⁶⁴ External Review of the World Resources Institute, Philanthropic Support Services, 2012, p.77

⁶⁵ External Review of WRI’s Portfolio, TripleLine, 2016, p79

⁶⁶ Internal Interview

⁶⁷ WRI in Africa, WRI, 2018, p1.

2019 Energy Act. In Zambia, on the other hand, the Platform is being used by the Ministry of Health, as well as other investors in the health sector to reveal where there are health facilities across the country that lack electricity.

Figure 20: WRI in Africa Progress Against 5-Year Strategy Objectives⁶⁸

Team	Score	Judgement
Africa	62.7%	
- Forests	57.1%	
- Cities	80.0%	
- Water	62.5%	
- Energy	100.0%	
- Climate	50.0%	
- Governance	50.0%	

The ‘Cities’ workstream is on track. It had achieved 80.0% of its targets as of October 2021. The WRI Africa office has increased its engagement with African cities to include Antananarivo, Kampala, and Kumasi, on top of the original Addis Ababa and Accra. In Addis, WRI supported the Ministry of Transport to develop a National Road Safety Strategy; conducted training on safer bicycling planning and design; and has prepared the expansion of the Car Free Days initiative to Africa. In Accra, WRI has conducted road safety inspections within the Central Business District (CBD) on roads with high incidences of pedestrian-vehicular interaction and has conducted consultations with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly on interventions being carried out to the Pedestrian Road Safety Action Plan. Similar work has been undertaken in Kampala and Kumasi. The WRI Africa office has also engaged in a broader range of work than mobility and road safety. It has supported National Urban Policy development in both Tanzania and Ghana, largely through the Coalition for Urban Transitions (CUT) Platform. It has further delivered training on principles of sustainable urban growth to city officials of Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Accra, Sekondi-Takoradi, Nairobi, Nakuru, Kampala, Jinja, Lagos and Ikorodu, Cape Town, and the city of George.

The ‘Water’ workstream has been Mostly Achieved. It had achieved 62.5% of its targets as of October 2021. One of WRI Africa’s major achievements has been the development of improved water-wise planning in Ethiopia. The Water Team has developed a model to assess Ethiopia’s water supply and

⁶⁸ Source: ER Team Assessment of WRI Africa progress against 5-Year strategy documents

sectoral water demand, as well as current projected water risk based on growth and climate change. This has provided the Ethiopian Government with data that they did not have before and allowed the Planning and Development Commission to understand how water will allow for or impede the achievement of its Sustainable Development Goals.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the Water Team has not been able to deliver on its ambition to produce similar mapping for an additional African country. Other major successes within the ‘Water’ workstream includes supporting efforts to secure financing for water stress reduction investments through a payment-for-ecosystem-services model in Ethiopia and developing an integrated water resources management plan in the Tana Subbasin, also in Ethiopia. If the WRI Africa office was to be criticized for its water work, it would be for the fact that its work has primarily focused on Ethiopia. Expansion to other countries and/or regions concomitant with the strategy’s initial ambition would have improved its achievement.

The ‘Forests’ workstream has also been Mostly Achieved. It had achieved 57.1% of its targets as of October 2021. The ‘Forests’ workstream is by far the most comprehensive, accounting for nearly half of the indicators in the WRI in Africa strategy. Unsurprisingly, it also accounts for just over half of the non-verifiable indicators. With these excluded the ‘Forests’ workstream would be at 87.9% in its achievement of its strategic goals. Indeed, the Forests Team made some significant progress over the course of the WRI in Africa strategy. Global Forest Watch Pro had been leveraged to monitor supply chains in Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, and South Africa. Similarly, Open Timber Portal was being used to increase transparency in Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Gabon and the Central African Republic. Its restoration work too had been highly successful. Restoration efforts had been supported in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Sudan. The WRI Africa office had secured at least US\$27.9 million for restoration projects. Through the AFR100 Platform, the WRI Africa Team had also created opportunities for farmers to communicate and share best practice on restoration, extending the benefits of the Platform far beyond which WRI has direct control over. The WRI Office has also been moderately successful in creating an enabling environment for forest protection. It had trained more than 40 institutions across Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and Niger to support governance reform. It has also developed baseline and monitoring systems for restoration commitments in six countries.

Both ‘Climate’ and ‘Governance’ are Mostly Achieved by a small margin. They had each achieved 50.0% of their targets as of October 2021. Within ‘Climate’, WRI Africa had fully achieved its ambition to build capacity measurement, reporting, and verification of emissions in both Ethiopia and South Africa. In South Africa, this has been developed via the Tracking and Strengthening Climate Action (TASCA) project, which has provided the government with the tools and resources to track the implementation of its NDC commitments. The TASCA project has in fact contributed to increased ambition in South Africa too, largely by quantifying the impact of competing mitigation policies. Over the same period the Climate Team has also successfully increased Ethiopia’s climate ambition too. Its 2020 NDC submission draws directly from NCE and TASCA analysis on emissions reduction and adaptation pathways, and their associated costs and benefits. These outcomes had all been fully achieved relative to the ambition of the WRI in Africa strategy. The Climate workstream’s success is in fact only undermined by the inclusion of three non-verifiable indicators. Within the ‘Governance’ workstream, on the other hand, WRI Africa had promoted transformational adaptation within five African countries (Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, and South

⁶⁹ Internal Interview

Africa) via the Global Commission on Adaptation. Like ‘Climate’, the ‘Governance’ workstream’s success is also undermined by the inclusion of a non-verifiable indicator.

4.1 How effective were the Global Programs, Centers and other relevant WRI-hosted Platforms in contributing to WRI Africa’s Outputs and Outcomes?

WRI staff working on Africa generally feel that their work in Africa reflects the central operating principles underpinning WRI in Africa. Over half agree or strongly agree that WRI is succeeding in Africa at: doing fewer, but bigger, high-quality things; stabilizing the number of countries in which WRI engages; being inclusive, but with a view to achieving impact; empowering the previous Regional Director to take the lead; building institutional and programmatic cohesion; promoting South-South cooperation; and developing partnerships with pan-African, regional, and local organizations.

Specific contributions by Programs and Centers to outputs and outcomes in Africa, i.e. going beyond the results of WRI Africa itself, can be illustrated by the following:

Cities: The Air Quality Team has worked with Addis Ababa and Kigali city administrators to help improve the quality of their monitoring data and develop a functional low-cost air quality forecast that city leaders can use to anticipate and manage pollution; the Cities Program has worked to transfer the experience of car free days from India to Ethiopia; and the 2021 ‘World Resources Report, Towards a More Equal City’, is already informing a program of urban water resilience in Africa with a view to underpinning future programming through the Ross Center.⁷⁰

Climate: In Ethiopia, with NCE support, the Government of Ethiopia is building economy-wide modelling and analytical capacity to generate a strong base of empirical evidence to guide the integration of environmental and climate change objectives into development policies and planning, and to ensure coherence across sector plans. In Uganda, earlier NCE and NDC Partnership work has helped integrate Climate and SDG approaches into their planning processes. In South Africa, WRI has helped the Government to introduce and operationalize the country’s Tracking and Evaluation Portal within the Department of Environmental Affairs to support development of the NDC.

Energy: see further below in this section.

Food: WRI’s primary engagement is through FOLU (see more under RQ 3 on platforms).

Forests: WRI has been active in central Africa since the late 1990s, initially through Global Forest Watch. The second phase of GFW began in 2014. A recent Evaluation found that there was 18% less deforestation in Africa in areas where there were Global Land Analysis and Deforestation (GLAD) alerts. (See more under RQ 3 on platforms). AFR100 is a pan-Africa Program managed by WRI and implemented by the African Union Development Agency, New Partnership for African Development (AUDA NEPAD. It targets over 30 countries in Africa with on the ground implementation managed by partners such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), as well as WRI itself.

Oceans: A partnership with the Government of Ghana was established in October 2019 and the Global Plastics Action Partnership was due to partner with Vietnam’s Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in Q4 2020, and then Nigeria in 2021.

⁷⁰ *Seven Transformations for more Equitable and Sustainable Cities*, WRI, 2021, [link](#).

Water: In Ethiopia, years of work to develop a national database and water gap analysis for Ethiopia have been completed and will be released soon. WRI's work now transitions to helping Ethiopia make water a centrepiece of future development planning and prioritize investments that build greater water and climate security. A landscape assessment of frameworks and tools for Africa urban water resilience work has been completed; and the Water Team, together with the Cities Team and external City Water Resilience Approach partners, have made an initial assessment in Addis and Kigali.

The Governance Team has completed the research, writing, publication and soft launch of the ABCG report, Community Forests and Forest Cover Change in Africa. The team also completed NDC gender assessments for Eswatini, Mozambique, and RMI, and a training for RMI.

Among platforms, AFR 100 is the only platform focusing exclusively on Africa (see box 3 below). The External Review Team heard from both internal and external stakeholders that progress in restoring land has varied widely across participating countries. Madagascar, for example, has successfully developed national policies, received financing and is in the process of implementing technical programs. Other countries such as Guinea felt that they needed both technical and financial assistance to meet their commitments. Similarly, while countries were positive in relation to the strong dialogue around conservation, others interviewed felt that there needed to be a more holistic approach to restoration which better included private companies and the economy in agro-forestry initiatives.

Several Platform Teams were positive about the work currently underway and their future. For example, Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy (PACE) is in the process of securing funding for a WRI Africa project in Rwanda, initially conceptualized from a PACE Action Agenda call to action issued in early 2021. The High-Level Panel on Oceans was also beginning to work more with WRI Africa, had three African countries who were members of the Ocean panel, and looked forward to further collaboration with WRI.

In our focus group with francophone participants in AFR100, some countries highlighted the importance of effective communication. This was particularly relevant for countries with relatively lower administrative public sector capacity, both internally, within country governments and between WRI and participating countries. The purpose of AFR100 was not clear for some participants, who had different expectations of their involvement. Francophone participants may not have been engaged as intensively as anglophone participants. However AFR100 is entering its second phase, so there is an opportunity to incorporate these learnings and to increase communication and technical assistance. There is also a great opportunity to build on South – South partnerships, and knowledge transfers between the countries involved. WRI's role in the AFR100 platform could be better defined in the coming new phase to better demarcate responsibilities and manage expectations of the platform.

Box 3: AFR100

AFR100 (the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative) 'is a country-led effort to bring 100 million hectares of land in Africa into restoration by 2030.'⁷¹ The African Union Development Agency, World Resources Institute (WRI), Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the World Bank launched the initiative at COP21 in Paris, with AUDA-NEPAD acting as the AFR100 Secretariat.

As part of WRI's Forests Program, AFR100 aims to create partnerships between governments, technical experts, and financial institutions – with the core ambition for WRI to connect projects with finance

⁷¹ AFR100, AFR100, 2021, [link](#).

and technical assistance to help with implementation.⁷² AFR100 feeds into global commitments such as the Bonn Challenge, the New York Declaration on Forests, and the African Resilient Landscapes Initiative.

Already 128% of the initial target of 100 million hectares has been committed by 32 African countries. External stakeholders interviewed in Africa feel that a strength of the Platform is its pan-African approach to restoration and cooperation. The ER Team also found that countries involved in the Program were positive with WRI acting as interlocuter between donors and countries. The ER Team also found that AFR100 was helping to raise restoration as a global topic of conversation and in Africa.

AT COP26, AFR100 laid down a challenge to increase investment in land restoration in Africa to US\$2 billion by COP27. This has already met with several positive commitments.⁷³

Several platforms have a significant, if not exclusive, focus on Africa. For example, Global Forest Watch started to make available Global Land Analysis and Deforestation alerts in the Congo Republic in 2016. Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda followed in early 2017. An evaluation of GLAD alerts published in 2021 found an 18% reduction in deforestation (relative to 2011-16) in African countries that were early subscribers to GLAD alerts. Potential reasons include the fact that countries in Africa had little broad-scale deforestation monitoring technology prior to GLAD. Consequently, the introduction of freely available alerts was a new source of information to support policy interventions. For example, Cameroon's government relies on GLAD for deforestation monitoring, with efforts to stem deforestation in Africa recently boosted through regional agreements.⁷⁴

The Energy Access Explorer has specifically focused on universal access to electricity in Africa and worked on building capacity of governments in six African countries. In Uganda, for example, WRI partnered with Dan Church Aid Uganda, commissioning data to identify strategic opportunities for the use of clean energy across the sweet potato value chain. In Tanzania, WRI and its local partner, Tanzania Traditional Energy Development Organization, collected and analyzed data for integrating clean energy, notably in relation to irrigation needs. EAE is also a key knowledge product for the FCDO-funded Africa Clean Energy – Technical Assistance Facility (ACE-TAF), designed to catalyze the off-grid solar market. WRI is a partner in the consortium led by Tetra Tech and is expanding EAE to an additional six countries in Africa.

Other partnerships active in Africa include the NDC Partnership (multiple countries) and NCE, FOLU and Aqueduct, all of which have focused predominantly on Ethiopia. NCE has brought on dedicated program staff for its Africa work and is identifying opportunities for future work. Several Platform Teams are developing a pipeline of work. PACE, for example, is in the process of securing funding for a WRI Africa project in Rwanda, initially conceptualized from a PACE Action Agenda call to action issued in early 2021. The High-Level Panel on Oceans was also beginning to work more with WRI Africa, had three African countries who were members of the Ocean panel, and looked forward to further collaboration with WRI.

⁷² *Delivering Impact at Scale: Strategic Plan 2018-2022*, WRI, 2018, p15, [link](#).

⁷³ *Release: AFR100 Issues COP27 Challenge to Mobilize \$2 Billion for Africa's Locally Led Land Restoration Movement*, WRI, 2021, [link](#).

⁷⁴ *AFR100*, [link](#).

Several Platform staff noted that budgetary constraints have prevented further expansion in Africa. CCG staff felt that their budget *‘is virtually non-existent’* and it was unclear *‘if or how any of the unrestricted funding from the CCG might be allocated to Africa’*. A survey respondent from the Global Commission on Adaptation reflected that *‘minimal resources were directed to Africa specifically’*. The Greenhouse Gas Protocol, on the other hand, reflected that capacity constraints limited participation – previous efforts to engage more with Africa when designing multi-stakeholder working groups has only had limited participation from individuals recruited from Africa due to limited capacity.

4.2 What has WRI learned from its experience under the 2018 WRI in Africa Strategy, and where has the organization added the most value?

WRI has reflected openly on its progress towards developing a strategic presence in Africa through the annual planning process and in the workshops and surveys that underpinned development of the 2020 Strategy as well as through the survey and interviews conducted for the present Review. Key reflections include the following:

On the challenge of working across a continent:

A core challenge for WRI Africa is to identify issues of regional concern while developing solutions that genuinely respond to local needs. Responding to this twin challenge will require WRI Africa to engage with, and if necessary, develop, mechanisms that encourage a bottom-up and top-down flow of insights and enabling capacity. This in turn suggests that WRI will need to: i) accelerate and deepen its relationships with regional organizations such as the African Union and African Development Bank; and ii) do more to identify local public sector bodies, private enterprises and NGOs capable of delivering on the ground.

To enable this, WRI will need more senior level capacity to enable it to develop relationships at an appropriate level.⁷⁵ This capacity will also need to consider the diversity that exists in Africa across 54 countries with political, institutional, and cultural as well as linguistic commonalities and differences between and among anglophone, francophone and Lusophone countries. Currently there appears that engagement with francophone and Lusophone countries is less developed than it is in Anglophone countries. An Africa Advisory Board, mooted since 2019, could be a useful mechanism to facilitate this dialogue, providing strategic guidance; helping build effective partnerships; supporting fundraising and outreach; and representing WRI.⁷⁶

WRI will also need to ensure that its knowledge products in general, and research output, support its objective of playing a strategic role in Africa. The appointment of a research director in WRI Africa is crucial in this respect. But there is still a need for more capacity to incentivize robust research, and to inform and inject WRI norms and standards in WRI’s analysis, data products, and decision-relevant tools across Africa. More ‘stand-alone’ Africa-focused publications are needed, but WRI also needs to mainstream Africa in WRI research reports more broadly (few have dedicated attention to the challenges and realities Africa faces).⁷⁷

On the political and institutional challenges of working in Africa:

⁷⁵ WRI Africa Annual Plan FY20, WRI, 2019

⁷⁶ WRI Africa Annual Plan FY20, WRI, 2019

⁷⁷ WRI Africa Annual Plan FY19, WRI, 2018

WRI's work in key countries of focus for WRI such as DRC and Ethiopia has also been subject to political upheaval and/or other political changes that have set back progress. (Annual Plan FY19.) Weak institutional capacity is both a contributory factor and, in part, a consequence of these changes. Building institutional capacity is thus crucially important in Africa. Having staff work part time in government institutions such as the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and the municipality of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia are examples and help build trust, relations and networks.⁷⁸

Alignment of Strategy, Budget and Staffing

Although WRI Africa has developed a regional strategy for Africa, it has few tools available to ensure that the programming developed by other teams in WRI is in fact aligned with this strategy. While this coordinating role is likely true for all International Offices, it is perhaps particularly acute in the case of a regional office trying to bring coherence across multiple countries. Internally, staff note that although the new Africa Strategy has narrowed WRI's focus and country scope in Africa, the WRI Africa office has not yet been effective in coordinating work across the Global Network in line with this aspiration. Even within WRI Africa, there seems to be a challenge in coordinating effectively across teams. Coordination is of course especially crucial to the Africa Strategy, which treats the Global Challenges as fundamentally interconnected issues. For WRI to achieve its ambition in Africa it needs to deliver on its desire to collaborate and ensure coherence.

In both 2019 and 2020, the outgoing and new IO directors raised the question of regional pillar leads versus country managers as the dominant organizational structure. Both directors noted that *'WRI Africa is unique in that it comprises implementation work in multiple countries. An emerging organizational question is the relationship between country directors and regional thematic leads for strategy design and implementation.'*⁷⁹ For example, multilateral development banks such as the African Development Bank typically align budget with strategy and vest these in country managers, while the bulk of staff are employed by the equivalent of Programs and Centers which have delivery responsibilities. Under this model, country managers are responsible for developing strategy (with a small core team) and 'buying in' staff time from relevant teams to deliver the strategy. In this way, country managers have real control over the implementation of strategies. Some budget remains vested in global teams to deliver global priorities.

Two other factors increase the difficulty of adopting a strategic approach in Africa. First the need to 'follow the money' and 'go with the donor flow' tends to encourage a project-focused approach. In late 2019, the IO director noted that *'The current portfolio for forests and cities has become geographically diffuse and project-based.'*⁸⁰ It is not obvious that this proliferation of project-based initiatives has diminished (see further below). In this context, the Africa Portfolio Review Committee has been slow to fulfil its aim to act as a 'clearing house' or as a center of gravity for dealing with opportunities and risks across Africa – rather, it is a forum to share information.⁸¹ Second, the annual plan/report modality in WRI appears not well suited to the needs of regional offices. Rather than encouraging a strategic perspective, the process tends to encourage the collection of loosely related interventions from multiple

⁷⁸ WRI Africa Annual Plan FY19, WRI, 2018

⁷⁹ WRI Africa Annual Plan FY20, WRI, 2019 ; WRI Africa Annual Plan FY21, WRI, 2020

⁸⁰ WRI Africa Annual Plan FY20, WRI, 2019

⁸¹ WRI Africa Annual Plan FY19, WRI, 2018

programs across multiple countries in Africa, rather than representing the result of a coherent, more top down, strategic process.⁸²

4.3 How have the lessons learned from the previous Africa strategy been applied in the new strategy “Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation So Africa’s People and Landscapes Flourish”

The development of ‘Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation’ in 2020 built on, and further developed, the basic principles that informed the 2018 WRI in Africa Strategy; namely:

- to do fewer, but bigger, high-quality things and to stabilize rather than increase the number of countries in which we engage;
- to be inclusive but with a view to achieve impact;
- to respectfully empower: the Africa Director should be empowered to steer and manage effective and coordinated engagement in Africa, whilst respecting the programmatic lead from global challenge directors;
- to build institutional cohesion through institutional innovation: to work effectively across a continent, and to incentivize programmatic synergies, we will organize regular Africa portfolio review meetings, co-organized by WRI Africa, together with Vice President for Science and Research, MfR, GOT and Program leads;
- to make Africa an opportunity for additional IO impact. South-South Cooperation and collaboration across the IOs could be a defining feature of the work in Africa.

For example, the three-pillar structure adopted in ‘Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation sought to integrate WRI’s work across Programs and Centers and to encourage the development of fewer, bigger programs that leverage WRI’s matrix within a people-centered theory of change.

The WRI in Africa Strategy also advocated a pan-Africa approach. For example, it committed to ‘*consider the establishment of a WRI Africa Advisory Board comprised of eminent, independent thought leaders and private sector actors from Africa on our issues ... The Africa Advisory Council will play a key role setting the strategic directions, deepen our understanding of African realities and opportunities, and help us to connect relevant partners and funder.*’⁸³ AFR100 is an excellent example of an initiative that seeks to take a pan-African approach in the context of land restoration. The ER team heard unqualified support for the continent-wide approach adopted by AFR100.

Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation also signalled that WRI Africa was under new, African leadership. Some in WRI feel that the appointment of a non-African as WRI’s first director sent a poor signal to the outside world. One internal stakeholder described the 2018 Strategy as ‘a misstep’. The recruitment of an African national as the new director has therefore been welcomed and signals a sea change in WRI’s approach in Africa. WRI Africa is now delivering a strategy by Africans, for Africans. WRI’s strategic involvement in Africa has been a process and the development of a new strategy, which shares much DNA with its predecessor, was a brave step.

Externally, the rationale for, and existence of, a new/revised Strategy could have been better communicated. Core donors told the External Review Team that they had not been well briefed on the

⁸² WRI Africa Annual Plan FY19, WRI, 2018

⁸³ WRI in Africa, WRI, 2018, p8.

need for a change of strategy and had not initially fully understood the reasons for doing so. Several external stakeholders interviewed were either not aware of the new WRI Africa office or felt that its profile was still low. For example, one representative of a leading bilateral donor (non-core), with extensive Africa experience, was still not aware that there is a new WRI strategy in Africa. However, core donors also recognized the need for a permanent director of the WRI Africa office and that a new strategy was a natural evolution.

Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation was also finalized without being fully costed and without a fully developed results framework. A significant weakness of the 2018 WRI in Africa Strategy was its weak results framework: there were too many indicators, of which a large percentage WRI is incapable of measuring (see further under results section). Though Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation has gone some way to correcting this gap, this was not completed as an integral part of the strategy development process itself. Lack of costing is a barrier to raising funding for the Strategy.

Internally, however, our interviews indicate that there is generally strong support at senior levels for WRI Africa and its new direction, although it is still in its early days. Individual team directors are generally working hard to support the new director and the Board has provided resources and encouragement. Just under one half of WRI staff working on Africa feel that *‘WRI has clearly improved its approach in Africa based on lessons learned from the 2018 WRI in Africa Strategy’*. However just over half were not sure or (in a few instances) disagreed.

In the longer term it remains to be seen whether Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation will be able to gain the traction it intended. For example, the 2018 WRI in Africa Strategy noted that WRI was active in 16 countries in Africa: restoration work in nine countries (Malawi, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, DRC, Ghana, Liberia, Tanzania); forest work in eight countries (DRC, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Liberia, Madagascar); and cities engagement in two countries (Ghana, Ethiopia). Both the 2018 and 2020 strategies articulated a goal of reducing the number of countries in which WRI works. Yet WRI’s teams continue to be active across a wide range of countries and sectors. AFR100 alone seeks to engage with 31 countries. Correcting this will require a new approach to how WRI engineers its matrix to better align strategy, people and budget – as further discussed under core functions.

4.4 How are these lessons affecting the integration of GSE in WRI’s work in Africa?

The WRI Africa Strategy Refresh deliberately sharpened the Office’s focus on Gender and Social Equity. It is obvious from documentation associated with the Strategy Refresh that WRI recognized that policies to unlock opportunities for Africa’s youth and women were central to the continent’s sustainable development. There was a clear appreciation of the calls by African decision-makers to integrate equity and development, as well an acknowledgement of the importance of this for core donors. At the same time, WRI Africa’s leadership has recognized that WRI can do better in the way that it integrates GSE into its work. Participants at the Strategy Refresh, therefore, stressed the need to integrate poverty, gender, and social equity across the Strategy’s three Pillars, to avoid the tendency to silo these challenges as had previously occurred in WRI. Indeed, there were multiple calls for the new WRI Africa to integrate these themes over the course of the Strategy Refresh. Additionally, locating the new Global Governance Director in Africa was itself seen to be a conscious effort on WRI’s part to put equity front and center in its activity in Africa.

As a result of the Strategy Refresh, there is clear evidence of the integration of poverty, gender, and social equity themes across the new WRI Africa strategy. The WRI Africa strategy is itself framed as

“inclusive”, testament to the importance of this theme for the region. At the level of the Strategy’s Pillars, under Pillar 1 (Vital Landscapes), for instance, there is a clear appreciation of the need for clear and equitable land and natural resource ownership, access, and control, especially for women and other vulnerable groups. Pillar 2 (Thriving Resilient Cities) aims at delivering a planning approach in African cities that addresses urban, rural, and natural systems in an integrated manner to provide equitable access to core services for African people. Pillar 3 (Institutional and Economic Transformation) aims at addressing the enabling environment to allow Pillars 1 and 2 to thrive. This involves, in part, addressing the gaps in the design and implementation of efficient, effective and equitable policy instruments in Africa that incentivize sustainable production and consumption.

There are also several WRI engagements in Africa that have an explicit social equity focus. Under Pillar 1, the AFR100 project clearly aims at implementing restoration efforts that improve livelihoods for rural Africans. FOLU is also an important Platform in Africa (see further under Platforms) with potential to have a positive impact on GSE. The majority of women are small-scale farmers living in poverty but produce approximately 50% of the food consumed. Hence, Food is a very gendered program of work, just by its nature. The Urban Water Resilience work, which falls under Pillar 2, is also a clear entry point for themes such as poverty, gender, and social equity. WRI Africa’s work here focuses on urban water resilience in cities that face water scarcity, integrating social equity dimensions into strategies, thereby helping to ensure that urbanization occurs sustainably and equitably.

WRI’s challenge with respect to GSE in Africa is twofold: to ensure both i) that GSE is a lens through which it selects what it does to be reflected in strategies across the organization; and ii) that GSE is better reflected in results frameworks so that teams can actively monitor how well they are delivering against specific ambitions. Both of these are needed. Results frameworks require a process, as well as targets, to ensure that outcomes are in fact equitable and just. Outcomes that appear to be addressing an inequity (in a results framework), e.g. financial flows to a marginalized group, may, if the process is inequitable, not be inclusive: e.g. if the process does not include consultation with the marginalized group to identify their priorities.

The ER team found that WRI has been inclusive in its engagements in Africa, but that this should be developed further, including partnerships with NGOs and other local organizations. WRI operates upstream in the environment and development value chain. This is particularly the case with WRI Africa which is a regional office engaging with 54 countries. We heard that there is a premium on WRI Africa forging partnerships in Africa at regional, national, sub-national and local levels. The importance of working with partners at the local and community levels is three-fold: i) to ensure that WRI is well informed by those closest to the issues they are addressing; ii) to develop partners who can advocate for implementation of policies and plans that WRI has helped facilitate in its work with governments; and iii) to help deliver on the priorities identified by WRI and its partners whether in Platforms or Programs. We also heard strong support e.g. in our francophone focus group on AFR100, for Africa-wide initiatives that enable the sharing of experience which could also apply across local organizations.

How well are the core functions supporting WRI Africa?

The engagement and expertise of the Regional Operations Director has been crucial in past years in Africa, although challenges remain. It has helped prevent fiduciary risks and build out awareness about

the WRI norms and standards.⁸⁴ Issues in recent years include breaches of policies and procedures, especially in the recruitment of consultants. *‘Rather than going through fair, competitive, and transparent processes for acquiring consultants, Programs are relying on personal relations, creating risks for WRI.’*⁸⁵ Nevertheless, some staff have pointed to issues arising when the WRI Africa office instated operational policies without providing notice to directly affected staff outside of WRI Africa. This may not be the sole fault of the WRI Africa office (as its size warrants additional support for the core functions) but finding out about policy changes only when they become a problem has led to delivery issues in its programmatic work and raised reputational concerns with sub-grantees.

Core functions in WRI Africa are now considerably stronger than they were in 2018. This is particularly true for operations and HR. Nevertheless, critical weaknesses remain. This is particularly the case in the areas of Program Management (including PMEL capacity), Development, and RDI (see Figure 21) are all still rated by WRI Africa staff as requiring strengthening. As noted above, the WRI in Africa strategy had an excessively large number of targets (46) of which over a quarter (12) were non-verifiable due to a lack of data, more than any other International Office. The new Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation strategy could also have given greater focus at an earlier stage to developing a results matrix. At the same time, internal interviews confirm that WRI Africa has been strongly supported by the core functions in those areas where it has been lacking capacity (see further under ‘Core Functions’ above).

Figure 21: ‘Building Block’ Self Assessments of Core Functions capacity in WRI’s IOs⁸⁶

Building Blocks	Europe (2015)	India (IRT) (2017)	Africa (2016)	India (C2) (2011)	Brazil (2014)	Mexico (2016)	China (2008)	Global (1982)	Indonesia (2014)	Average
Programs	N/A	39%	39%	39%	30%	66%	66%	N/A	76%	51%
Development	N/A	58%	30%	58%	35%	94%	85%	63%	61%	60%
Research, Data & Innovation	N/A	65%	39%	65%	54%	65%	73%	60%	79%	62%
IT	61%	58%	74%	58%	48%	43%	86%	88%	90%	67%
Grants & Contracts	38%	53%	70%	57%	98%	65%	74%	90%	93%	71%
Financial Management	59%	74%	82%	79%	99%	71%	85%	89%	98%	82%
Communications	65%	74%	84%	83%	86%	80%	96%	93%	79%	82%
HR & Security	87%	79%	91%	78%	96%	89%	91%	98%	97%	90%
Average	62%	62%	64%	64%	68%	72%	82%	83%	84%	N/A

 = Essential Operational CF

⁸⁴ WRI Africa Annual Plan FY19, WRI, 2018

⁸⁵ WRI Africa Annual Plan FY20, WRI, 2019

⁸⁶ Source: Building Block data for 2020. The Building Block data is based on self-assessments by the IO’s of their own capacity in each of the core function areas.

5. How and to what extent are Platforms contributing to WRI's Strategic Plan? To what extent are GSE reflected in these contributions?

Overview of Section

WRI's platforms are institutional arrangements that bring together a range of partners to achieve a goal or set of goals. They generate momentum, provide a rhythm, direction and profile to WRI's work and that of their partners. As such, Platforms, when managed well, can be important mechanisms for creating intellectual and social capital of lasting value and hence for delivering on and scaling up specific agendas for sustainable impact.

Overall, there is strong evidence that WRI's Platforms have been effective in addressing the Global Challenges for which they were conceived. Over 80% of WRI staff working on Platforms feel that, taking budget into account, their platform is effective in addressing the Global Challenge for which it was set up.⁸⁷ We also had plentiful external confirmation of the effectiveness of several Platforms.

A common theme emerging from across the Platforms is the effect of combining flagship knowledge products with the infrastructure provided by Platforms. Several Platforms have been launched on the heels of important knowledge products. WRI's ability to produce and quality assure impactful research that speaks to their audiences, together with the organizational ability to convene, manage, and influence are the two key ingredients in WRI's 'secret sauce'.

However, Platforms also need to operate in countries with an inhospitable political economy where the space for civil society organizations to engage with governments has shrunk. In these cases, there is a need for WRI to develop strategies to ensure that dialogue and progress continues. This includes 'behind the scenes' dialogue with policy makers that has no immediate, concrete results.

There are four areas where WRI should review its design and delivery of Platforms:

- *Lack of overall oversight and the risk of 'too many' Platforms:* the most common criticism of Platforms internally is that there are too many of them and/or that the distinction between Platforms is not always clear.
- *Poverty, gender and social equity:* Platforms are not doing enough to directly target these objectives.
- *Partnerships:* WRI could do more to diversify the range of partners with whom they engage and the depth and quality of these relationships
- *Monitoring and evaluation:* Tracking and demonstrating results is critical for ensuring that Platforms maximize the value of the social capital that they create. MEL is a clear weak point of the Platforms.

⁸⁷ Presentation for Core Donors 20211007v8, The External Review Team, 2021, Slide 43

Overview of Platforms

The External Review Team has identified a total of 28 Platforms that are either fully owned by WRI or co-owned.⁸⁸ WRI also participates in a small number of Platforms that are exclusively owned by third parties. The overall purpose of delivery Platforms is to *‘create large scale change and lasting impact.’*⁸⁹ They are a means of delivering on the Strategic Plan’s commitment to *‘focus on catalyzing the systemic changes required to address urgent global challenges.’*⁹⁰

There is no formal definition of a Platform at WRI. In essence, however, WRI’s Platforms are arm’s length institutional arrangements that bring together a range of partners to achieve a goal or set of goals. These goals may involve the production of a standard, data tool, or other knowledge product and/or the dissemination and further promotion and development of these products. They define a subject domain and provide a focal point for partners to engage on an ongoing basis with an agenda supported by a secretariat. They generate momentum, provide a rhythm, direction and profile to WRI’s work and that of their partners. As such, Platforms, when managed well, can be important mechanisms for creating intellectual and social capital of lasting value and hence for delivering on and scaling up specific agendas for sustainable impact.⁹¹

Platform agendas fall into one or more of four broad categories as listed below:

- *Implementation and Learning*

Examples of WRI-owned platforms in this category include: the Building Efficiency Accelerator (established in 2011); AFR100 (2015); Initiative 20x20 (2014); the Better Buying Lab (BBL) (2017); and New Urban Mobility Alliance (NUMO) (2019). Examples of co-owned platforms include: Coalition for Urban Transitions (CUT) (2014); Champions 12.3 (2015); NDC Partnership (NDCP) (2016); Cities4Forests (2018); Friends of Ocean Action (FOA) (2018); Partnership for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G) (2018); Partnership for Accelerating the Circular Economy (PACE) (2019).

- *Devising and setting guidelines, standards and rules*

Examples include the following co-owned platforms: the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHGP) (1997); the Food Loss and Waste Protocol (FLWP) (2013); and the Science Based Targets Initiative (2015).

- *Recommendation-making*

Examples of WRI-owned Platforms in this category include: the Corporate Consultative Group (CCG) (2008); and the Energy Access Explorer (2019). Co-owned platforms include: New Climate Economy (NCE) (2014); Clean Energy Investment Accelerator (CEIA) (2018); Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU)

⁸⁸ WRI’s website lists 25 Platforms. For the purpose of the External Review, the External Review Team looked in more detail at four delivery Platforms; AFR100, Coalition for Urban Transitions, Food and Land Use Coalition, and the Global Commission on Adaptation. These Platforms were selected on the basis that: i) they offer insight into impact in Africa as well as other regions; ii) they have not already been the subject of an evaluation; iii) they are either co-owned or at least (as with AFR100) include management by a third party; iv) have been the object of specific attention and interest by core donors. In addition, we held a focus group on Global Forest Watch and, as a result of a number of onward referrals by external interviewees, gathered further detail on the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy.

⁸⁹ *Delivery Platforms*, WRI, 2021, [link](#).

⁹⁰ *WRI Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022: Delivering Impact at Scale*, WRI, 2018, p9, [link](#).

⁹¹ OECD defines social capital as “networks together with shared norms, values and understanding that facilitate cooperation within or among groups”, *The Well-Being of Nations: The Role of Human and Social Capital*, OECD, 2001, [link](#).

(2018); Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA) (2018); and the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy (2019).

- *Development and provision of data and information*

Examples of WRI-owned platforms include: Aqueduct (2013); Global Forest Watch (GFW) (2014); Climate Watch (2017); Open Timber Portal (2017); Resource Watch (2018). Examples of co-owned platforms include: LandMark (2015).

Contribution to the Strategic Plan

Overall, there is strong evidence that WRI's Platforms have been effective in addressing the Global Challenges for which they were conceived. Over 80 percent of WRI staff working on Platforms feel that, taking budget into account, their Platform is effective in addressing the Global Challenge for which it was set up.⁹² We also had plentiful external confirmation of the effectiveness of several Platforms. For example, we heard from one of the world's largest agri-business corporations that works regularly with Aqueduct and the Water Team, the Green House Gas Protocol and the Food Team. In their view WRI's Water Team *'is exceptional, world class. The value has been really significant, and it's been their agile approach in working with us ... it's been remarkable. The result is we have a method of assessing water impacts for agriculture which is the best in the world.'* We also heard in respect of the GHG Team that *'... this seems like WRI's bread and butter ... WRI adds value to the industry ... the new protocol [that is] being developed has been valuable and we would like to continue this work with WRI ... we appreciate how intentional they have been about coming back to us for feedback ... they have been receptive of feedback and not defensive.'*

Examples of Platforms widely cited in our interviews as successful include: Global Forest Watch, New Climate Economy, and the High-Level Panel on Ocean Sustainability

Global Forest Watch is an open-source online platform which allows free access to data and tools for monitoring forests. Recent advances in remote sensing technologies allow for near-real-time monitoring of forest loss. GFW Pro delivers this technology to stakeholders on a global scale, offering them tools to monitor areas of their interest. In 2020, GFW commissioned an impact evaluation to provide empirical evidence on whether empowering stakeholders in commodities supply chains is effective in preventing forest loss. The evaluation found that monitoring by GFW Pro users reduces the probability of Global Land Analysis and Discovery Alerts occurrence by 0.7-1.3 percentage points.⁹³ Nature Climate Change later reported in 2020 that subscriptions to alerts made available through the GFW interface, decrease the probability of deforestation in Africa by 18% relative to the average 2011–2016 levels.⁹⁴ GFW and its approach to data collection, analysis, monitoring, evaluation and impact are a model for other platforms in the ResourceWatch family.

GFW was cited as a strong illustration of WRI's comparative advantage in developing and sharing technical tools and data globally. The Platform is aimed at a variety of stakeholders from governments to businesses and has played a key role in mainstreaming the use of geo-spatial technology in the monitoring

⁹² *Presentation for Core Donors 20211007v8*, The External Review Team, 2021, Slide 43

⁹³ *Evaluating the Impacts of GFW Pro on Deforestation*, D. Szerman, 2020

⁹⁴ [The impact of near-real-time deforestation alerts across the tropics | Nature Climate Change](#)

of deforestation.⁹⁵ Governments in Central Africa, as well as the Indonesian Government, were cited as regular users of GFW data. GFW Pro is aimed at businesses, and major producers such as Mondelez, Unilever, and Walmart are using GFW Pro to track deforestations in their supply chains.⁹⁶ One stakeholder credited the uptake by corporations to GFW Pro, illustrating the risk of deforestation associated with mills, and that it has shifted the corporation's understanding of the impact of palm oil production.

How and why WRI's data has impact was explained by an expert in peatland restoration: *'WRI's niche is integrating these information systems with policy, downscaling the complexity of the tools so that they are easy to act on by decision-makers. This is what makes WRI stand out compared to others. They go the step further in developing data into action.'* And *'WRI has considerable expertise in delivering information to users. It tailors its tools to whoever you are, whether that be a decision-maker, contractor, or simply a community group. Its platforms can be used by everyone ... the tool developed for the Peatland Restoration Agency to monitor peatland quality, for instance, has been extended to predict the chance of peatland fires. The tool is being used to monitor peatland moisture conditions, providing potential fire alerts when it becomes too dry.'*

New Climate Economy (NCE) released its initial report in 2014: *'Better Growth, Better Climate: The New Climate Economy Report'*.⁹⁷ The report concluded that countries at all levels of income had an opportunity to build lasting economic growth while simultaneously reducing the risks of climate change. Very much in the tradition of Green Growth, the idea of a complementary rather than zero sum relationship between economic growth and climate change-reducing strategies is now mainstream, in a way that it was not in 2014. Active country Programs today include: Indonesia, Ethiopia, Colombia, Brasil, Vietnam. Subnational Programs are ongoing in Indonesia and WRI is also undertaking specific work in China, India, and St Lucia.

A Danish review in 2020 found that NCE had contributed to laying the groundwork for accelerated climate action in several developing countries and emerging economies. The review noted that NCE often worked in close partnership with national ministries of finance and/or planning and drew on in-country research institutes in collaboration with business partners and bi- and multilateral actors. NCE Global Commissioners, according to the review, through their networks and access to decision-makers, had allowed NCE analysis to reach the highest levels of government at key moments, contributing to enhancing momentum.⁹⁸

In our interviews with WRI staff, we heard that NCE was a pioneer of in-country work for WRI. In one instance NCE convened a meeting where the Indonesian Minister of Planning shared their experiences with several African finance ministers. NCE has continued to work with countries such as Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa to develop 10-year development plans. For WRI, NCE has become one of its flagship Programs in Africa. In Ethiopia, a particular strength of NCE was its willingness to work with local NGOs and think tanks, and to share the data and models underlying its policy advice in a way that private consultancies, also active in the climate change space in Ethiopia, are typically less willing to do. Such an approach had the long-term effect of building a ground level, citizen-based demand for reform and policy implementation.

⁹⁵ Internal Interview

⁹⁶ Internal Interview

⁹⁷ *Better Growth, Better Climate: The New Climate Economy Report*, The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, 2014, [link](#).

⁹⁸ *Danish Support to New Climate Economy*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark, [link](#)

The report found that NCE-led analysis resulted in important insights on the win-win relationship between growth and climate friendly policies. It showed that in Indonesia, a sustainable, inclusive, long-term growth path could deliver higher annual GDP-growth rates and result in lower emissions than a business-as-usual pathway, while unlocking a range of social and environmental benefits. The initial results were launched in a report by the Ministry of Planning (Bappenas) in March 2019. Ensuring full ownership by key Indonesian ministries was a large part of the success. Elements of the approach were integrated into the 5-Year economic development plan for Indonesia (2020-2024), making it the first low-carbon development plan for that country. This was one of WRI's top ten achievements in FY20.

Interviews with external stakeholders in Indonesia confirmed the value of the work undertaken by NCE: that WRI *'plays a valuable role in Indonesia [and] had the foresight to develop the local initiative. They have been of tremendous influence, very positive.'* More generally, internal interviewees noted how NCE has provided a forum for governments to interact with each other – almost as a quasi-intergovernmental body and more easily than some UN agencies in one commentator's view - another example of how Platforms create valuable social capital through their solutions-oriented approach and economic perspective on environmental issues. However, there were also features of the engagement that could have been improved. According to one observer: *'WRI had a big influence on this, that is correct. But they could have had a much bigger influence if the report - in Indonesia - had been delivered half a year earlier. There could have been time for due process, and consultations, knowledge transfer, and awareness raising.'*

The High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy brought together 14 heads of state *'to build momentum for a sustainable ocean economy in which effective protection, sustainable production, and equitable prosperity go hand in hand.'*⁹⁹ One of WRI's most recently established Platforms, the HLP is the latest example of how WRI approaches the set up and management of a new Platform. Its organizational and convening abilities have filled a gap and have been widely praised. The Panel's report, *'Ocean Solutions that Benefit People, Nature and the Economy'*, is seen by senior figures within WRI as a major accomplishment.

As a result of the HLP, members of the Panel committed to leveraging the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. It also drew on the body of knowledge produced by the Ocean Panel. They committed to sustainably manage 100% of the ocean areas under their national jurisdiction, guided by Sustainable Ocean Plans, by 2025. Members agreed on action in five areas: ocean wealth, ocean health, ocean equity, ocean knowledge and ocean finance. WRI acted as the Ocean Panel Secretariat, and assisted with analytical work and science, communications, and stakeholder engagement.¹⁰⁰ Co-chaired by Norway and Palau, the HLP was supported by the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean.

Acting as Secretariat to the HLP was a huge task. According to one external NGO participant: *'WRI had a huge coordination role ... organizing those expert groups and getting to a result that was good context-wise, that was a huge achievement. And a lot of impact on final recommendations ... a combination of in-depth knowledge on the topics, and to get the right networks and host the right events. I think that did have a huge impact.'* According to another observer from the UN system: *'I feel that ... WRI has played a role in really bringing all the natural resources eco-systems together. We see its work in climate change,*

⁹⁹ *About the Ocean Panel*, High Level Panel for A Sustainable Ocean Economy, 2021, [link](#). Countries represented comprise: Australia, Canada, Chile, Fiji, Ghana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Namibia, Norway, Palau, Portugal, and the United States of America.

¹⁰⁰ *About the Ocean Panel*, High Level Panel for A Sustainable Ocean Economy, 2021, [link](#).

biodiversity, etc [and] it has managed all its communities together, with very interesting partners that maybe the UN would not have been able to do [i.e.] in terms of private sectors together as well as governments. It is a big organization that has been able to bring stakeholders together in this space. The number of knowledge products is valuable. It is what I go to the website for.'

In addition to the platforms noted above, the External Review Team also looked in further detail at three more Platforms: the Coalition for Urban Transitions; the Food and Land Use Coalition; and the Global Commission on Adaptation (see Box 4).

Box 4: Additional Platforms

The **Coalition for Urban Transitions** sits within the WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities Program at WRI. CUT bridges the gap between national policy and city policy to support the decarbonisation of cities globally.¹⁰¹ CUT supports the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the Nationally Determined Contributions, which feed into meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.¹⁰²

The **Food and Land Use Coalition** was established in 2017, and builds on the work of the Food, Agriculture, Biodiversity, Land Use and Energy Consortium. FOLU supports 'science-based solutions and help[s] build a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities to unlock collective, ambitious action.'

The **Global Commission on Adaptation** was launched in 2018 by the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon and was co-managed by WRI. Established by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, with 22 other convening countries, the Commission's purpose was 'to accelerate adaptation by elevating the political visibility of adaptation and focusing on concrete solutions'¹⁰³. The Commission's mandate ended in 2020, and its work was showcased at the Climate Adaptation Summit in January 2021. Stakeholders cited the GCA as part of WRI's work to begin to shift global discussions from climate mitigation to climate adaptation.¹⁰⁴

A common theme emerging from across the Platforms is the accelerated effect of combining flagship knowledge products with the infrastructure provided by Platforms. Several Platforms have been launched on the back of important knowledge products. 'Creating a Sustainable Food Future', which helped underpin FOLU, and was widely cited at the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, is one example. WRI's ability to produce and quality assure impactful research that speaks to their audiences, together with the organizational ability to convene, manage and influence, are the two key ingredients in WRI's 'secret sauce'. As a result of this powerful combination, internal interviewees feel that that FOLU forms an important part of the global sustainable food system architecture.¹⁰⁵ In the case of HLP, several observers noted that the platform will have to go beyond publication of a report to have impact. In one person's words: 'In terms of oceans, convening governments via the HLP has been useful, but the strength of the Program really depends on follow-up. It is one thing to hold panels and publish glossy brochures, but it is useless if it doesn't result in action'. One senior internal interviewee comparing CUT and the HLP felt that:

¹⁰¹ *About the Coalition*, Coalition for Urban Transitions, 2021, [link](#).

¹⁰² *About the Coalition*, Coalition for Urban Transitions, 2021, [link](#).

¹⁰³ *About the Commission*, Global Commission on Adaptation, 2021, [link](#).

¹⁰⁴ External Interview

¹⁰⁵ Internal Interview

‘oceans didn’t do it as well as CUT. It brought heads of state together and produced a brilliant report. [But it] didn’t support nations to deliver that in country. I think that is the missing link of the oceans puzzle.’

However, Platforms also need to operate in countries with an inhospitable political economy where the space for civil society organizations to engage with governments has shrunk. This may reflect a view that CSOs are fronts for hostile elements such as foreign powers or capital. The ability of a platform such as CUT to impact policy makers is dependent on political context. Obstacles towards CUT’s impact in countries such as Mexico and Tanzania include a lack of both local and national political buy-in. In these cases, there is a need for WRI to develop strategies to ensure that dialogue and progress continues. This includes ‘behind the scenes’ dialogue with policy makers that may not have an immediate, concrete result. Although not easily quantifiable, such work is often a necessary pre-requisite to more tangible results. It may be possible to do more to identify and engage with WRI alumnae, WRI consultants, other WRI associates who are now in positions of influence and can open the door to dialogue.

Based on the views of internal and external stakeholders, the following areas for further improvement have been identified:

Lack of overall oversight and the risk of ‘too many’ Platforms: the most common criticism of Platforms internally is that there are too many of them and/or that the distinction between platforms is not always clear.¹⁰⁶ In the words of one Board member: *‘we get approached all the time by governments and the UN. Do you want to take on this Platform? Each one of these come at a huge cost administratively for us. We need a more sustainable model for how we are going to resource and manage delivery Platforms.’* Multiple platforms can also lead to confusion and overlapping mandates. One senior manager told us: *‘They confuse the hell out of me – if I am really honest – big shot, famous people, more work than impact. Don’t get the point of them sometimes – half in, half out of WRI, unless very specific it is difficult to keep up. P4G is one I have never been able to figure out. NDCs again – should be engaged more... we have enough of those right now.’* Potentially overlapping mandates have already been recognized as a risk in restoration, with relevant senior managers collaborating to resolve this.

Too many Platforms can also exacerbate the challenge of quality control of research noted above. Because there is no systematic way of checking and monitoring the output of delivery Platforms within WRI, the risk of poor-quality knowledge products slipping through WRI’s quality assurance systems increases when the number of Platforms increases. This in turn has implications for WRI’s brand. The growth in co-owned Platforms thus brings the challenge of ensuring that knowledge products emerging from co-owned Platforms meet WRI standards, as does ensuring ‘institutional coherence’ with WRI’s research.¹⁰⁷ Co-owned Platforms have pressure placed on them by actors other than WRI, which means that their research output cannot always be consistent with that of WRI’s alone, especially if they do not include WRI authors on the team. This can undermine WRI’s credibility when such research is released by partners in platforms associated with WRI.

More generally, several internal interviewees commented that engaging with Platforms often requires considerable effort. Teams often need to reach out to Platforms rather than the reverse. In this sense, the linkages between Platforms and external stakeholders can often be stronger than those between Platforms and WRI’s own Programs and Centers.

¹⁰⁶ WRI’s Strategic Plan lists key questions to be considered when establishing a new platform. These center around the case for action, the solution, understanding what coalitions would work best, and what WRI’s unique contribution would be.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁷ *Key Findings Presentation*, External Review Team, 2021

Gender and social equity: WRI staff in general are not confident that Platforms are contributing significantly to meeting poverty, gender, and social equity objectives. Less than half (48%) of WRI staff working on Platforms agree that they make a significant contribution to social equity, with this figure falling to 35% and 29%, respectively, in the case of poverty and gender.¹⁰⁸ A large share of staff are just not sure what impact they are having on these cross-cutting themes. According to some staff, the central purpose of the Platforms is to target policy and decision makers at a high level, with impacts on poverty and GSE likely to be felt at a later point. In the view of these staff, the high level nature of targets of some of the Platforms has the consequence that on the ground impact is hard to determine and/or will be felt in the years to come.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, these figures are clearly striking.

The GCA appears to be one Platform that has successfully prioritized gender and social equity. GCA was cited by several stakeholders as a successful example of incorporating and addressing poverty and GSE into their Platform: 132 million people at risk of falling into poverty if they do not receive support for adaptation was a major driver for the Platform and those working on it. The GCA's contributions towards locally led adaptation initiatives are also seen by several stakeholders, because poverty and GSE were properly incorporated into the Platform's ethos.

In general, however, Platforms are not doing enough to directly target gender and social equity as confirmed in the results of the survey cited above. For example, although poverty and GSE are built into the FOLU theory of change ('Opportunity for All: Stronger Rural Livelihoods, Gender & Demography'), internal stakeholders feel that, in practice, gender is not sufficiently part of its core work.¹¹⁰ In another example, one otherwise positive (external) commentator on HLP noted: *'I personally think we are not doing enough, it is not just WRI, we should be doing a lot more. If you look at fisheries, small fisheries, who are the people who are working in the fishery sector? It is the women.'*

Partnerships: The External Review Team found that WRI could do more to diversify the range of partners with whom they engage and the depth and quality of these relationships. Stakeholders interviewed reflected on the prestige and the high visibility of the partnerships, however, many were concerned that more diverse partners, including from the Global South, were not always sufficiently included.¹¹¹ For example, we heard a view among several (often female) commentators that WRI can be arrogant and non-inclusive: *'WRI has often seemed like a "boys' club" in the past few years, similar to WEF and some of the other UN System organizations. WRI has suffered by not reaching out to others in the community (especially in the Oceans arena) or by not being responsive when others have approached them. It is a clique, talking amongst themselves with the "same old" experts ... the HLP has simply not been inclusive enough of the new generation of thought leaders.'*

We also heard that CUT had not done enough to collaborate with other civil society organizations in Mexico who were working with them on a common mobility and road safety agenda. We heard that: *'40 different organizations came together to have a coalition, [but] WRI did not work with that coalition, and instead came directly to us and Congress to push their agenda for transport. But that fragmented the way CSOs presented themselves ... it wasn't strategic.'*

Another external commentator working with NCE in Asia said: 'we had previously collaborated with WRI in Africa on the New Climate Economy. I was initially unsure ... I hadn't heard good things from our

¹⁰⁸ Key Findings Presentation, External Review Team, 2021, Slide 44

¹⁰⁹ Survey results

¹¹⁰ Internal Interview

¹¹¹ Key Findings Presentation, External Review Team, 2021

project in Africa - all the credit had gone to WRI and the role of [our organization] wasn't credited enough, so I wasn't sure if I should engage.' By contrast, we also heard in our interviews in Africa how well NCE had collaborated with local CSO partners in Ethiopia. We also heard positive examples of how in the implementation of WRI in Africa, the country director had gone out of their way to ensure that WRI did not push out local organizations from opportunities to bid for tenders.

Monitoring and evaluation: tracking and demonstrating results is critical for ensuring that platforms maximize the value of the social capital that they create. Yet MEL is a weak point of platforms. The External Review Team found that reporting and wider MEL was a recurring issue when speaking with external and internal stakeholders about WRI's delivery platforms. While some Platforms such as GFW have prioritized MEL others have not invested in developing a theory of change, targets or indicators. There is no systematic way of checking and monitoring the output of WRI's Delivery Platforms, and it is therefore difficult to assess their impact.

WRI currently lacks a staff position for someone who has responsibility for all Platforms, and platforms are not part of the wider WRI reporting system.¹¹² The growing number of Platforms has heightened the lack of coordination and systematic monitoring, leading to difficulties in understanding the true impacts or interdependence of the various Platforms. Some Platforms feed into Program's reports. However, this is not uniform across all delivery Platforms and each has a different governance structure. According to one WRI staff member, many in WRI do not appreciate the importance of evaluating impact. This is because WRI staff see themselves as researchers. They view the initiatives they are involved in as primarily research exercises – as opposed to policy influencing initiatives - so they do not need to evaluate their impact.

¹¹² Key Findings Presentation, External Review Team, 2021

Conclusions

WRI remains a **critical player** as a source of energy and ideas, a communicator of insights and priorities, and a convener of actors through its **Programs** and **Platforms**. It is a key player in the global effort to confront and resolve issues affecting humanity and has achieved nearly 70% of its 2018-22 targets with one year to go (i.e. with 80% of the 5-Year Strategy already elapsed).

It engages with **multiple actors** including public administrations, decision makers, national institutions, civil society, sustainability and corporate leaders, NGOs, and multilateral organizations.

COVID-19 does not appear to have materially slowed the work of the Programs/ Centers, which is a testament to the great support provided by the Core Functions throughout the period. In many cases the teams appear to have made **great strides despite the pandemic**, in what is proving to be an ongoing global social experiment.

With power and influence comes responsibility. There is a disconnect in some instances between how WRI sees itself, and its mode of working in **partnership**, and how external partners describe it especially partners with less power and influence but valuable and important contributions to make. Yet WRI risks losing its **innovative edge** unless it connects better with partners outside of established/conventional networks.

WRI should have the **confidence to be humble**, to push for radical transparency in areas where it fails and to continue to learn and improve. It risks not knowing what is working and what is not unless it strengthens its ability to monitor and evaluate its impact.

There is also a risk that what has made WRI great so far, its **research quality and strategic influence**, is threatened. This is partly because of the increased urgency of many agendas and the imperative to implement existing ideas, rather than develop new ones.

WRI's **Global Network** has allowed it to introduce and adapt its solutions in widely varying contexts, particularly in **important emerging markets** such as Brasil, China, India, Indonesia and Mexico, and more recently in Africa. The concept of **Sisterhood** is not yet fully developed and there may be scope to **better align budget, staff, and strategy**.

WRI exemplifies the power of **effective communication**, recognizing that the impact of new ideas can only be as great as the degree to which they are effectively communicated. However, maintaining this critical approach and inculcating it across the organization will take a significant and sustained effort.

WRI has come a long way, from a relatively low base in 2018, in incorporating **gender and social equity** into its work. It is making progress but is still on a journey and has a considerable distance to travel if it is to become an exemplar of best practice.

The WRI in Africa strategy is 'mostly on track'. Lessons have been learned, including the need for geographic focus, the importance of working through governments and partnering with local actors, and an emphasis on gender, poverty, and equity, etc. How far WRI Africa can influence other WRI Programs in the longer term is still an open question.

The **core functions** face a huge task in keeping up with WRI's rapid growth. Development, Operations (G&C) and MfR are struggling more than most. Core donors should focus on tracking their contribution to cross-cutting dimensions of WRI's work.

The fact that WRI “**shoots for the stars**” means that it will tend to fail more often than organizations that are not so ambitious. This is reflected in its Results Frameworks, which contain in many places **unachievable** or otherwise **difficult to measure targets**. *WRI needs to think deeply about what and how it measures in terms of results.*

WRI urgently needs to **improve its MEL capacity** to ensure that it is fully capturing the **progress** that it is making, being accountable to itself and others, and **learning from what is not working, as well as what is**. Fail Fest is a strong example of WRI’s efforts to reflect on the importance of this.

While teams are reporting to donors against Program- and project-level result frameworks, they have **little incentive to define and report against high-quality strategic reporting frameworks** because there is little demand for this from the Board.

Donors are pushing WRI to do more to measure the results of what it does. This is a valid requirement and necessary if WRI is to be accountable to its funders. But WRI must also beware of being driven into a **false equation of measure = manage = impact**.

Recommendations (grouped by Review Question with Top 10 recommendations highlighted)

Recommendation 1.1: WRI should explore how to better align strategy, budget and people across the organizational matrix to achieve a more coherent and cohesive offer that meets demand at global, national and local levels as effectively and efficiently as possible. Core functions need to be better networked e.g., Operations with M&R to develop an integrated project database that supports WRI’s strategic imperatives.

- There is a limit how far internal goodwill alone will ensure delivery in WRI focus countries that is coherent with International Office strategies. Yet, without this coherence it is unclear what traction country strategies can have
- Programs delivered within countries where WRI has an International Office often appear to be conceived and designed by the Programs and Centers and there is frustration in in some International Offices that centralized budget ownership undermines their capacity to lead.
- The concept of sisterhood is not always well understood and can result in inefficient competition across IOs for WRI Global program funding and attention.
- There are opportunities for better collaboration among core functions as well as between core functions and the rest of the organization
- The lack of a central database of projects is a significant gap in WRI’s toolbox box.

Recommendation 1.2: WRI should further strengthen joint-programming through the development of cross-Challenge targets that encourage cross-sectoral working among senior managers and their Teams.

- The Global Challenges are fundamentally seen as interconnected, and WRI is in a unique position to address them in a holistic way.
- However, within WRI are broadly working on the Global Challenges separately and at times at cross-purposes.
- WRI’s funding model undermines its ability to work on issues collaboratively.
- There is a risk that without joint-programming the GCs/Centers are now competing for the same donors.

- WRI can build on good practice such as the Urban Water Resilience and Cities4Forests programs as well as strengthening its Annual Planning process

Recommendation 1.3: WRI should build on existing examples (e.g., Equity Center, International Offices) to foster more partnerships with institutions in the Global South, especially community-based organizations that are relevant for implementation.

- Partnership is core to the way that WRI works.
- However, it is criticized for its tendency to partner with established partners, especially from the Global North. WRI's promotion of South-South cooperation scores low in the survey.
- Staff reflected on the need for WRI to partner more with sub-national actors, especially community-based organizations that are on-the-ground. This is especially important if the WRI increases implementation-based activity.
- These CSOs can play an advocacy role in country contexts, increasing the demand for WRI's solutions.

Recommendation 2.1: To ensure adequate unrestricted funding to support the new Strategic Plan, and financial reserves, WRI should consider convening a roundtable of current and potential bi/multilateral funders, as well as other mechanisms, to grow this critical resource.

- Unrestricted funding is a critical element in WRI's overall funding, allowing it to innovate and incubate new ideas, increase agility and responsiveness, expand its global presence, expertise and partnerships and to support partners' development.
- Lack of unrestricted funding is a constraint on WRI's ability to help solve the world's most pressing problems. Most donors are 'free riding' on the willingness of a few to provide unrestricted funding. A more coordinated approach could help WRI deliver more effectively for all its funders.
- WRI could build on the Multi Partner Meeting to raise this issue with a wider group of funders and explain how unrestricted (or at least flexible institutional funding) serves the interests of all partners.

Recommendation 2.2: WRI should invest more in building research and communications capabilities in its International Offices

- WRI exemplifies the power of high-quality research and effective communication, recognizing that the impact of new ideas can only be as great as the degree to which they are effectively communicated: but maintaining this critical approach and inculcating it across the whole organization will take a large and sustained effort.

Recommendation 2.3: WRI should increase the transparency of its promotion decisions including ensuring that promotion criteria are objective and well understood, and that the application of these criteria is seen to be fair.

- The least favorable responses in the HR component of the survey were in relation to the transparency of promotion decisions.
- 360° feedback is no longer practiced in WRI.

Recommendation 2.4: WRI should investigate the factors that have caused a gradual slide in its ranking as an environment policy think tank in the University of Pennsylvania GGTTT rankings – including a possible tilt away from its roots in quality research.

- WRI's ranking has slipped from 1/50 to 8/99 in the University of Pennsylvania think tank rankings
- Under one view WRI is moving away from its research roots towards advocacy to an excessive degree which could jeopardize its reputation and impact
- Research and other knowledge products communicated by co-managed platforms is often beyond the quality assurance control of WRI

Recommendation 2.5: WRI's Board should include one or more research champions on each of the Global and IO Boards to help ensure that the research side of the research/advocacy balance is fully represented

- Research lies at the core of WRI's success and impact
- The organization is potentially reaching a tipping point between research and advocacy
- There is no research champion on the Board

Recommendation 2.6: There is a need to strengthen organization-wide capability to manage the appropriate overall balance between research quality and timeliness of WRI knowledge products.

- WRI's growing agenda, the heightened urgency of this agenda, and the need to maintain quality means there is a need for a sharper focus by the organization on its top strategic priorities.
- WRI also needs to ensure both quality assurance (including by adding research/scientific representatives on IOs and Global Boards, strengthening dedicated research capacity in Programs/Centres/IOs and implementing the new roster of staff qualified to sign off on KPs) and timely delivery against these priorities.

Recommendation 2.7: The Board should take a more strategic approach to monitoring progress towards implementation of the Strategic Plan, increase the demand for meaningful reporting, and hence incentivize staff to better monitor annual planning targets

- Recent progress should be built on, including progress such as: Annual Planning process, new MEL system, new staff hires, greater clarity on MEL expectations in LPR, more training in development on PMEL, etc.
- There is a lack of effective demand, from the Board, for meaningful reporting of WRI's progress at the strategic level.
- Without effective Board demand, staff have little incentive to produce and report on meaningful metrics of strategic progress and MfR is undermined.
- Without more meaningful strategic reporting, the Board will not be able to track implementation of its Strategic Plan effectively.

Recommendation 2.8: WRI should rethink the targets it uses to measure organizational progress under the Strategic Plan, including developing meaningful measures of higher-level impact, as well as better ways of aggregating the results of Teams' 5-Year plans.

- There are currently no measures of global progress towards the higher-level impacts to which WRI is contributing (e.g. measures of a sustainable ocean, measures of food loss and waste, renewable energy use, etc.).
- The targets and indicators currently selected from teams' annual plans are a somewhat arbitrary sub-selection that do not aggregate across teams' delivery in a comprehensive manner.

Recommendation 2.9: There is a need for a step-change in funding, resourcing, and support for MEL across the organization. All grant agreements should include provisions for MEL; Directors should be held responsible for integrating MEL into their programs' work; and projects and programs should be required to use Dev Results, the system that WRI has already invested in, to ensure consistently high standards across the matrix.

- Evaluation and Learning has not kept pace with the growth of WRI in the last five years, particularly as it delivers more projects.
- Managers need to do more to champion and require the use of DevResults to staff.
- WRI is not set up to be a learning organization, which is a risk to both design and delivery, and to the reputation of WRI as an evidence-led think-and-do tank.

Recommendation 2.10: The MfR function needs to be fully integrated as an essential core function, commensurate with WRI's role and reputation as a centre of research excellence

- The MfR function is ambivalently situated, chronically under resourced and funded and cannot support WRI effectively as presently constituted, notwithstanding the progress made in the last two years.
- There is no effective mechanism for ensuring that MfR feedback to teams is actioned.

Recommendation 3.1: WRI needs to develop stronger policies, Standard Operating Procedures and strategies to elaborate the WRI approach to PGSE, fully.

- Increasingly, PGSE is included more explicitly in planning documents, but PGSE work is still not grounded by wider organizational policies or Standard Operating Procedures, as these remain absent. Over-arching directives, and protocols, covering the whole of the organization and its work, still need development: to ensure that engagement with PGSE is mandatory, standard analysis procedures are followed and PGSE is part of all work.

Recommendation 3.2: WRI should link completion of training in poverty, gender and social equity to staff performance assessments where training may be tailored to the existing skills, experience and needs of staff

- GSE work to date has often been driven by goodwill of invested staff. A balance needs to be found between "forcing" staff, platforms projects etc., into working with a PGSE perspective, and relying on goodwill alone.

Recommendation 3.3: WRI needs to earmark additional funding for post-intervention impact assessments/longitudinal research to measure outcomes and impact and include as a structural component of any funding agreement with donors.

- Ongoing, longer-term, follow-up and evaluation allow learning on the sustainability of equity outcomes achieved, and analysis of what leads to success in this (or not).

Recommendation 3.4: At a minimum WRI should conduct Political Economy Analysis, Social Impact Assessment and Do No Harm assessments all at the start of all work initiatives, potentially as part of the New Lines of Work process, to understand how poverty, gender and social equity are shaped by power dynamics etc.

- Understanding of context is critical to engagement with PGSE and to ensuring value-for-money of work initiatives. WRI can ensure that Political Economy Analysis is a “living” tool, using the data collated for adaptive management processes, tracking and learning. This will also help WRI to better assess their work in line with DAC-OECD criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, coherence, impact). Engagement with affected populations both at design and during monitoring and evaluation processes must also be conducted to ensure a participatory and Do No Harm approach is applied.

Recommendation 3.5: WRI needs to energetically implement the key proposals of the Equity Task Force, including the use of Markers for gender and social equity, to help ensure that success is recognized; top outcomes reward contributions to equity; and efforts to bolster staff capacity and capabilities are sustained.

- WRI needs to capitalise on work undertaken so far under the GSE Initiative and the ETF, to strengthen systems and champions for PGSE, and recognize/reward small gains in GSE as well as in organization-wide top outcomes.

Recommendation 3.6: A need to increase engagement, consultation and feedback to stakeholders at community level including women and other marginalized people, and representative bodies i.e. NGOs, CSOs and local leaders

As a think- and do-tank, and as WRI increase their focus on equitable development, it is imperative that at all stages of a project, WRI engage, consult and feedback to community level organizations including marginalized communities themselves

Recommendation 3.7: WRI needs to build Do No Harm Risk assessments into PEAs, before and during work in different contexts.

Poverty, gender and social equity are still challenges for WRI, which has a strong science focus, but a weaker social science focus. Some teams have excelled in integrating these lenses, but other teams are far behind.

Recommendation 3.8: The Review Team also strongly recommend increasing the number of products produced in multiple languages.

Recommendation 4.1: WRI should plan to i) develop more strategic initiatives that are Africa region-specific and ii) vest budget for delivery of these in WRI Africa to be used to buy time and input from Program and Center Teams

- Although WRI Africa has developed a regional strategy for Africa, it has few tools available to ensure that the programming developed by other teams in WRI is in fact aligned with the regional strategy.

Recommendation 4.2: WRI Africa should fully cost out the current Africa strategy, to enable a more targeted funding strategy, and develop metrics to enable monitoring and evaluation of its progress

- The 2020/21 Africa strategy, Catalyzing Inclusive Transformation: So Africa's People and Landscapes Flourish, is still being costed out.
- The Strategy does not yet have SMART metrics to measure progress.

Recommendation 4.3: WRI should build on the example of AFR100, and prioritize platforms that can address issues in Africa on a region-wide basis, while meeting local needs and leveraging additional funding

- There is a need to elevate WRI's offer above the level of multiple small projects in order to achieve change at scale while meeting needs at the local level.
- Including African countries alongside countries from other regions in WRI's platforms may not generate region-wide capital as effectively as Africa-specific initiatives.

Recommendation 4.4: WRI should explore developing a WRI Africa NGO Partnership comprising leading NGOs in countries of focus in Africa to stimulate demand for implementation of policies/plans and act as a bridge to Development Banks and other funders.

- The Equity Center has already begun work along these lines which should be built upon.
- Developing local partnerships is crucial for WRI's own success and credibility in Africa. Lack of engagement with NGOs is an underdeveloped area for some multilaterals e.g., the African Development Bank, and an area where WRI could act as a facilitator.

Recommendation 5.1: WRI should consider the value of Platforms in terms of their contribution to creating social capital. Starting or ending a Platform could be a function of whether social capital is increasing or depleting.

- Current terminology around Platforms (catalyzing, accelerating, etc.) may miss the important ingredient of social capital.
- WRI is searching for guidance on when to start and end a Platform: this could be rooted in the concept of social capital, particularly for non-data driven Platforms.
- There is concern that some Platforms have outlived their usefulness and there may be too many in some sectors.

Recommendation 5.2: There should be a presumption of a time limit to WRI's involvement in all Platforms, which would then require an explicit decision to extend its role at a formal mid-term review.

- The tendency for virtual networks (platforms, other virtual networks) is to continue even when past their useful period
- Platforms are highly resource intensive for WRI
- WRI's comparative advantage is in the start-up and take off phase of platforms rather than routine/ongoing support
- Platforms that go stale and begin to consume social capital could potentially negatively affect the reputation of Platforms more generally.

Recommendation 5.3: WRI should ensure that its contribution to establishing and maintaining Platforms is fully funded, in order to cover all the direct and indirect costs of performing this function

- Acting as secretariat for a Platform is energy sapping but vital: all relationships/networks require investment in order to survive and contribute effectively.

Recommendation 5.4: Platforms should have convincing and robust results frameworks to provide common direction and a means of tracking and evaluating progress

- Currently only a few platforms have proper MEL frameworks e.g., GFW and NCE.

Recommendation 6.1: WRI should undertake a review of its governance arrangements, including its IO Boards, to ensure that they have the diverse perspectives, skills, fundraising capabilities, and experience to ensure WRI remains equipped in the face of its growing global agenda.

The following issues for particular Board attention were identified:

- the need to monitor and judge the appropriate balance between research and advocacy
- insufficient Board level demand for meaningful monitoring and interpretation of progress towards implementation of the Strategic Plan
- lack of a research champion(s)
- insufficient demand for progress implementing poverty and GSE priorities