

# MONGABAY STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2030



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## Foreword

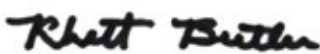
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Mongabay has grown substantially since its inception in 1999, rising from a one-person rainforest website to a multinational news organization with hundreds of staff and contributing journalists. We've come a long way thanks to our newsroom's capacity to deliver original journalism that drives tangible impact. But the scale of the planetary challenges we face as a global community requires continued expansion channeled toward places and topics where Mongabay's work can fill a significant gap.

Mongabay's strategy has always been based on the idea that journalism can contribute to real-world results by raising awareness about the importance of nature, generating opportunities for accountability for environmental destruction and inspiring people to work toward solutions. We've focused on geographies where biodiversity is high, threats are acute, issues are relevant to our core coverage strengths and there are legal frameworks under which credible journalism can operate. While we now produce original content in half a dozen languages and have a presence in more than 20 countries, the urgent need for transformative action on global environmental crises, such as biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution is abundantly clear. The time available to mobilize is dwindling.

In this context, Mongabay's strategy is to assemble a collaborative journalism network at national, regional and global scales to help meet the challenge during this pivotal decade. This document outlines how we intend to build on Mongabay's strengths and successes to scale up our capacity to deliver on our mission of conveying information in a compelling format in a relevant time frame to critical audiences that shape policy and influence global trends. We've organized this plan around five strategic objectives critical to enabling Mongabay to contribute toward alleviating the planetary emergency.

By realizing this strategy, Mongabay will meaningfully engage a global community brought together by a shared affinity for nature, mobilize a journalism network capable of gathering information from some of the world's more remote corners via local sources and revealed in Earth observation data, expose hidden drivers of environmental destruction through investigative reporting on corruption and illegality, and sustainably provide professional opportunities for journalists to improve their skills and earn a decent and dignified living.



Rhett Butler  
CEO



Willie Shubert  
Global Program Director



## Introduction

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Mongabay developed a new strategy for 2023-2030. The organization hired [Nexus Evaluation LTD](#) to help design and facilitate its development and implementation.

The strategy development process enabled Mongabay to articulate how journalism can contribute to addressing global social and environmental challenges, what role it can play in the media landscape, why it is prioritizing certain activities and when it aims to accomplish long-term goals.

This document details the following:

- A collective vision and mission statement: This statement describes the type of world Mongabay would like to see, coupled with a description of how Mongabay can contribute to the vision statement.
- Strategic objectives: Areas of focus for the next five years or more that will help achieve the mission statement.
- An implementation plan: A series of key activities and mindset changes that must be achieved to meet strategic objectives.

Mongabay took an iterative and multifaceted approach centered around transparency and inclusivity to develop this plan. Spearheaded by a small working group of Mongabay staff and our Nexus consultant, a series of one-on-one interviews with stakeholders, ranging from Mongabay board members to supporters, as well as focus group discussions with a diversity of Mongabay staff were conducted. Throughout the process, an advisory group of Mongabay staff representative of different regions, seniority and roles reviewed and provided input on the plan.

Please consult Annex 1 for further information about the strategy development process, including:

- Highlights of the strategy development approach.
- Principles and criteria for decision-making.

**Through 2030, Mongabay aims to use this plan to guide its continuous evolution and growth as an organization.**



01.

# Vision & Mission





This vision statement serves as a North Star for everything Mongabay does.



**Mongabay believes credible independent journalism is essential to successfully address the planetary emergency because sharing knowledge through stories can inform, inspire and sustain effective action worldwide.**

This mission statement articulates Mongabay's purpose as an organization and describes how Mongabay carries out its global-scale ambition:

**Mongabay improves understanding of the concurrent global scale forces undermining the health of Earth's systems. Mongabay makes science accessible and elevates the voices and knowledge of people directly impacted by environmental change.**

**Mongabay is an independent, nonprofit media organization reporting on nature and planetary challenges with a global network of local journalists. Mongabay serves a diverse audience by providing free access to news and information in numerous languages and formats to address knowledge gaps and improve transparency. By revealing the evidence of ecosystem destruction and its consequences for people worldwide, Mongabay creates opportunities to hold those responsible accountable.**

This mission and vision expand Mongabay's tagline:



**Mongabay delivers news and inspiration from Nature's frontline to help alleviate the planetary emergency.**

02.

# 2023-2030 Strategic Plan Goals, Objectives & Key Actions





The ultimate goal of this plan is:

**By 2030, Mongabay will mobilize a global community toward alleviating the planetary emergency by practicing credible and effective journalism to inform positive action on a significant and measurable scale.**

To realize that goal, Mongabay will pursue the below complementary strategic objectives:

**1 Diversify the topics and places relevant to Mongabay's editorial agenda.**

Enable Mongabay to respond and adapt to planetary changes through its editorial coverage and project design, prioritizing underreported themes, narratives and approaches with the potential for real-world impact.

**2 Strengthen impact through meaningful audience engagement.**

Deepen Mongabay's relationship with its audiences by creating quality engagement, serving new constituencies and being responsive to the competition.

**3 Ensure financial sustainability.**

Diversify Mongabay's funding by pursuing business models that maintain organizational growth and enable operational agility.

**4 Prioritize safe practices.**

Promote a culture of safety by recognizing and communicating risk, socializing effective mitigation measures and expanding safeguarding protocols.

**5 Develop and support a growing journalism network.**

Ensure viable career paths in environmental journalism by improving the professional qualities of current and future journalists so that the industry is more ready to meet new challenges and needs.

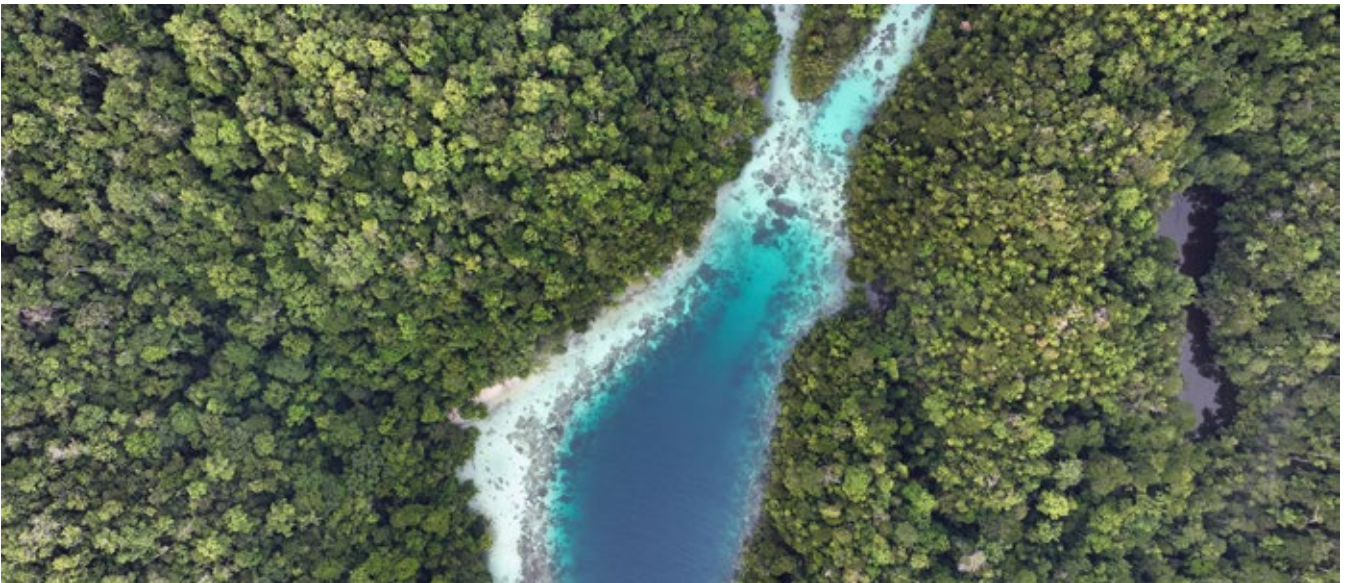
Among these objectives, the first two are the main expected results of this strategy and the rest are drivers of change and pre-conditions toward achieving Mongabay's ambitions. The following section presents more information for each of the above objectives.

## Objective 1

# Diversify the topics and places relevant to Mongabay's editorial agenda.



**Goal: To respond and adapt to planetary changes through its editorial coverage and project design, prioritizing underreported themes, narratives, and approaches with the potential for real-world impact.**



One of Mongabay's core strengths is the ability to report globally about the conservation of nature and biodiversity with nuanced stories from a network of local journalists. As a newsroom, Mongabay often focuses our editorial attention on the science of Earth systems, biomes and species ranges to help define the boundaries of our reporting interests ahead of political borders. This nature-centric approach has revealed the need to improve awareness of global issues to address alarming levels of environmental stress.

The intertwined influences of nature and society implore us to recognize the relevance of the climate crisis, the health burdens of pollution and unsustainable economic practices as essential for understanding the planetary changes fueling biodiversity loss and extinction. Mongabay believes journalism can inform positive action and prioritizes publishing solutions to these problems grounded in scientific evidence and the lived experience of people directly affected. Expanding the scope of issues, themes and approaches that Mongabay values is urgently needed to inform those taking direct action for the Earth's benefit and humanity's sustainability.

## Mindset changes needed

- Expansion beyond core conservation issues, focusing on global-scale environmental topics, is urgently needed.
- News gathering is not the only engine of publishing, with educational and entertainment approaches used to create content.
- Decisions around publishing formats and channels should be based on a defined target audience and desired impact.

To advance this editorial objective, Mongabay will design a global newsroom structure with increased decentralization of editorial decision-making and role specialization to publish across a more significant number of topics, locations and formats. This action will likely involve:

- Prioritizing editorial coverage of themes that promote global thinking about environmental challenges while continuing to organize the newsroom around regional or national teams with local working relationships. By linking local coverage with regional or global issues, Mongabay intends to provide the bigger picture of a planetary-scale crisis through frequent and nuanced reporting.
- Improve cross-team collaboration, learning, and priority-setting processes by creating editorial hubs that regularly coordinate coverage of emerging topics of interest, review performance, socialize standards and raise questions that help staff make informed choices.
- Mongabay's journalism aims to cut through the noise of what's said to reveal what is happening. Mongabay will bolster its ability to originate actionable primary source information necessary to advance accountability, especially for the social and environmental outcomes of natural resource sector practices.
- Create a global environmental news desk specialized in creating short, written and multimedia content to reach non-specialist audiences. This news desk includes covering systems that people interact with daily and explaining how news events affect the environment in less academic or technical ways.
- Unify visual storytelling staff across Mongabay's newsroom in a global department dedicated to defining a common style and approach. Visual storytelling will remain an area of ongoing collaboration with newsgatherers and experimentation as new technologies emerge.
- Partner with organizations and relevant media outlets to:
  - Increase the relevance of Mongabay's publications with audiences that improve the potential for impact.
  - Enable Mongabay to cover new geographies by supporting existing outlets with strong coverage.
  - Develop reporting of new editorial themes and contribute to new platforms or brands.

## Objective 2

# Strengthen impact through meaningful audience engagement.



**Goal: To strengthen Mongabay's role by supporting existing audiences, developing new ones, creating quality engagement, and being responsive to the competition.**

Responding to the planetary emergency necessitates sustained and collective action worldwide premised on accurately conveyed facts. Informing and influencing this action is how Mongabay contributes to impact and directly depends on engaging with our audience. Serving this social purpose is possible only with trust in the credibility and authenticity of Mongabay's publications, so science journalism remains at the core of our methods. Over this next decade, Mongabay will build upon its reputation as a trusted source among our existing audience, as described in Mongabay's Theory of Change, by giving increasing attention to the time spent with our publications and channeling our efforts to platforms and spaces where audiences want to engage with us. Mongabay recognizes the fundamental importance of its audience community in sustaining independent journalism by allowing its information to contribute to the kinds of impact Mongabay envisions.

Taking coordinated action based on a shared set of facts is increasingly challenged by a degraded information ecosystem with increasing disinformation, audience fragmentation and competition for attention. Mongabay will adapt to these obstacles by expanding the types of communities connected to our mission and editorial coverage by affirming a shared affinity for nature, reverence for life and the need for justice. Enabling journalism to address global-scale challenges requires Mongabay to meaningfully engage with a greater variety of people. This strategy explicitly means seeking out new audiences and prioritizing Indigenous communities and youth by increasingly including their concerns and voices in our work.



## Mindset changes needed

- Assess the success of publication by the quality of audience engagement ahead of total number of people reached.
- Ensuring the inclusion of marginalized communities requires dedicated and sustained outreach with resources to follow through on commitments.
- Audience participation can improve content creation, topic prioritization and impact gathering.



Finding and engaging quality audiences to achieve increased impact will likely involve the following:

- Measuring the success of publishing activities will prioritize quality engagement among target audiences. Mongabay considers time spent on content as the primary metric for measuring the effectiveness of direct results. Reach metrics, including page views and impressions, will continue to be gathered and analyzed to understand awareness-raising effects, which are now a secondary consideration.
- Connecting directly with audiences and building trust is fundamental for increasing quality engagement. Mongabay will develop the profiles of editors and journalists in its network so audiences know who is talking to them, and their opinions.
- Editorial choices about the appropriate format and channel for a given story increasingly require reflection and decision among a collaborative group.
- Developing content relevant to Indigenous communities as the intended audience, which at the same time is meaningful to Mongabay's editorial themes and existing audiences.
- More flexibility to use platforms and exit others based on evidence, adapting content based on platform-specific behavior and insights on what works or does not work.
- Modernize Mongabay's technologies, design approach and visual style.



## Objective 3

### Ensuring financial sustainability



**Goal: Diversify Mongabay's funding by pursuing business models that maintain organizational growth and enable operational agility.**



The nonprofit news industry is steadily growing in size and capacity to address the shortcomings of commercial media and pioneer new approaches to public service journalism. In this context, Mongabay can contribute to developing a sustainable business model for independent journalism by enhancing the diversity of revenue sources supporting the organization, and communicating progress with industry associations and our community.

Mongabay's reliance on foundation support for its operations remains a strong pillar enabling special reporting projects that add depth to editorial coverage and the flexibility to work worldwide. Meeting the challenge of compellingly reporting complex planetary change depends on quick adaptation and sustained attention. The organization's relationship with short-term restricted grants needs to transition into a mechanism for rapid response to meet immediate editorial needs in conjunction with multiyear financial support to sustain ongoing programs.

## Mindset changes needed

- Prioritize long-term financing, emphasizing programs that enable the organization to carry out longer-term plans.
- Staff can contribute to fundraising efforts through community engagement regardless of role.

In practice, Mongabay's new fundraising strategy will likely involve the following:

- Utilizing short-term (one year or less) restricted grants for quick expansion and adaptation to meet immediate editorial priorities.
- Developing relationships with donors with light reporting requirements and those offering core or unrestricted funds.
- Experimenting with business models that generate revenue from new and existing activities.
- Advancing Mongabay's audience as vital supporters by increasing fundraising messaging.
- Socializing fundraising processes across the organization so that staff can identify funding opportunities as they arise, articulating why it is worth funding Mongabay and referring prospects to the appropriate people in the organization to continue the conversation.
- Considering partnering with intermediary and complementary organizations to fill gaps in resources and capabilities for project implementation via subgrants or partnership agreements.



## Objective 4

### Prioritizing safe practices



**Goal: Promoting a culture of safety by recognizing and communicating risk, socializing effective mitigation measures, and expanding safeguarding protocols.**

Mongabay recognizes the critical need for transparency and accountability among natural resource industries, their regulators and ultimate beneficiaries. Otherwise, the lack of access to accurate and timely information hinders informed action to address increasing levels of environmental stress. By working to fill these information gaps, Mongabay intends to challenge the growing atmosphere of impunity for ecological degradation, rising social inequality and immediate threats to environmental and human rights defenders.

Mongabay's willingness to assert freedom of expression, along with global trends toward authoritarianism, shrinking press freedoms and economic volatility, influence the conditions of staff and can hinder their ability to safely work in countries where independent journalism is often most needed. Mongabay prioritizes the safety and well-being of the people engaging with the organization and takes action to safeguard its community from harm.





## Mindset changes needed

- Normalization of risk management and safeguarding procedures is needed for broad compliance with policies.
- Risk assessment and safeguarding must include staff and contributors working directly with Mongabay and the information sources included in publications.



Decentralizing risk management by promoting a culture of safety among staff and contributors should include the following:

- Articulating Mongabay's organizational risk tolerance with input from the board of directors to inform policy direction.
- Creating an incident register to document experiences across the organization and improve access to institutional knowledge.
- Forming a permanent safety committee, representative of a diversity of staff roles and regions.
- Systematizing pre-publication risk management and safeguarding.
- Ensuring security training is current for both staff and contributors.
- Including support for trauma-informed journalism, perhaps via an external service provider, in the design of projects with a higher likelihood of encountering traumatic situations. Trauma includes distress associated with ongoing reporting about planetary crises.

## Objective 5

# Develop and support a growing journalism network



**Goal: Ensure viable career paths in environmental journalism by improving the professional qualities of current and future journalists so that the industry is more ready to meet new challenges and needs.**

Mongabay's role as a publisher makes journalists our most engaged community to support. By directly providing job opportunities that otherwise would not exist, Mongabay's highest commitment is to the staff, contributors, interns, fellows and other people working with the newsroom. Over the long term, this focus has begun to mobilize a global network of communicators to surface local stories of planetary change that resonate with diverse audiences. Building on these fundamental relationships, Mongabay will expand the types of support it provides to this community to include capacity building and, more broadly, to improve the conditions and qualities of the profession.



## Mindset changes needed

- Mongabay is both a publisher and a training organization.
- Network development is a long-term investment that is not required to directly and immediately result in publishing.
- Partnering with existing media development organizations and industry associations is essential to improving the profession more broadly.

Bolstering the capability of Mongabay's journalism network will likely involve the following:

- Creating a new "Network" program to organize and systematize Mongabay's capacity-building activities, including paid fellowships, journalism training and small grant-making activities.
- Establishing a professional development plan for staff to push their craft to the forefront of the sector.
- Promoting Mongabay's network development programs and supporting active participation in relevant journalism industry associations, forums and events.
- Increasing visibility and engagement of journalism students by demonstrating that environmental journalism is a viable career option and perhaps by contributing to curricula development.



03.

# Financial Forecast



Achieving the objectives of this strategy will require Mongabay to grow in size and capacity to carry out our plan. We've built a financial model incorporating a range of variables, from staffing levels to developing new programs, to determine the extent of resources Mongabay needs through 2030 to deliver this plan.

Mongabay envisions raising **\$110 million by 2030, of which \$25 million** will be in endowment funds. While this total figure includes the entire seven years of this plan, we estimate this revenue will entail incremental growth from a **\$6.2 million annual budget in 2023 to a \$16.7 million budget in 2030**. A long-term forecast depends on making assumptions about how Mongabay will use its resources, which is contingent on securing more funding.

**\$110**  
million by 2030

This section of the strategic plan describes the assumptions we've made to forecast expenses, set milestones to evaluate progress and create revenue targets for each year of the plan. The first assumption is the need for immediate investment in institutional strengthening. To start, Mongabay will hire a senior fundraising executive to expand the organization's revenue base and begin work toward our financial sustainability objective.

Beyond this fundamental first step, bolstering Mongabay's relationship with its network of contributing journalists is crucial to implementing this strategy. Supporting Mongabay's reporting network will increasingly include offering professional training tailored for environmental journalists, as articulated in objective five. However, paid opportunities to report remain central to our strategy and mission. Mongabay assumes a 10% annual growth rate in the contributor budget, from \$918,000 across all bureaus in 2023 to \$1.79 million in 2030. Overall, we expect to increase yearly article production from 5,200 in 2022 to 15,000 in 2030 and 1,100 videos in 2030, up from about 550 in 2022.

Metric	Year-end 2022	Projected 2030
<i>Annual budget</i>	<b>\$5.07 million</b>	<b>\$16.67 million</b>
<i>Staff</i>	<b>77</b>	<b>236</b>
<i>Bureaus</i>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Authors per year</i>	<b>800</b>	<b>1,600</b>
<i>Article production</i>	<b>5,200</b>	<b>15,000</b>
<i>Original video production</i>	<b>550</b>	<b>1,100</b>
<i>Website users</i>	<b>21 million</b>	<b>50 million</b>
<i>Hours spent on Mongabay sites</i>	<b>11.6 million</b>	<b>45 million</b>



Mongabay needs to hire more journalists throughout the newsroom to support this growth. Mongabay will restructure the management of its global newsroom to facilitate the better development of its bureaus and invest in editorial support departments that serve the entire organization. The organizational restructuring will include promoting existing staff into more senior roles and adding new staff to progress components of this strategy.

Beyond its core news reporting activities, Mongabay's Global bureau provides the shared infrastructure that underpins all of Mongabay's work, including organizational leadership, fundraising, marketing, operations, and donor reporting. The Global bureau also acts as an incubator for small reporting desks to mature enough to stand independently as bureaus. Accordingly, Mongabay Global has the largest budget and headcount in our model. We forecast Mongabay Global expanding from about 49 staff at the end of 2022 to 125 by the end of 2030. That growth occurs across programmatic areas and includes the creation of the short news desk and a data lab and an expansion of Mongabay's education initiative.

We forecast Mongabay will grow from



5,200  → 15,000

Stories per year

Mongabay plans to sustain and expand all three of its existing news bureaus and add three new ones:

- Mongabay Indonesia is our first bureau. Its maturity, coupled with the challenges of fundraising for journalism in Indonesia due to growing restrictions on civil society organizations and media, means that our model projects only modest growth by 2030, with the team expanding from seven to 10 staff.
- Mongabay's Spanish-language bureau, Mongabay Latam, has grown substantially since its official launch in 2016. We expect this expansion to continue, with the bureau's team reaching 30 people by the end of 2030.
- Mongabay India is our largest bureau and the only multilingual bureau besides Global. Currently staffed with 13 people, we anticipate supporting 30 people by 2030, emphasizing increasing India's capacity to produce reporting in languages beyond English and Hindi.

Within two years, Mongabay expects to graduate two regional reporting desks within Mongabay Global to bureau-level status and establish a brand-new bureau dedicated to Chinese language reporting:

- Mongabay Brasil will become a bureau in 2025, with eight staff producing content in both English and Portuguese. We plan to double the team by 2030, which we anticipate yielding about 600 stories and 150 videos yearly. Mongabay Brasil is projected to have a fellowship program starting in 2027.
- Mongabay Africa is also projected to achieve bureau-level status in 2025, with 13 staff working on publishing in French and English. The team will expand to 19 staff in 2027 and hold steady through 2030.
- Mongabay aspires to establish a Chinese-language bureau focused on the Chinese-speaking diaspora in 2025. The bureau, which would be located outside China (Singapore is the most likely candidate), would have a stable staff level through 2030.



04.

# Annex 1

# Strategy Development Process





## Overview of strategy development approach

This strategy was conceptualized, facilitated and drafted by a working group composed of Yulye Jessica Romo Ramos (Nexus director), Rhett Butler (CEO), Willie Shubert (global program director) and Alana Linderoth (senior program associate) to co-develop key deliverables.

The work group engaged a diverse advisory group to challenge, validate and ultimately create ownership of the strategic plan.

A participatory, collective and transparent approach that:

- Directly employed the knowledge and wisdom of a wide range of staff and some external stakeholders in developing the strategy.
- Created an open path to collective action through active participation in sense-making and strategy development and defined a shared vision for change.
- Strengthened relationships, dialogue and shared understanding among staff that will continue beyond the strategy development.
- Created promising conditions for the dissemination and use of the strategy.
- Introduced a RACI (an inter-accountability mapping tool) framework to help clarify accountabilities across the organization or (if required) within a bureau for the strategy implementation plan.



## Principles

Strategy development principles are the values that guide the design of the process and the behavior of those involved in it.

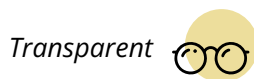
Below are the principles we adhered to throughout the strategy development process:



The process will create spaces for dialogue and input to inform the design of the new strategic plan, creating a path to collective action and the conditions for disseminating and implementing the new strategy.



The knowledge and wisdom of a wide range of staff from different levels of seniority, functions, regions and protected characteristics will be used in sense-making and strategy development.



The consultant will support transparency and accountability in the decision-making process by helping document how decisions were made and why to strengthen relationships, dialogue and shared understanding among staff around the new strategy.

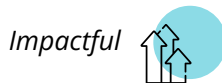
A public document will also be made available for external audiences.

## Decision-making criteria

Clear criteria for decision-making were used to finalize the strategic plan and prioritize activities for its implementation phase.



The strategy positively contributes to nonprofit journalism and the role Mongabay plays in it. It inspires staff, partners and the wider sector to change as needed.



It maximizes the impact potential for Mongabay.



Action plans are plausible based on available resources, relationships, capabilities and contextual factors.



It represents a unique value-add or new opportunity for Mongabay.

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