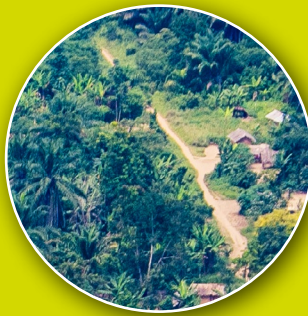


# WELL GROUNDED 2.0

## A 5 Year Strategic Plan

2021-2025





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# Foreword

**Since its beginning in 2010, the ambition for Well Grounded has always been to work towards a world where communities have control over their own lives and destinies and to care for their lands and natural resources.**

Well Grounded's particular contribution to that was to support the national organisations that work with communities, particularly those in forest areas in sub-Saharan Africa, to become more effective at what they do and more accountable to the communities with whom they work.

This new strategy represents another step in that direction. It continues to build on more than 10 years of learning and practice in supporting organisations to develop themselves. The way in which building on strengths is highlighted is really important – we all spend too much time trying to respond to deficits and talking about gaps rather than recognising and celebrating what is there and what people have already put in place to build on.

Added to that, the focus on shifting power to a local level when it comes to civil society organisations is particularly exciting. It is represented in the attention paid to women's and indigenous peoples' leadership in civil society organisations and in the emphasis on supporting a pool of committed, skilled people from the countries Well Grounded is working in to themselves be taking a lead in offering that support to national organisations. This strategy is really explicit about looking at and naming power imbalances and in supporting people to



*Artwork by Cath Long*

tackle them, to take the space for themselves and to come up with their own solutions.

Well Grounded as an organisation has constantly interrogated itself about how power is manifested and managed, within its own team and with the work it engages in – and that process has been challenging and complicated at times. It is great to see that challenge and that questioning being brought to every aspect of the work that Well Grounded does.

CATH LONG • FOUNDING MEMBER

# Executive summary

**Since 2010, Well Grounded (WG) has worked with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the Congo Basin. WG has aided these CSOs in building the organisational, human, financial and strategic resources needed to support local communities, enabling them to know and claim their rights and to better manage their natural resource endowment, with a particular emphasis on forests.**

This strategic plan lays out Well Grounded's intended outcomes over the next five years and how we intend to achieve them.

After five years, there will be an increase in the number of confident, assertive and effective CSOs, responding to the needs of their communities and treating all community members with respect and dignity. Women and indigenous leaders and organisations will be more visible, defining and delivering their own development priorities.



After 5 years women will play a greater role in defining and delivering their own development priorities

We will achieve this by focusing on the following:

- 1** Further development of our work on organisation development for CSOs, working with both individual organisations and networks. We will support CSOs in gaining greater control over their identity and strategy, embracing approaches that put communities in the driving seat of their own development thereby fostering their resilience.
- 2** Scaling up of our work on women's and Indigenous Peoples' (IPs) leadership. We will support women and IP CSO leaders to be better equipped in asserting their rights and speaking up about issues that affect them so that they can play a more effective role in natural resource governance.
- 3** Recognising that the current context coupled with the Covid-19 global crisis demands even more local solutions, we will strengthen our work on 'shifting power' to the local level. In particular, we aim to develop and work with a pool of committed, competent and experienced local consultants, capable of facilitating change processes, being locally deployable and able to contribute to the empowerment of CSOs and communities.

## OUR VALUES

Respect

Inclusion

Sovereignty

Adaptation

## OUR WAYS OF WORKING

Power analysis

Tailor made support

Client ownership

Focused on strengths

Committed to change

## OUR FOUR INTERCONNECTED STRATEGIES:

1



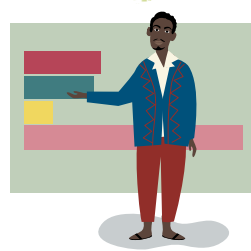
Improved organisational inclusion and effectiveness

2



Stronger CSO leaders (women and IP)

3



Increased availability of competent local OD practitioners

4



Shifting power for an enabling environment



A credible, inclusive and effective African civil society

Positive and sustainable change for environmental and social justice




# Who we are

**The idea behind Well Grounded came from the experience of our two founding members, Cath Long and Iola Leal, who had both been working for over a decade with civil society organisations focussing on community rights and the sustainable management of natural resources in tropical countries. Although they both met many inspirational and dynamic individuals and groups doing extraordinary work, they realised that these same people and groups kept encountering barriers stopping them from having the impact they hoped for.**

In 2010, Well Grounded was established with the aim of helping African CSOs to overcome the barriers they were encountering.

Having a key role to play as a complement and a counterweight to government and

the private sector, Well Grounded works with CSOs so that they are able to realise their objectives and vision thereby making a positive change to community rights and natural resource governance in their home countries and the wider world.



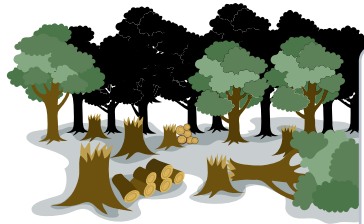
**Natural resources in the Congo Basin are central to the lives and livelihoods of the poorest and most marginalised people. However, all too often these resources are not managed in a way that benefits the communities who depend on them**

# Problem statement

The Congo Basin rainforest is the second largest tropical forest in the world and a critical site in the battle against climate change. Natural resources in the Congo Basin are central to the lives and livelihoods of the poorest and most marginalised people. However, all too often these resources are not managed in a way that benefits the communities depending on them or that ensures that they will be available to future generations. The situation is becoming more critical as international demand for NR results in severe pressure exerted on the natural habitats on which local communities depend.

In this context, CSOs have a key role to play in mobilising communities and influencing government practices and policies so as to create positive and sustainable change in natural resource governance. However, many committed and innovative CSOs face an array of internal challenges in their ability to effectively achieve their goals. In addition, power dynamics and policies and practices of international actors negatively impact the sustainability of the CSO.

## Over exploitation of natural resources



## CSOs facing internal challenges and external pressures



## Weak natural resource governance



## Unbalanced power dynamics



## Impoverishment of resource-dependent communities



## Women and indigenous people facing exclusion and discrimination



# Our ways of working

## ● POWER ANALYSIS

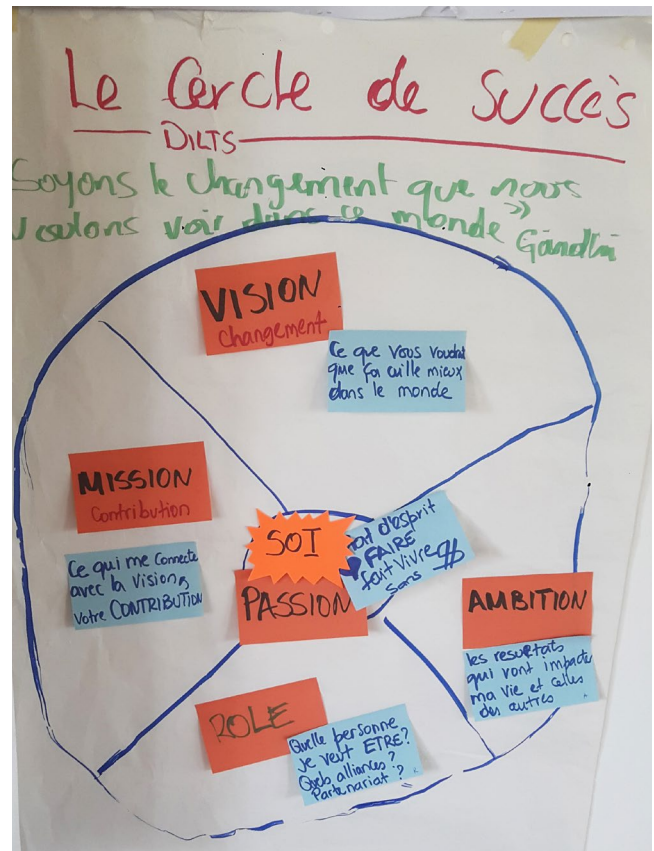
We ensure all our work includes a questioning of systemic challenges linked to inequality, thereby supporting an understanding of power dynamics and their impact on environmental and social justice.

## ● TAILOR MADE SUPPORT

We believe that each organisation is unique and requires a unique response to its particular situation. We therefore tailor our support to the organisation's unique and particular needs.

## ● CLIENT OWNERSHIP

We believe that the CSOs we work with should take ownership of their organisation's development process, playing a key role in the transformation they seek. We will not do what organisations can do by and for themselves. We will act as "talking partners", mentors or coaches supporting them in taking the lead in the transformation process, respecting the autonomy of each organisation to make the decisions on where and how they want to move forward.



## ● FOCUSED ON STRENGTHS

We believe that we excel by amplifying strengths, never by only fixing weaknesses, therefore our focus will be on supporting strengths and opportunities — magnifying "what is best" and allowing us to imagine "what is next".

## ● COMMITTED TO CHANGE

Structure and processes will change if people's behaviour and mindsets have changed. While supporting CSOs to improve their strategies, systems and processes, we will create a space to question and transform the organisational culture and practice. We will guide our client through a transformative journey.



# Our vision

**A credible, collaborative, inclusive and effective African Civil Society capable of advocating for social and environmental justice while empowering communities to determine their own future.**

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# Our mission

**Supporting African CSOs to gain power and skills to positively influence natural resource governance and to empower communities to determine their own future.**

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# Our values

**Our values guide how we work at Well Grounded, whether that be internally or with others.**

Our key values are as follows:

## ● RESPECT

Our relationships are centred around listening to and valuing the other person. We believe that mutual respect in our relationships means being treated with equity, while being transparent and accountable.

## ● INCLUSION

Each person is unique and has a value that should be recognised and a voice that should be heard. We will provide equal access to opportunities and resources for people and groups who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. We will ensure people we work with have a say in decisions that affect them.

## ● SOVEREIGNTY

Each individual and organisation is seen as an independent actor in their own right. They hold both the power and the responsibility for their actions and own development.

## ● ADAPTATION

Making and acknowledging mistakes, as well as celebrating successes, is part of the learning process. We believe in the importance of creating opportunities for continuous learning and in obtaining new knowledge at both the individual and collective levels.

# Targeted actors

We have identified the following actors as being the main target for our actions:

## ● CSOs

National and community based civil society organisations as well as local, national and regional CSO networks (platforms, coalitions or alliances) working in the natural resources governance sector, formal or informal, working on advocacy, investigation and/or technical capacity development with the aim of amplifying collective action.

## ● CSO WOMEN LEADERS

Women leaders working either on advocacy of women's rights in relation to natural resource governance or the development of women's leadership at the community level, including those who are responsible for gender inclusion within their organisations.

## ● CSO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LEADERS

Community leaders and CSO leaders working to improve indigenous peoples' rights and supporting indigenous peoples' communities allowing them to take the lead in their development.



We will support women and IP CSO leaders to be better equipped in asserting their rights and speaking up about issues that affect them so that they can play a more effective role in natural resource governance.

# Key Achievements to date

In its first ten years, Well Grounded has achieved the following:

**50 CSOs with strong identity and clear strategy**



**4 Credible forest monitoring CSOs in Congo Basin**



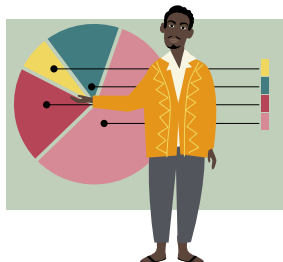
**Purposeful and self-aware CSOs leaders**



**More CSOs are relating to the outside world with confidence and pride**



**Organisation development on stakeholders radar**



**More inclusive and participative culture within CSOs**



## CREDIBLE AND COLLABORATIVE FOREST-MONITORING CSOs IN THE CONGO BASIN

We supported the establishment of independent forest monitoring CSOs in 4 countries of the Congo Basin (DRC, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville and CAR); helping each of them to define their identity, strategy and approach to independent monitoring. Our support also enabled them to identify complementarity with other CSOs thereby strengthening their collaborations. We also supported the creation of a regional organisation, Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG), to work in a complementary capacity to national organisations. This was a key factor in the establishment of independent forest monitoring in the Congo Basin.

## A MORE PARTICIPATORY AND INCLUSIVE CULTURE WITHIN CSOs

We have supported a gradual shift in CSO organisational culture from a more centralised approach to a more participatory one. More CSOs exhibit positive leadership creating opportunities for more inclusive and participatory ways of working, influencing how they share responsibilities and take decisions internally and how they engage and remain accountable to the communities they serve.

## CSO CONFIDENCE

We have supported the transformation of how CSOs relate to the outside world. They are now more confident in their potential and continue to strive and grow, engaging constructively in mutual collaborations with other CSOs.

## PURPOSEFUL LEADERS

We have provided space for civil society actors to develop not only technical skills but also a strong sense of self-awareness, clear purpose and core values. This enables them to act in alignment with their values and to be confident to engage with diverse opinions, perspectives, experiences, and identities; to leverage individual and collective strength to accomplish a shared goal; and to work with others towards positive change.

## ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT (OD) ON THE RADAR

We have supported an increase in OD offer and demand over the last 10 years. More and more international organisations are seeing the need for and prioritising OD in their work, taking steps to strengthen CSOs beyond projects and programmes. More CSOs are also advocating with their donors and partners for support in organisation development.

## CSOs WITH A CLEAR IDENTITY AND CLEAR STRATEGY

We have supported civil society organisations through one-to-one processes to define their identity and to clarify their strategic focus and purpose. A well-defined vision, mission and strategic objectives gives them a foundation on which they can build to advocate, and influence their broader environment. A total of 50 community based organisations (CBOs), CSOs and networks/platforms in Cameroon, DRC, CAR and RoC have been supported.

# The moment we are in

**A number of opportunities are impacting CSOs working on natural resource governance in the Congo Basin and have influenced Well Grounded's choice of strategies for the upcoming 5 years. These are:**

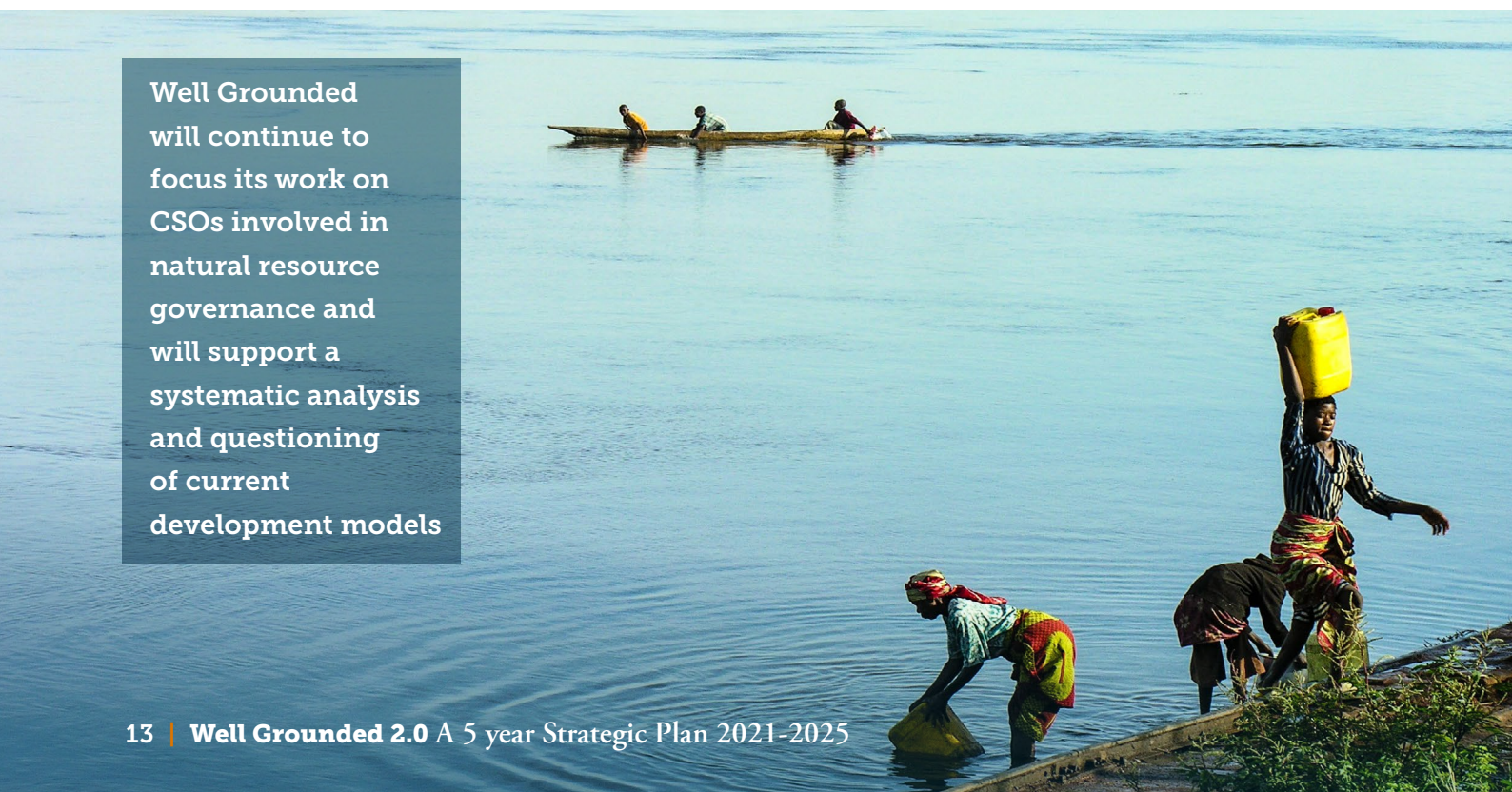
## DYNAMIC, PERSISTENT AND COMMITTED CIVIL SOCIETY

In spite of a challenging operating environment in the Congo Basin with many countries not being functional democracies and with CSOs facing threats from those in power with both their personal safety and their ability to operate at stake, civil society in the Congo Basin continues to make significant contribution to social and environmental justice. CSOs are uniquely placed to mobilise citizens and to hold their government to account. Well Grounded will support CSOs in developing adequate skills and systems to manage operational and security risks and to maximise impact.

## A DESIRE FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Past and current “development” models are based on a logic which will have disastrous and irreversible consequences in the long term. They involve the over-exploitation of natural resources driven by the rush for profit and growth, leading to adverse climate change and the drastic decline and disappearance of biodiversity. However, locally and globally citizens are mobilising to offer and demand alternative development models respectful of the resources the earth has to offer. Well Grounded will continue to focus its work on CSOs involved in natural resource governance and will support a systematic analysis and questioning of current development models.

Well Grounded will continue to focus its work on CSOs involved in natural resource governance and will support a systematic analysis and questioning of current development models



## RISE OF WOMEN'S APPETITE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY

Women are disproportionately more affected by climate change, inequality, violent conflict and poverty. Their social vulnerability is maintained by a patriarchal society that aims at silencing them in the public space and in decision-making from the family circle to the political arena. But women are rising and demanding their rights, as seen in countless initiatives led by women aiming at reclaiming their rights and participation spaces. Well Grounded will sustain and strengthen its work on women's leadership and with women's platforms in natural resource governance.

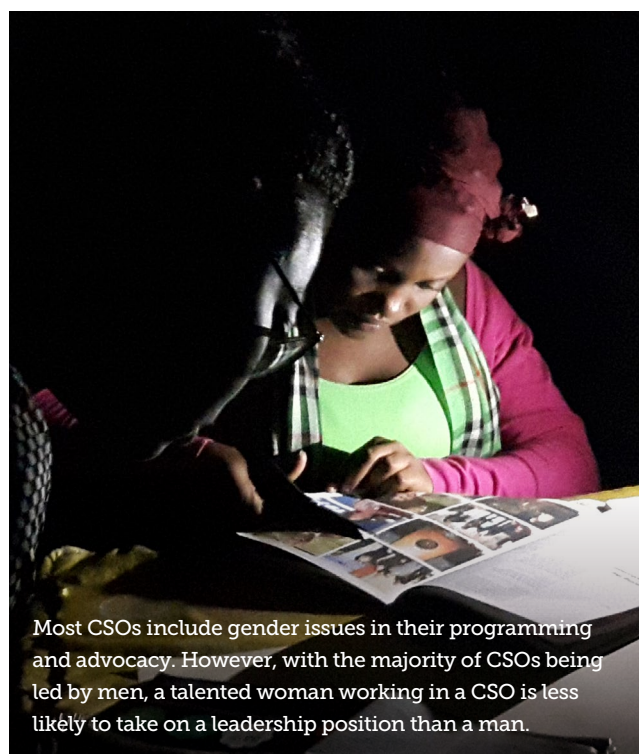
## RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' (IP) RIGHTS

The life of indigenous peoples in the Congo Basin is inextricably linked to the forest and its resources. However, as a direct result of historical and on-going expropriation of indigenous lands for conservation and resource extraction, many have been forced to abandon their traditional way of life and culture and are living in extreme poverty. Their participation in social and political affairs is low, and they encounter discrimination in various forms, including racial stereotyping, social exclusion and systematic violations of their rights<sup>1</sup>. However some IP leaders are organising their community into networks in order to claim their rights. They are mobilising allies and partners to foster IP community taking their destiny into their hands. In response, Well Grounded will strengthen IP leaders in their effort to increase community ownership on projects

affecting them and to develop a new generation of IP leaders. Well Grounded will work with IP leaders to develop a leadership development programme responding to their situation.

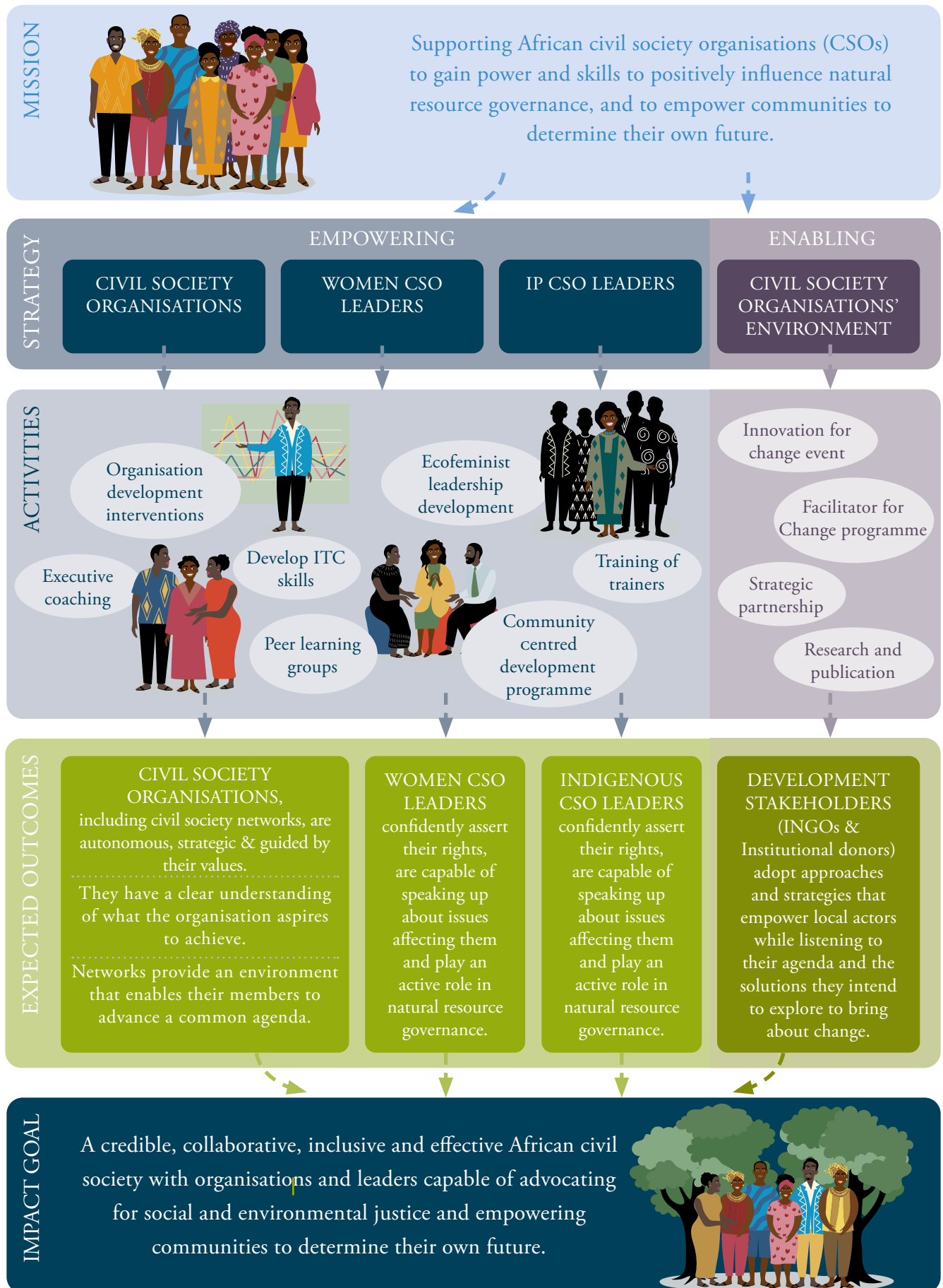
## A DIGITAL ERA

The on-going Covid 19 pandemic has forced CSOs and other development actors to adapt their strategies and accelerate digitisation. It has enabled people to access new knowledge and work opportunities from anywhere in the world. However, this acceleration has also led to digital discrimination – especially for those in rural areas, particularly women and indigenous people. Well Grounded will strengthen the digitisation of its work so we can continue to provide distance support online in response to the current context. In response to digital discrimination, we will support the development of local capacities to increase the possibilities to continue providing support to CSOs and communities where Internet access is limited.



Most CSOs include gender issues in their programming and advocacy. However, with the majority of CSOs being led by men, a talented woman working in a CSO is less likely to take on a leadership position than a man.

# OUR THEORY OF CHANGE



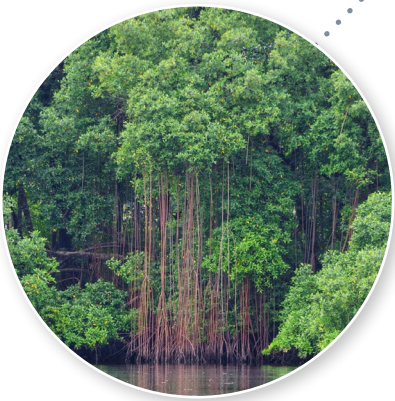
# Geographical scope

Well Grounded works in Africa, with a strategic focus on three Congo Basin countries:

- 1 Democratic Republic of Congo
- 2 Republic of Congo
- 3 Republic of Cameroon
- 4 Gabon

The Congo Basin is one of the richest regions in natural resources while being significantly poorer in terms of social and environmental justice. The vision for natural resource exploitation is very short-term with little of the profits derived filtering down to the level of the communities who depend on these same resources. The level of agency amongst the worst affected and most marginalised is next to non-existent, yet these are the very people whose voices need to be heard most.

Well Grounded will continue to take on opportunities outside the Congo Basin where they can offer opportunities to explore new issues or to experiment with a new approach bringing new learning to our organisation and our clients.





# PILLAR 1

## Supporting the development of CSOs' organisational capacities

### OUTCOME 1

**CSOs, including networks, are autonomous, strategic & guided by their values. They have a clear understanding of what the organisation aspires to achieve. Networks provide an environment that enables their members to advance a common agenda.**

Well Grounded expects a strong and conscious commitment from CSOs to engage in an organisation development process over 2-3 years. Interested CSOs should be aware of the positive change they seek to effect. The result of the support will be a deep shift within the organisation and a greater sense of ownership focusing on the areas outlined below.

#### 1 IDENTITY & STRATEGY

We will facilitate processes that help CSOs to define their identity (i.e. vision, mission, values, target groups, membership guiding principles, etc.) and to develop a strategic focus that will guide their work. We will support CSOs in developing the confidence to mobilise and utilise resources effectively in addition to guiding and negotiating their partnerships with global development actors.

#### 2 BUSINESS MODEL

We will support CSOs in reflecting upon and defining the most appropriate business model that will support their work, allowing the organisation to be less dependent on one type or source of funding thereby allowing for greater flexibility and sustainability. We will connect organisations to other CSOs who have innovated in how they resource their organisations. We will encourage CSOs to be more creative, supporting them to explore possibilities and potentials.

#### 3 GOVERNANCE

We will help organisations to objectively question their structure and governance model, analysing whether the decision-making model, and roles and responsibility sharing serve the organisation's purpose and effectiveness. We will support them in reflecting upon power, understanding the power each of them holds and how it affects their personal leadership development and their capacities to implement their assigned roles and responsibilities.

#### 4 LEADERSHIP

We will create one-to-one spaces for leaders and senior managers with professional coaches, which they can use to better understand their leadership style and its impact on their effectiveness and on the organisational culture. We will support them to see the 'big picture', to understand their strengths, to further develop their leadership purpose and to reflect on their legacy. We will also connect them to other leaders as learning partners, and we will encourage peer-learning groups when there are common challenges or interests.

## 5 PARTNERSHIPS

We will support CSOs to understand what a partnership is and to define their expectations with regard to the different partnerships they engage in. We will support them to analyse the assets they bring to different partnerships. We will help them define what a win-win situation and a well-balanced partnership looks like for them.

We will also create spaces for CSOs and their financial and technical partners to reflect on, analyse and ultimately improve existing partnerships.

## 6 COMMUNITY-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT

We will support CSOs to reflect critically on how they engage with the communities they serve and the nature of their relationships. We will support CSOs in reflecting upon the reasons for their commitments to their local communities. We will also expose CSOs to Community Centred Approaches, connecting them to other CSOs and/or communities who employ this practice in order to share

learning. WG will also connect CSOs to other practitioners for peer learning.

## 7 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

We will support CSOs in understanding the strategic use of ICT. We will expose them to tools and technologies that are accessible and available to support them in meeting their strategic objectives and improving information sharing among the team. Availability and accessibility covers a range of factors, including infrastructure, costs, intellectual property, etc... We will build strong partnerships with organisations whose core business is to support teams in making strategic use of ICT.

*We recognise that organisations supported through a deep OD process by WG may be in need of an immediate response or support that sits outside of our area of interest and expertise. Well Grounded will help the client to define their specific needs and, where possible, this support will be outsourced to an external provider.*



# PILLAR 2

## Women CSO leaders

### OUTCOME 2

**Women CSO leaders confidently assert their rights, are capable of speaking up about issues affecting them and play an active role in natural resource governance.**

To achieve this outcome, Well Grounded will deliver an Ecofeminist Leadership Programme. Details of this programme are outlined below:

### ECOFEMINIST LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

We will focus on a political understanding of gender, power, and patriarchy in the current context. We will also examine leadership not just as a discourse but also as a lived alternative. We will work to understand, critique, and

explore various progressive alternatives of change and justice. We will consider historical movements so as to understand the role women have played in transforming society.

*The ecofeminist leadership programme will encompass the following strategies:*

#### ● TRAINING OF TRAINERS

We will support women CSO leaders in designing leadership programmes adapted to their context, helping them understand and facilitate workshop activities aimed at developing self-awareness, confidence and understanding the systemic challenges facing them.

#### ● EXCHANGE FORUM

We will provide women with a forum that allows for interactive exchanges of experiences, perspectives and lessons learnt.

#### ● POSITIVE MODELS

We will showcase historical and existing women leaders to serve as role models.

#### ● PEER LEARNING GROUPS

We will bring together women leaders so as to share and to learn from one another with the goal of improving leadership skills and fostering cooperation.

#### ● MENTORING

We will support women in implementing their own social action so as to demonstrate motivation, value, and commitment to creating more just, humane, and equitable systems within one's own sphere of influence. In addition, leadership styles and skills will be developed further through practice.

# PILLAR 3

## Indigenous CSO leaders

### OUTCOME 3

**Indigenous CSO leaders confidently assert their rights, are capable of speaking up about issues affecting them and play an active role in natural resource governance.**

*To achieve this outcome, Well Grounded will deliver a leadership programme dedicated to Indigenous Peoples. Details of this programme are outlined below:*

### INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

We will support IP organisations and networks to express how systemic challenges affect them, to develop a vision and strategy for their work and to facilitate leadership development in their communities. In particular, we will support

IP leaders in their exploration of the history of the struggles for indigenous rights in the face of colonialism and to examine their own communities' situation and possible responses in that context. The right to self-determination will be central to this approach.

*The IP leadership programme will encompass the following strategies:*

#### ● TRAINING OF TRAINERS

We will support IP leaders to design leadership programmes adapted to their context. We will support them in understanding and facilitating workshop activities aimed at developing self-awareness, confidence and understanding of the systemic challenges facing them.

#### ● EXCHANGE FORUM

We will provide indigenous peoples with a forum that allows for interactive exchanges of experiences, perspectives and lessons learnt.

#### ● POSITIVE MODELS

We will create opportunities for indigenous peoples to connect with and celebrate their indigenous identity, culture and traditions as a foundation of their leadership development journey.

#### ● RESEARCH

We will support research on Indigenous Leadership Initiatives around the globe with a view to sharing this research with organisations that we are supporting.

#### ● SOCIAL ACTION

We will support indigenous people in implementing their own social action so as to demonstrate the motivation, value, and commitment to creating more just, humane, and equitable systems within one's own sphere of influence.



# PILLAR 4

## Shifting Power for an enabling environment

### OUTCOME 4

**Development stakeholders (INGOs & Institutional donors) adopt approaches and strategies to empower local actors and listen to their agenda and the solutions they intend to explore to bring about change.**

African civil society organisations operate in a context where many unequal power dynamics are at play; political space is restrictive; funding models influence the agenda and external actors continue to influence how much African CSOs can set their own agenda for change. Well Grounded believes these dynamics must shift, with power taken back by local actors and communities.

*To achieve this, Well Grounded will focus on the following strategies:*

#### ● DEVELOPING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

We will seek out meaningful partnerships with like minded organisations so as to amplify our voice and shift power.

#### ● CREATING SPACE FOR DEBATE

We will create space for exchanges aimed at generating bold, alternative and unique ideas that favour the re-imagining of the development sector, including partnerships and funding models.

#### ● DEVELOPING LOCAL OD PRACTITIONERS

We aim to develop a pool of committed, competent and experienced local consultants, capable of facilitating change processes, being locally accessible and capable of contributing to the empowerment of civil society organisations and communities.





Since 2010, Well Grounded has worked with CSOs in the Congo Basin. WG has aided these CSOs in building the organisational, human, financial and strategic resources needed to support local communities enabling them to know and claim their rights and to better manage their natural resource endowment, with a particular emphasis on forests.

# Implementation priorities

**This strategic plan gives Well Grounded a clear path, over the next several years, towards advancing its goals and mission. However, for the effective implementation of this strategy, Well Grounded will need the right skills, team, systems and resources in place.**

*Key priorities include:*

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## ● PROSPECTING FOR NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

We aim to increase its funding while diversifying its donor portfolio so as to ensure that we can deliver our strategic ambitions and strengthen Well Grounded's sustainability.

.....

## ● DEVELOPING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

We will seek out meaningful partnerships with like minded African and global organisations so as to complement our expertise, share resources, put Organisation Development on the agenda in the natural resource governance sector, and to shift power to local actors and communities.

.....

## ● SECURING THE RIGHT SKILLS

We will ensure that it secures the right skill sets to deliver its strategic ambitions. We will aim at increasing the size of our core team and the number of associates we collaborate with. We will ensure appropriate processes are developed to recruit, retain and manage talent.

.....

## ● ENSURING LEARNING

We will adapt our organisational monitoring and evaluation system so as to ensure that we capture learning from our work, improve our strategies and are accountable to all our stakeholders for the period of this strategic plan.

.....

## ● DIGITISING OUR WORK

We will establish an online learning platform allowing us to design individual and collective journeys in training programmes. We will digitise resources, tools and processes, capitalising on our historical experience and expertise. And We will provide digital – online support where possible so as to reduce our ecological footprint.

.....

## ● GOVERNANCE

We will ensure our structure, governance and decision making model enable us to effectively implement our strategy thereby allowing us to remain inclusive.



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