

An aerial photograph of a dense tropical forest. In the center, there is a clearing with several traditional huts with thatched roofs. A dirt path winds through the forest, connecting the huts. The forest is lush and green, with various tree species visible. The lighting suggests it might be late afternoon or early morning, with some shadows cast on the ground.

STRATEGY FOR THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF FORESTS

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Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities →
are the most important guardians of the world's forests.
Forests of the World works alongside them to conserve
forests, strengthen livelihoods, and uphold rights.



Forests Matter for Climate, Biodiversity, and Equality

Forests are the foundation of life on earth.

Billions of people depend directly on ecosystem services that forests provide, and most of the planet's terrestrial plants and animals rely on habitats within forests and the areas surrounding them. Forests are also the world's largest land-based carbon sink.

Yet forests are continuously being lost at an alarming pace. In 2024 alone, the world lost a record 30 million hectares of tree cover, including 6.7 million hectares of tropical primary forest rich in biodiversity and essential for carbon storage.

The drivers of deforestation and forest degradation are complex and differ from region to region, but at their core are unsustainable global economic and political systems. They include large-scale agriculture, extractive industries, unequal power relations, corruption, and illegal activities, as well as market and governance failures that weaken democracy and restrict civic space.

As forests disappear, their loss accelerates two of the most urgent crises of our time: climate change and biodiversity loss, the latter often described as the sixth mass extinction. At the same time, Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities, who are among the world's poorest and most marginalised, disproportionately face the impacts of deforestation and climate change, adding to a third crisis: growing global inequality.

Scientific assessments from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirm that forest-based adaptation and preventing the conversion of natural ecosystems are among the most cost-effective and immediately actionable strategies for addressing climate change adaptation and mitigation. Legitimate governance and locally led adaptation and mitigation initiatives are seen as essential for the sustainability of emerging climate investments.

Forests of the World is committed to creating lasting impact on these interconnected crises by conserving and restoring some of the planet's most vital and vulnerable forests. We do this by joining forces with Indigenous Peoples, Forest-dependent Communities, and other partners working on the frontlines of forest conservation.

Forests of the World Strategy | 2026

Our Vision, Mission, and Danish Roots

Vision A World with Rich Forest Nature

Mission

- We work to conserve, restore, defend, and enjoy biodiverse forests.
- We collaborate with Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities.
- We engage people and institutions to act for forests, sustainable livelihoods, and rights.

ROOTED IN DENMARK

Forests of the World is a Danish organisation with a global vision and an international scope. Our Danish roots remain strong in our values, our membership base, our political legitimacy, and our mandate to work for rich forest nature. We are committed to leading by example and promoting at home the same practices that we promote internationally. We recognise our shared responsibility for addressing global crises and that climate change is not just an environmental issue, but also a social and human rights issue of climate justice.

In Denmark, less than 1% of forest area is currently designated as wild forest nature. Strengthening public and governmental support for wilder forests in Denmark is therefore both valuable and of crucial importance. We engage actively in Danish nature policy and public debate, and we work to demonstrate how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect biodiversity, and respect human rights. By engaging people and decision-makers in Denmark in making Danish forests wilder and enjoying biodiversity, we seek to build broader understanding and support for the challenges we address in international policy forums and for our international work in tropical forests.

ADDED VALUE – LOCAL PRESENCE AND GLOBAL VISION

Forests of the World's roots in Denmark's civic culture, anchored in democratic values of participation, accountability, equality, and transparency, shape our vision for international engagements. We operate in contexts where political and organisational corruption is often systemic, and in many of these areas, we are the sole representatives of Danish principles of governance and credibility.

We are a small specialised organisation. Our team works alongside local partners to provide strategic and technical support to address the challenges in forest conservation and territorial governance. We understand forests as ecological, social and political landscapes shaped by markets, power relations and broader environmental and historical forces, and we therefore apply a forest landscape approach in our work.

We facilitate access for our partners to international forums and promote legitimate global decision-making based on local representation.

We bridge contexts and cultures by uniting forest guardians across landscapes to join forces and exchange knowledge and practices. Our horizontal approach and collaborative way of working, with open dialogue and joint decision-making, allow us to stay agile and respond to local priorities in forest landscapes.

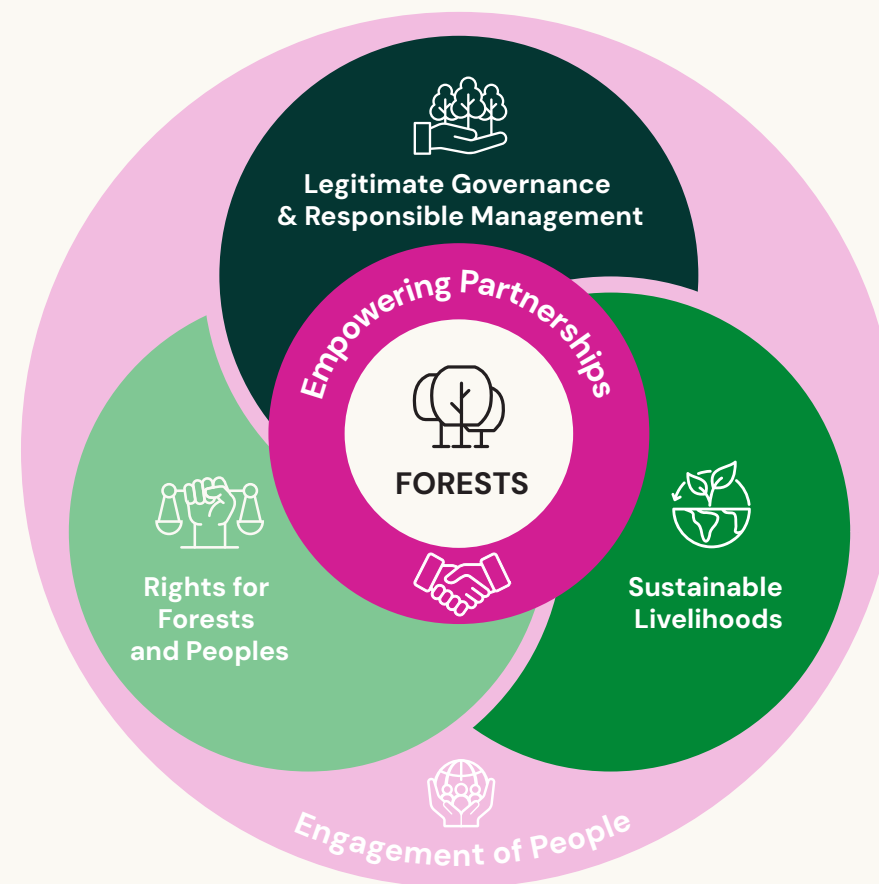
Defend Forests from Deforestation and Degradation

Forests of the World finds that when Indigenous Peoples, Forest-dependent Communities, and civil society have the organisational capacity, knowledge, skills, and tools needed to collaborate through empowering partnerships and engage people in support of forests, they can lead the achievement of legitimate governance and responsible management of forest, pursue sustainable livelihoods, and hold duty-bearers accountable for fulfilling their rights and the rights of forests. Together, these mutually reinforcing efforts create the conditions for forests to thrive and be conserved, contributing to a world rich in forest nature.

To address deforestation and forest degradation, we work towards **three strategic goals**: *Legitimate Governance and Responsible Management*, *Sustainable Livelihoods*, and *Rights for Forests and Peoples*.

We pursue these goals through **two strategic enablers** of lasting impact: *Empowering Partnerships* and the *Engagement of People*. Our work is based on interventions that are tailored to local contexts and driven by the needs and priorities of our partners to achieve lasting change.

Overall, we will keep an eye on the deforestation rate in forests we contribute to conserving.





LEGITIMATE GOVERNANCE AND RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT

The future of forests is shaped by the decisions we make

Deforestation and forest degradation are driven by structural economic pressures and governance systems that incentivise short-term use of forest landscapes over long-term sustainability. This is enabled by weak, inadequate, or illegitimate governance and management systems. These gaps leave forests highly vulnerable and allow for deforestation and degradation, causing severe consequences for local communities, biodiversity, the long-term stability of entire ecosystems, as well as the global climate.

We work to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities can exercise Legitimate Governance and Responsible Management of forests.

We will promote legitimate governance and decision-making systems that are accountable and recognised as representative and fair by Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities. This entails promoting responsible forest management that meets a triple bottom line of environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Clear land and resource tenure rights are important for long-term stewardship of forests and for defining legitimate governance mandates.

Concretely, legitimate governance of forests requires a landscape approach with multi-stakeholder engagement that balances diverse interests in a sustainable way. Central and regional governments are key stakeholders in many cases, as are Indigenous and Afrodescendant authorities in others. We promote broad, inclusive participation in decision-making to ensure that the voices and needs of Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities are recognised and addressed.

Our focus includes conserving remaining natural forests, increasing tree cover and restoring forests with high biodiversity or livelihood potential. Achieving this requires strong local capacity to plan and implement effective forest management practices, including forest monitoring, sustainable production and use of forest products, fire prevention, watershed protection, and the restoration of ecological corridors to enhance biodiversity connectivity and other vital ecosystem services.

→ We will keep an eye on # of hectares of forest we contribute to conserving.



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

*When people thrive with forests,
forests thrive with them*

The livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities are under increasing pressure. Growing populations, unreliable harvests and yields due to climate change, and power imbalances in access to markets, land, and natural resources drive livelihood practices that contribute to deforestation and forest degradation. Local producers often face limited market access, low bargaining power, and unequal access to resources, which can trap communities in cycles of poverty, inequality, and reliance on unsustainable forest use.

We work to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities implement climate-resilient production and agroecological practices that strengthen sustainable livelihoods.

We will strengthen the development of sustainable livelihoods based on climate-resilient production, sustainable food systems, and nature-based solutions that improve productivity, strengthen adaptation to climate change, and contribute to climate mitigation by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing carbon sequestration. Sustainable livelihood approaches in forest landscapes thus become an integrated part of forest conservation and restoration, minimising the pressure placed on forests from unsustainable land use and resource extraction.

Concretely, sustainable livelihoods depend on recognising the inherent value of natural forests and the role of forest-adjacent areas as buffer zones. We promote local entrepreneurship in agroforestry, certification of timber and non-timber forest products, such as nuts, oil, and honey, and related services. Such entrepreneurship can take place inside forests as part of forest management and in adjacent areas to reduce pressure on the forests.

Our focus includes adopting proven techniques that integrate natural forest regeneration, local knowledge, and high-value, diversified crops through successional agroforestry. This requires strong local capacity to manage transparent and accountable producer organisations, strengthen business capacity, and develop sustainable and fair value chains that enable more direct and responsible trade. We also engage private sector commercial partners to create fair and sustainable market opportunities, ensuring collective and equitable benefit and risk-sharing for local producers in and around the forests.

→ We will keep an eye on # of households improving their livelihoods.



RIGHTS FOR FORESTS AND PEOPLES

Protecting forests entails protecting the people who defend them



Forest conservation is reinforced by the recognition of rights of both forests and Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities who rely on them. However, these rights are violated, environmental legislation is not enforced, and shrinking civic space hinders the work of environmental defenders, frequently putting their lives at risk. When rights are not respected or fulfilled, and when nature or biodiversity is not protected by law, we see forests being lost and degraded.

We work to ensure that Indigenous Peoples, Forest-dependent Communities, and civil society organisations can hold duty-bearers accountable for fulfilling their rights and for adopting and enforcing regulatory frameworks in favour of forests and people.

We will support the defence of both the rights of forests and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities. This entails enabling rights-holders to claim their rights and holding duty-bearers accountable for enforcing the law, including democratic freedoms of expression and association, and access to information and participation. We advocate for legal and legitimate frameworks that protect both people and forests, ensuring that forest conservation and social equity go hand in hand.

Concretely, the recognition and fulfilment of rights takes two forms: enforcing and exercising existing laws, or advocating for new or improved regulatory frameworks that protect forests, biodiversity, and communities. We promote Indigenous Peoples' collective and territorial rights to self-determination and consultations aimed at securing free, prior, and informed consent. Further, we create awareness about rights and support Forest-dependent Communities in fulfilling criteria to obtain forest tenure rights.

Our focus emphasises legitimacy over legality, as legal systems that empower a limited economic elite have often been used to manipulate outcomes that contribute to deforestation. This requires strong local capacity to ensure legitimate representation and leadership while effectively advocating and negotiating for rights. We support campaigning, networks, and alliance-building, and provide legal assistance to help communities file complaints, obtain legal recognition of territories or claim rights for forests and peoples.

→ We will keep an eye on # of local communities defending their rights and forests.



EMPOWERING PARTNERSHIPS

Lasting change grows from strong local leadership

Forest conservation is an ongoing challenge that requires sustained efforts beyond the scope of short-term initiatives. Long-term sustainability depends on permanent local change agents who take ownership and have the necessary capacities and resources to carry forward forest conservation initiatives. At the same time, addressing the complexity of deforestation requires the support of a diverse range of partners to achieve lasting impact, acting as catalysts for change within collaborative efforts, where we empower one another and become stronger together.

We work to ensure that Indigenous Peoples, Forest-dependent Communities, Forests of the World, and other civil society organisations are empowered by partnerships that promote local leadership, strong organisations, democracy and equal participation in favour of forests and their conservation.

We will primarily empower through collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, Forest-dependent Communities, and civil society organisations, assuming the role of enabler and supporter, guided by locally defined needs, knowledge, and priorities. Our partnerships are grounded in trust, fairness, and shared accountability. We aim for mutual learning while recognising and addressing power imbalances to promote local ownership and leadership.

Concretely, empowering partnerships rely on equitable dialogue and decision-making structures. We prioritise dialogue over adherence to defined – and possibly outdated – plans, because we believe collaboration must be meaningful for all parties. When a partnership or initiative no longer serves its purpose, we encourage open conversation, adjustment, and mutual learning.

Our focus is organisational strengthening, as strong, transparent, and inclusive organisations are the best defence of forests and against inequality and shrinking civic space. Our experience shows that forest conservation is more effective when we unite knowledge, technology, and resources. It entails uniting civil society and promoting collaboration and coordination across sectors, including central governments, academia, media, and the private sector. By supporting local change agents to lead and sustain action among diverse stakeholders, we aim to ensure that the struggle for forests, livelihoods and rights continues – and grows – even beyond our direct involvement.

→ We will keep an eye on # of partners joining forces to conserve forests.



ENGAGEMENT OF PEOPLE

Forest conservation depends on us all

Action for forests is needed from all sides, making the purpose of engagement twofold. First, to increase local participation and leadership among Indigenous Peoples, Forest-dependent Communities, and civil society close to the forests. Second, to increase support from the general public, students, scientists, businesses, and decision-makers more distant from the forests. That includes you and me, and all of Forests of the World's members. Sustainable change for global impact on forests relies on collective engagement that enables legitimate governance, responsible management, sustainable livelihoods and the fulfilment of rights.

We work to ensure that Indigenous Peoples, Forest-dependent Communities, and the general public are engaged to the extent that they change their behaviour in favour of forests, or provide support and legitimacy to leaders and organisations working for forest conservation.

We will engage people by raising awareness and enabling meaningful action. We provide a platform for the Danish public, as well as national and international partners, and encourage communities to participate in forest conservation, thus connecting local and global agendas. We inspire individuals and institutions to co-develop actions to change practices, influence decisions, and strengthen movements for forests. We aim to empower informed and committed stakeholders, bringing together diverse voices and actors across age, gender, ethnicity, and geography.

Concretely, meaningful engagement requires that people understand both why and how to act. They need to grasp the value forests hold, the urgency of taking action, and the ways in which they can contribute effectively. We share knowledge, carry out information campaigns, and support environmental rights education, technical training, and strategic guidance, with clear calls to action. We give individuals and institutions both the reason and the means to engage, change behaviour, or influence opinions in support of forest conservation and social justice.

Our focus includes mutual learning, outreach, communities of practice, and volunteering, as well as the donation of funds and services. We open doors through advocacy and promote decision-making in favour of forests, including votes or endorsements. By fostering engagement rooted in knowledge and shared responsibility, we create lasting support and collective action that amplifies the global impact for forests and people.

→ We will keep an eye on # of people taking action to conserve forests.

Hotspots - Geographic Priorities

Forests of the World's international work takes place primarily in forest landscapes that qualify as global biodiversity hotspots and key biodiversity areas. To maximise our impact at the nexus of climate change, biodiversity loss, and inequality, we prioritise forests within landscapes with the following characteristics:

- High levels of endemic species
- Significant threats from human activities, including climate change, that place forests at risk of disappearing
- Strong potential for empowering partnerships with Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities

Besides our efforts in Denmark, we currently work in hotspots across the East African Rift Valley Ecosystem, the Amazon and Cerrado regions of South America, and the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor.

In Latin America, we work with local communities, primarily Indigenous Peoples, as their territories overlap with the largest and most threatened forests of the region. Securing their territorial rights and sustainable livelihoods has proven to be the most effective way to conserve forests. This includes addressing the external political and economic factors driving land grabbing, agricultural expansion, and cattle farming. We support their legitimate governance, climate-resilient production, territorial monitoring, and advocacy efforts to claim and fulfil their rights.

In Denmark, we work to increase public awareness of the value of forests. We advocate for improved political frameworks to protect biodiversity and create better conditions for forests to expand and grow wilder.

In East Africa, we work in and around the forests. In the forest, we work to safeguard local communities from deforestation and degradation by strengthening community-led forest management and conservation and supporting the exercise of collective rights and stewardship. Outside the forest, in surrounding buffer zones, we support climate-resilient livelihoods that increase productivity and income while reducing dependency on forest extraction.

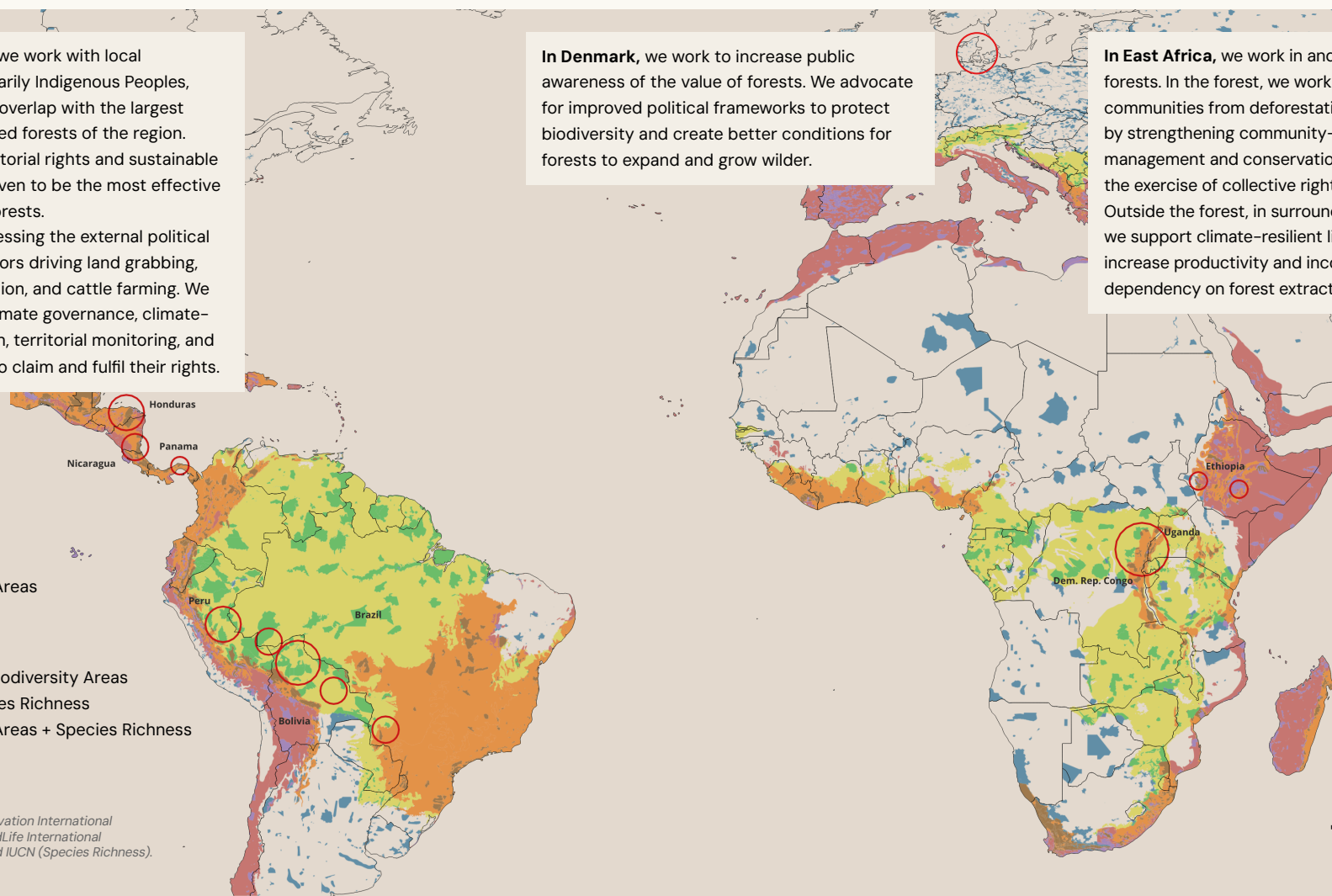
Biodiversity layers

- Hotspots
- Key Biodiversity Areas
- Species Richness

Overlaps

- Hotspots + Key Biodiversity Areas
- Hotspots + Species Richness
- Key Biodiversity Areas + Species Richness
- Triple overlap

Based on data from Conservation International (Biodiversity Hotspots), BirdLife International (Key Biodiversity Areas) and IUCN (Species Richness).



Forest Conservation Principles

Forests of the World recognises the complexity of conserving forests and creating lasting positive change in a world where forests are disappearing. We follow six cross-cutting principles in doing so.

1. LOCAL LEADERSHIP

- Development led by Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities

Forest conservation should be a global cause led by local actors. We see Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities as knowledgeable and representative partners with strong potential to lead development, while recognising they are often positioned as poor, marginalised and vulnerable. They are the permanent local change agents who drive and sustain the desired change. They have their own vision for the future and a deep understanding of local threats and opportunities, and are therefore our key local partners. Together with other NGOs, we play an enabling role in supporting their vision and responses to the threats they face. This includes connecting local agendas to global arenas, facilitating access to new information and data, as well as drawing on cross-cutting experiences from other contexts.

2. FORESTS IN LANDSCAPES

- Coexistence between nature and peoples

Our landscape approach considers forests in relation to other land uses, production activities, water resources and communities. These relations are shaped by ecological, social, economic and political interactions, where Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities hold a key role. We take an integrated, multi-stakeholder perspective, balancing a variety of interests, opportunities and threats.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS

- Leaving no one behind in forest conservation

Human rights are the foundation of our work. Active participation, empowerment, and knowing one's rights are fundamental. We take a non-discriminatory approach focused on equality, without distinction based on gender, sexuality, age or ethnicity. We also uphold the principle of *"Nothing about us, without us"*. We are accountable for our own actions and promote accountability in our engagements.

4. YOUTH

- Our future world's leaders

Children and young people are our future leaders who should understand, innovate, and take ownership of the changes ahead. Youth have shown particular openness to changes in power relations, gender roles, and digitalisation around the world. They play a crucial role in carrying forward traditional knowledge, values and culture, while also learning from the past and shaping a better future.

5. GENDER

- Increasing access to talent, insights, and resources

Gender equality and the rights of girls and women are central to our work. Girls and women make up half the world's rights-holders, consumers, and labour force, and they produce more than half of the world's food. They also hold half the knowledge and intellectual capacity available. Their active participation thus brings talent, insights and resources. We take an intersectional approach to gender equality and equity, and we affirm all genders.

6. COMMUNICATION

- A tool for collective action

Communication is an essential element for sustainable development. What is not communicated cannot be questioned, improved or scaled. Effective communication should inspire both reflection and action. We believe hope for forests is earned by creating opportunities for people to engage and contribute to change. The truth must be shared, which is why we insist on facts and data. People's support matters, so we showcase results and impact.



Our Organisation

Forests of the World is rooted in more than 40 years of history, dating back to the foundation of the organisation in 1983 under the name *Regnskovsgruppen Nepenthes*. The organisation was founded by volunteer biology students from Aarhus University. Although much has changed since then, Forests of the World remains grounded in evidence-based knowledge and driven by the dedication of volunteers and professionals who support or advance our work globally.

In recent years, we have taken deliberate steps to enhance our ability to deliver on our mission. We seek to reduce hierarchy and distribute decision-making power more broadly across the organisation to improve the effectiveness of our joint efforts. Our organisation is purpose-driven rather than person-driven, meaning that everyone has both the mandate and the responsibility to contribute to our shared goals for the forests.

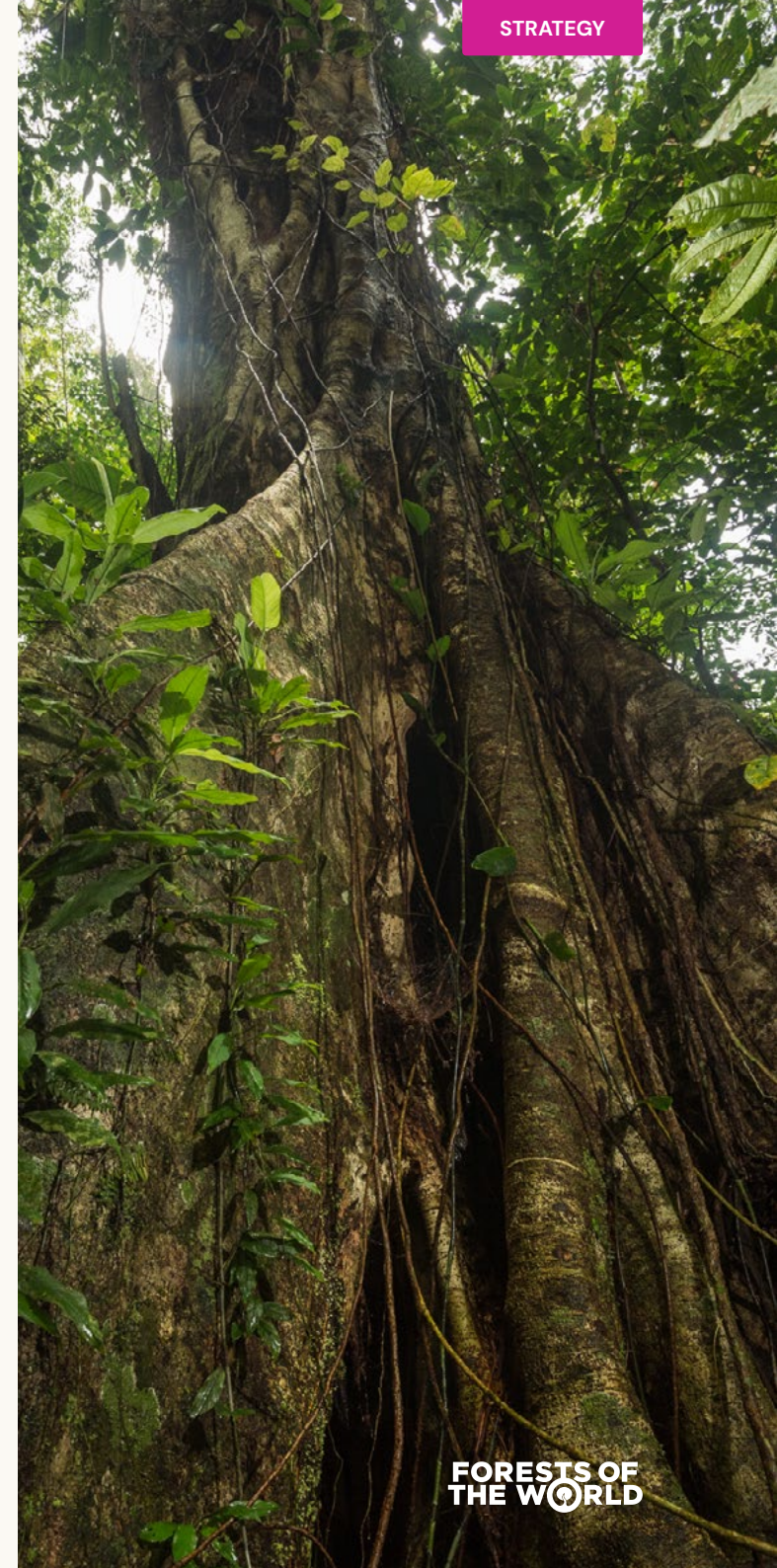
Our staff and volunteers are based across two offices in Denmark and three regional hub offices in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia; and La Ceiba, Honduras. Together, they bring substantial experience as well as the strategic, technical, and administrative competencies needed to advance our mission.

We will invest in developing the potential of our staff and volunteers, ensuring the capacity needed for continuous monitoring, learning, and knowledge development. We value experimentation above perfection, and see failure as an opportunity to learn and improve our interventions.

Creating long-lasting impact in a complex and often contentious world requires a sound business model and a robust and diversified financial base.

We will expand our funding sources while consolidating existing partnerships. Our members remain the core foundation of our legitimacy and operations. This will be complemented by strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations and networks, as well as institutional and multilateral funding and private donations.

We recognise that all funding is entrusted to us by individuals and institutions who believe in our mission. We are committed to honouring this trust by using every resource effectively to benefit forests and the communities that depend on them.



Our Compass Points to the Forest

Our organisational compass guides how we work. It reminds us who we are and keeps us aligned with our values in long-term priorities and in daily decision-making.

1

We put the forest above all else

We recognise forests as having value in themselves.

Our work begins with the forest and, from there, addresses climate, biodiversity, equality, governance, management, livelihoods, and rights.

2

We are one among many

We see humans as one species among many in the natural world. We belong to the world; the world does not belong to us.

3

We act from a place of privilege

We do not take our privileges for granted.

We use them responsibly and seek to put them at the service of local leaders, where they can help open doors and create access.

4

We have feet on the ground

Many of us live far from the forests, but we have all set foot in the forests.

We invest in understanding local contexts and maintaining close, strong relationships with Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities.

5

We recognise the value of local knowledge

We recognise the knowledge systems, cosmovisions, and practices of Indigenous Peoples and Forest-dependent Communities as equal to scientific and technological knowledge.

6

We see the forest, not just the trees

We know that many threats to the forest arise outside forests themselves. We dare to tackle the root causes behind the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation.

Evidence Base

The following sources provide the evidence base for our Strategy, Theory of Change, and the broader context analysis.

FORESTS AND BIODIVERSITY

- Global Forest Watch - [Global Dashboard](#)
- The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - [Global Assessment 2022](#)
- Forest Stewardship Council - [FSC Annual Reports](#)
- World Resources Institute - [Global Forest Review](#)
- Food and Agriculture Organization - [Flagship Publications](#)
- International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources - [The IUCN Red List](#)

CLIMATE CHANGE AND VULNERABILITY

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - [Reports and Data Publications](#)
- German Watch - [Climate Risk Index 2026](#)
- European Union's Science for Climate Action Office - [Science for Climate Action 2022](#)
- United Nations Environment Programme - [Reports and Data Publications](#)

RIGHTS AND CIVIC SPACE

- Global Witness - [Investigations and Publications - Land and Environmental Defenders](#)
- CIVICUS - [Global Findings Civic Space 2025 Report](#)
- Transparency International - [2025 Corruption Perceptions Index](#)
- United Nations - [The Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report 2025](#)

LIVELIHOODS, ECONOMICS, AND INEQUALITY

- The World Bank - [Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024](#)
- Development Finance International and Oxfam International - [Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index Report 2024](#)
- World Inequality Lab - [World Inequality Report 2026](#)
- United Nations Development Programme - [Human Development Report 2025](#)
- United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs - [World Social Report 2025](#)

STOP DEFORESTATION AND FOREST DEGRADATION

Forests of the World

Head Office

VOX, Lyngbyvej 100

2100 Copenhagen

Denmark

+45 86 13 52 32

info@forestsoftheworld.org

forestsoftheworld.org



Discover our work