

Strategic Plan

2026 - 2030



Social
Entrepreneurs
for Sustainable
Development

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Introduction

Executive Summary

We are Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev), a Liberian organization working to advance community land rights, strengthen local governance, and ensure fair and sustainable use of forests and natural resources. Since our founding in 2009, we have walked alongside rural communities — listening, informing, organizing, and helping them claim their rights and shape their futures.

Liberia’s progressive legal framework gives communities the right to own and manage their land and forests, but enforcement remains weak. Communities are often excluded from decisions, concessions are granted without their consent, and land and resource exploitation continues to fuel conflict, inequality, and environmental harm. We work at this intersection of rights, governance, and sustainability — bringing our legal knowledge, trusted relationships, and grassroots experience to help communities assert their rights, hold institutions accountable, and participate in shaping policies that affect their lives.

Over the next five years, our strategy focuses on four key pillars: strengthening community rights and governance; building coalitions for policy influence; engaging and strengthening government institutions; and promoting sustainable livelihoods. We will work across nine counties to support land formalization, build inclusive governance structures, uphold Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and ensure communities can benefit from and protect their resources.

To meet this ambition, we will also strengthen ourselves — deepening our governance, expanding our team, improving systems, and diversifying our funding. We remain guided by our vision of a Liberia where communities thrive with secure land rights, fair benefits, and harmony with nature — and we are more committed than ever to making that vision a reality.

We work at this intersection of rights, governance, and sustainability.

KEEPING THE PROMISE:

KEEPING THE PROMISE:

Second National Land Conference 2024

Theme: Looking Backwards, Moving Forward Two years after the first national land conference

Sept 23-27, 2024

Gompa City, Nimba County

FORUM CIV

Sverige

USAID

Agro-Business Network

actionaid

Landesa

UIN DTP





Letter from the Leadership Team

Dear friends, partners, and allies,

We are proud to share with you SESDev's Strategic Plan for 2026–2030 — a roadmap rooted in our shared commitment to justice, community rights, and the future of Liberia's forests and people.

This strategy is the result of deep reflection, learning, and listening — with communities, partners, and ourselves. It comes at a time of both great opportunity and great urgency. Liberia has some of the most progressive land and forest laws on the continent, yet the gap between law and reality remains vast. Communities still face land grabs, exclusion, and exploitation — while the promise of rights and sustainability hangs in the balance.

At SESDev, we have always walked with communities, not ahead of them. For over 15 years, we have stood by them as they fought to be recognized, to be informed, and to shape their own futures. We have supported them to draft bylaws, formalize land claims,

confront injustice, and build their own systems of governance and stewardship. And through it all, we have learned that power must be shared — among people, with the government, and across civil society.

This new strategy builds on that foundation. It deepens our work to strengthen community governance, engage government institutions, influence policy, and expand livelihoods that respect both nature and rights. It also challenges us to grow — strengthening our own governance, diversifying our funding, and investing in the systems and people that make this work possible.

We know that we cannot do this alone. Our strength has always come from relationships — from the trust of communities, the commitment of partners, and the solidarity of a growing movement for justice. We invite you to read this plan, walk with us, and hold us accountable. Together, we believe we can build a future where communities are not just beneficiaries of change — but leaders of it.

In solidarity,



Mina Beyan
Program Director



Daniel Krakue
Coordinator



About Us

Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev) is a Liberian non-profit organization committed to advancing natural resource rights, governance, and community-led development. Founded in 2009 in response to widespread land grabs and human rights abuses — especially in southeastern Liberia — SESDev was born out of a need to defend customary landowners and amplify rural voices in the face of unchecked exploitation.

At the heart of our work is a simple yet powerful belief: that communities have the right — and the ability — to determine how their land and resources are used. Our mission is rooted in justice, equity, and deep respect for community leadership, autonomy, and traditional knowledge.

We work alongside communities to secure land and forest rights, strengthen local governance, promote sustainable livelihoods, and shape policies that uphold environmental and social justice. Whether it's monitoring large-scale land deals, navigating community-company negotiations, supporting formal registration of land rights or supporting women's land rights, we combine legal expertise, grassroots organizing, and strategic partnerships to create real, lasting change.

Our participatory, inclusive approach ensures that we don't impose solutions — we co-create them. By doing so, we're not just resisting harmful development practices. We're redefining what development can be: just, resilient, and rooted in community power.

Our Context and Operational Areas

Liberia is home to one of the world's 36 biodiversity hotspots — the Upper Guinean Forest region — and holds the largest remaining forest cover in West Africa. These landscapes sustain endangered species such as the pygmy hippopotamus, chimpanzees, forest elephants, and myriad bird and plant species. For over 70% of Liberia's rural population, these ecosystems are also vital sources of food, medicine, culture, and livelihoods. Yet these same resources have long been subjected to an extractive and exclusionary model of development.

Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev) works in some of Liberia's most ecologically important and politically contested landscapes. Since our founding in Sinoe County, we have expanded our work to six counties — Nimba, Maryland, Grand Kru, Lofa, Rivercess, Grand Cape Mount as well as Sinoe — supporting over 500 communities stewarding hundreds of thousands of hectares of biodiverse forests and customary lands. These communities sit at the frontline of overlapping pressures: from logging, oil palm concessions, mining, and fortress conservation initiatives to the rising wave of unregulated carbon trading.

In fact, throughout the 20th century, Liberia's economy was shaped by large-scale concessions, including the 1926 Firestone rubber deal and post-war agreements for oil palm, mining, and timber. These deals were built on colonial-era legal frameworks — such as the 1956 Aborigines Law — that disregarded customary land ownership, vesting control of “tribal lands” in the state. Between 2006 and 2012 alone, over 30% of Liberia's total land was allocated to companies, often without the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of affected communities. These top-down agreements led to widespread displacement, broken promises, and social grievances that helped fuel Liberia's

civil conflict and continue to drive inequality, food insecurity, and environmental degradation. Since 2003, Liberia has taken bold legal steps to correct these historical injustices. A progressive suite of laws now recognizes and protects the rights of communities to govern their land and forests:

- The National Forestry Reform Law (2006) introduced sustainable forest management principles and public participation.
- The Community Rights Law (2009) granted legal recognition to communities' rights over their forests and introduced the Community Forest Management Agreement (CFMA) framework — requiring communities to form assemblies and governance bodies, develop forest management plans, and negotiate fair benefit-sharing agreements.
- The Land Rights Act (2018) was a landmark achievement that legally equates customary land ownership with private land — whether formally titled or not — and enshrines FPIC and women's land rights into law. The law also requires communities to form governance bodies for the management of their customary land.

These domestic laws are bolstered by international initiatives such as the EU-Liberia Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) under the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) mechanism, and by civil society-led Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM), FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security (VGGT) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Together, these frameworks offer Liberia one of the most forward-looking legal regimes for land and forest rights on the continent.

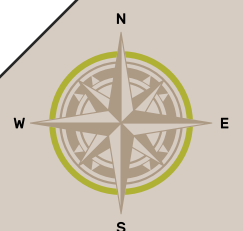
Yet progress is fragile and practice hasn't caught up to policy. Many rural communities still lack awareness of their rights or the technical and financial means to exercise them.

Our Organisational Context



LEGEND

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|
|  | Future Project Counties |  | Liberia National Boundary |
|  | Current Project Counties |  | international Boundary |
|  | Past Project Counties |  | Atlantic Ocean |



Key government institutions such as the Liberia Land Authority, Forestry Development Authority and Environmental Protection Agency remain under-resourced, especially at the county level. Illegal logging, opaque contract enforcement and “carbon cowboy” actors exploiting gaps in regulation all threaten to undermine the gains of legal reform. In some areas, conservation initiatives are being rolled out without community consent, repeating past patterns of dispossession — despite the strong FPIC safeguards now in place.

It is within this complex and high-stakes context that SESDev plays a critical bridging role. We work side by side with communities, and in partnership with key government agencies, to secure legal recognition of their lands, strengthen local governance systems, and support sustainable livelihoods. We provide legal and technical guidance, monitor corporate behavior, advocate for policy accountability, and amplify community voices — ensuring that development, conservation, and climate finance

do not come at the expense of the people who depend most on these lands.

We are one of few national organizations providing consistent, hands-on support to communities managing forests under CFMAs and those within and around proposed protected areas. We also support communities affected by palm oil and mining concessions — helping them navigate grievances, negotiate fairer terms, and build resilience. And we continue to lead national and international advocacy to ensure that Liberia’s legal reforms are not just symbolic, but implemented equitably, inclusively, and justly.

Looking forward, we aim to deepen our impact in the counties where we already work, while expanding into key biodiversity hotspot areas such as Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount, where community rights are acutely threatened. These regions urgently need trusted, grassroots-oriented partners to ensure that communities are not just protected — but equipped to lead.



Key Achievements



Over the past 15 years, SESDev has transformed from a grassroots response to land injustices into one of Liberia’s most trusted and effective civil society voices on land rights and community resource governance. Our success is grounded in community partnerships, legal literacy, strategic advocacy, and our unwavering commitment to justice.

Facilitating Customary Land Formalization

Since 2017, we have accompanied 31 self-identified communities in Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland, Lofa, Grand Cape Mount and Rivercess through the formal land recognition process established under the 2018 Land Rights Act (LRA). We supported community self-identification, land governance structures and processes establishment, boundary harmonization, participatory mapping, land use planning, FPIC protocol development and legal literacy. This work has helped communities comply with national frameworks, assert their legal ownership, and defend their lands from encroachment and exploitation.

Preventing the Loss of nearly One Million Hectares of Customary Land

When the government attempted to gazette a large protected area with limited community consultation or consent, SESDev led advocacy efforts that halted the process until all land claims were delineated, safeguarding nearly a million hectares of customary land. By invoking the Land Rights Act and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), we ensured that communities’ rights were prioritized. This case now serves as a national precedent for rights-based conservation.

“They (SESDev) supported the community to maintain their legality”

Kirsi Chavda,
Grant Manager,
Siemenpuu Foundation.



“Their participation in the national steering committee on protected areas helped ensure the government recognizes land formalization as a critical first step when trying to gazette a protected area.”

Katy Scholfield,
Director of Strategic Grantmaking,
Arcus Foundation.

Advancing Gender Justice in Land Rights

“Men never recognized that women had rights to land; now they do and even gave land to women”

Wesseh Fullah,
Acting Executive Director,
Green Landscapes Initiatives.

Historically, women in Liberia have been denied the right to own or inherit land, with customary leaders often refusing to allocate land to women without a man’s consent. SESDev has worked to dismantle this entrenched gender inequality through sustained community consultations, legal literacy, and awareness campaigns. In Vahun District of Lofa County, 17 women gained customary land titles and began cultivating high-value crops traditionally reserved for men as well as won land-related cases through traditional dispute resolution. Women now actively participate in customary land governance, sharing decision-making with men in all communities where land formalization has occurred.

Our work has also helped dismantle discriminatory norms and catalyze national conversations around women’s land rights, including our leadership role in the 2024 National Land Conference.

Influencing Landmark Legal and Policy Reforms

We played a critical role in the passage of the Land Rights Act (2018), one of Africa’s most progressive land laws, through sustained coalition engagement and civil society advocacy. Our participation in the National Steering Committee on Conservation further led to a major policy shift — requiring that land formalization precede the creation of any protected area.

“They did decades of work that culminated in Land Rights Law – SESDev was so much invested”

Chris Kidd,
Senior Policy Advisor,
Forest Peoples Program (FPP).



Enforcing Corporate Accountability in Oil Palm Concessions

As one of the founding members of the Liberian Civil Society Oil Palm Working Group (CSO-OPWG), SESDev supported communities to challenge exploitative agreements or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL). Our work prompted RSPO to direct GVL to review all existing MoUs – this led to the development of a company-wide sustainability action plan by GVL. Although implementation of the plan has lagged, this marks an important step towards strengthening community rights and setting new standards for corporate practice.

Building Local Governance and Monitoring Capacity

We've established and trained 31 land governance committees across six counties and equipped 45 community monitors and 12 technical staff with digital tools such as This Is My BackYard for real-time forest monitoring. Additionally, 12 community monitors in four districts were trained in livelihood impact monitoring, while two community forest governance structures in two counties were trained and their ecoguards equipped for effective patrols and biodiversity monitoring. These grassroots structures are now resolving land disputes, tracking violations and impact of corporate operations on livelihoods, and ensuring accountability – shifting conflict resolution from courts to communities.

“SESDev did a lot of engagement and education to support the MOU review process”

Jacob Hilton,
Program Development Officer,
Sustainable Development Institute.



“These committees have been resolving land conflicts at the community level, which would otherwise have gone to the courts”

Wesseh Fullah,
Acting Executive Director,
Green Landscapes.

Our Journey

In response to growing inequality, land dispossession, and human rights abuses linked to large-scale palm oil concessions, SESDev was founded as a grassroots initiative to defend customary landowners and elevate rural voices. Born from the frontline realities of southeastern Liberia, SESDev emerged as a community-rooted advocate for justice, self-determination, corporate accountability and environmental stewardship.

2009

2011

We formally registered as a national non-governmental organization, gaining legal recognition and a clear mandate to protect land and forest rights, promote community-led development, and influence structural reforms.

We led investigations and published a series of reports focused on the protection of community rights, especially emphasizing the importance of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

2011–2015:

2016:

We established a safe platform for dialogue for communities in Sinoe County impacted by oil palm expansion, particularly those whose lands were seized by Maryland Oil Palm Plantation (MOPP) in Maryland County. This laid the groundwork for restoring community agency and trust. That year, we also launched five community-driven livelihood pilots in Sinoe, Grand Kru, and Maryland counties — demonstrating SESDev's commitment to pairing rights advocacy with practical, locally owned development.

Our work deepened in the southeast as we supported community self-identification processes — a vital first step in securing statutory recognition of customary land under Liberia's evolving land governance framework. Our work deepened in the southeast as we supported community self-identification processes — a vital first step in securing statutory recognition of customary land under Liberia's evolving land governance framework.

2017:

We celebrated a national milestone: the passage of the Land Rights Act (LRA), to which SESDev contributed through years of policy advocacy, coalition-building, and community mobilization. That same year, we led the CSO Oil Palm Working Group in a successful advocacy effort that compelled Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL) to commit to a comprehensive sustainability action plan following several complaints to the RSPO.

2018:

Building on these foundations, we launched community forestry and natural resource governance programs, supporting land governance committees, facilitating the development of Community Forest Management Agreements (CFMAs), and training community monitors to combat illegal logging and land grabs using community-based monitoring tools such as the TIMBY app.

2019 onward:

SESDev continues to evolve — combining law, lived experiences, and proximity to power change from below. From village assemblies to national steering committees, we serve as a trusted ally to communities defending their land, forests, and future.

TODAY:

Situational Analysis

Opportunities

Progressive Legal Frameworks

Liberia’s landmark land and forest laws — such as the National Forestry Reform Law (2006), Community Rights Law (2009), and Land Rights Act (2018) — recognize communities’ rights to own and manage their customary lands and uphold Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). These frameworks provide a strong legal basis to advance tenure security, sustainable forest management, and inclusive rural development. National policies like the Agriculture Transformation Agenda and the National Adaptation Plan further support community-based agriculture, aligning well with SESDev’s mission.

Increasing Global Support for Tenure Security and Community-led Initiatives

Despite shifting global funding trends, many donors continue to back community-led conservation, land rights, and climate justice — particularly through initiatives such as 30x30, climate-smart agriculture, and restoration programs. Given its rooted work in land rights, FPIC, and local governance, SESDev is well-placed to tap into these support streams.

Working Groups and Coalitions for a Unified Voice

Liberia has active civil society platforms championing community and Indigenous rights, offering powerful spaces for collective advocacy. SESDev is well positioned to lead and contribute to these coalitions — amplifying under-represented voices, influencing national and global policy, and advancing a grassroots-driven agenda.



Threats

Shrinking Funding Landscape for Rights-based conservation

The withdrawal of major donors like USAID has sharply reduced funding for biodiversity and community rights work in Liberia, disrupting key programs such as Conservation Works. As a donor-dependent organization without a diversified funding base, this trend threatens our policy influence and long-term sustainability — making fundraising an urgent strategic priority to sustain our mission.

“There is a huge loss of international funds to Liberia in recent months, including for land formalization”

– Anonymous

Unregulated Carbon Markets

The rapid growth of carbon offset projects in Sub-Saharan African countries including Liberia poses a major risk for land rights violations if not properly regulated. While REDD+ and Afforestation, Restoration and Revegetation (ARR) offer economic and conservation potential, the potential for weak enforcement and the bypassing of FPIC mechanisms could heighten the danger of land grabs, undermining community rights and SESDev’s work.

“There is a need for well-articulated standards or frameworks as land rights law does not address carbon trading issues”

Jacob Hilton,
Program Development Officer (SDI)

Extractive Industries and Government Interest overriding Community Needs and Rights

Government-backed land concessions for extractive and agro-industrial projects continue to displace communities and degrade natural resources, often bypassing rights protections. This weakens livelihoods, fuels inequality, and directly undermines SESDev’s mission to support sustainable, community-led resource governance.

Lack of Capacity across Sectors

There is a fundamental lack of capacity within government institutions, which severely limits the implementation and operationalization of community land and forestry initiatives. Communities also lack the technical capacity to manage land and forests effectively. This capacity gap extends into the broader civil society sector, which, despite its potential to support and complement government efforts and serve as leverage for communities, remains under-resourced and underdeveloped.

“Lack of capacity within civil society makes it difficult to bring in seasoned expertise to scale their work”

Chris Kidd,
Senior Policy Advisor,
Forest Peoples Program

Climate Change intensifying Pressures

Increasing impacts of climate change such as flooding and changing rainfall patterns are disrupting traditional farming and forest-based livelihoods. This means adaptation mechanisms need to be developed. As communities struggle to adapt, competition over natural resources may intensify leading to land conflicts and limited economic opportunities that complicate SESDev’s mediation and livelihood development efforts. Additionally, flooding is reducing access to rural areas, and increasing the cost and complexity of program delivery, ultimately affecting our ability to reach communities effectively.

“Poor and undrivable roads due to climate change and prolonged rainy seasons make working in Liberia incredibly challenging”

Chris Kidd,
Senior Policy Advisor, (FPP)

Organizational Strengths

A Committed and Dedicated Team

We are a lean yet highly committed and compassionate team laser-focused on driving our mission – securing communities’ land rights with integrity so they can keep their forests intact while also improving their livelihoods. In the face of Liberia’s challenging environment, we remain not only adaptable, persistent and resilient but maintain a strong work ethic – continuing to show up, dig in, and do the work no matter what. With a readiness to learn and grow, we embrace challenges, seek improvement, and leverage opportunities for our continued presence and relevance.

“The individuals are their strength - Daniel and Mina are extraordinary in what they do”

Chris Kidd,
Senior Policy Advisor(FPP)

Credibility and Expertise in Land Rights and Community Based Natural Resource Governance

We have developed strong credibility and deep expertise in the areas of community land rights, corporate accountability and natural resource governance enabling us to be the voice of the voiceless. Through multiple level engagements – combining grassroots consultations, strategic advocacy and specialized legal support services, our organization has positioned itself as a trusted champion for vulnerable groups and communities. By consistently defending and safeguarding land rights through legal support services, we have not only delivered tangible justice outcomes but also reinforced our reputation as a reliable and effective advocate for community empowerment.

“They’ve moved from community to national scene and built credibility in the scope of community rights”

Jacob Hilton,
Program Development Officer (SDI)

Trusted and deeply committed to the communities they serve

At the heart of our work is our deep, long-standing trust with rural and underserved communities – trust that has been built through years of showing up, listening, and standing alongside communities in their most difficult struggles. Our programs are co-created and shaped by the self-identified needs and aspirations of the communities themselves. We remain responsive to community needs and readily adapt or modify programs when necessary, allowing us to design and implement impactful interventions that truly reflect local needs and realities and build lasting trust and impact on the ground.

“SESDev is a mediator, working for the community, and develops programs from the real needs of the local community”

Chris Kidd,
Senior Policy Advisor(FPP)



Constructive Engagement and Strategic Collaborations

SESDev is strong at collaborating and effectively leveraging diverse partnerships to advance its core mission and purpose. We combine a cooperative or non-confrontational approach with legal fluency to influence national processes without burning bridges. This has allowed us to work across various stakeholder groups and positioned us as a trusted partner within civil society coalitions (e.g. on land, oil palm, forests, and conservation), and a respected intermediary in politically sensitive spaces. Our constructive style of engagement has directly contributed to key achievements, such as halting unlawful protected area designations, strengthening corporate accountability in the oil palm sector, and shaping Liberia's national FPIC policies.

“SESDev is not confrontational — they find ways to constructively engage and this keeps the doors open”

Patrick Kipalu,
Director of Africa Program,
Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI)

Bridging between Local to Global

Our unique strength also reflects in our ability to operate with credibility in both rural community settings and policy or advocacy platforms at the national and international level. Through this, we are able to inform policy processes (e.g. national oil palm strategy, FPIC standards), participate meaningfully in platforms such as the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples and Local communities in Conservation in Africa (AICA); Women in Global South Alliance (WIGSA), Conservation on Biological Diversity Women Caucus (CBD WC), Tropical Forest Alliance (TFA) and ECOWAS land dialogues as well as support international actors in understanding and engaging with Liberia's land and conservation landscape through a rights-based lens.

This translational capability strengthens Liberia's civil society voice, ensures rural priorities are visible in global discourse, and positions SESDev to shape not just implementation, but the future direction of land and environmental governance policy.

“I think what is unique is SESDev's ability to not only connect and build strong relationships for change with local communities, but also that it brings this approach to others at the national and international level”

Katy Scholfield,
Director of Strategic Grantmaking(AF),



Organizational Challenges

Lack of a Functioning Governance Structure

We do not yet have a functional board that provides strategic direction, leadership engagement and accountability within the organization. The absence of a functioning governance structure likely impacts several other areas, including fundraising, leadership, management systems and procedures, planning, communications plus organizational culture and values. Moving forward, we are committed to restructuring our organization to ensure an effective governance system that fosters a strong organizational culture and growth.

Insufficient Resources and Limited Capacity Constraining Growth

We recognize our continuous reliance on external donors and the difficulties in securing long-term, sustainable funding. This overdependence creates financial uncertainty and limits our ability to plan strategically, invest in growth, or respond to emerging opportunities. The absence of a dedicated fundraising staff and a fully functioning board further hampers efforts to diversify and strengthen our funding base.

The current funding gap has directly impacted our ability to recruit and retain qualified personnel. Without adequate resources, we are unable to expand our team or bring in specialized expertise. As a result, our current staff are overstretched and spread too thin across multiple responsibilities, affecting both efficiency and overall organizational performance. Addressing these gaps is one of our key strategic focuses for the coming years.

Weak External Communication

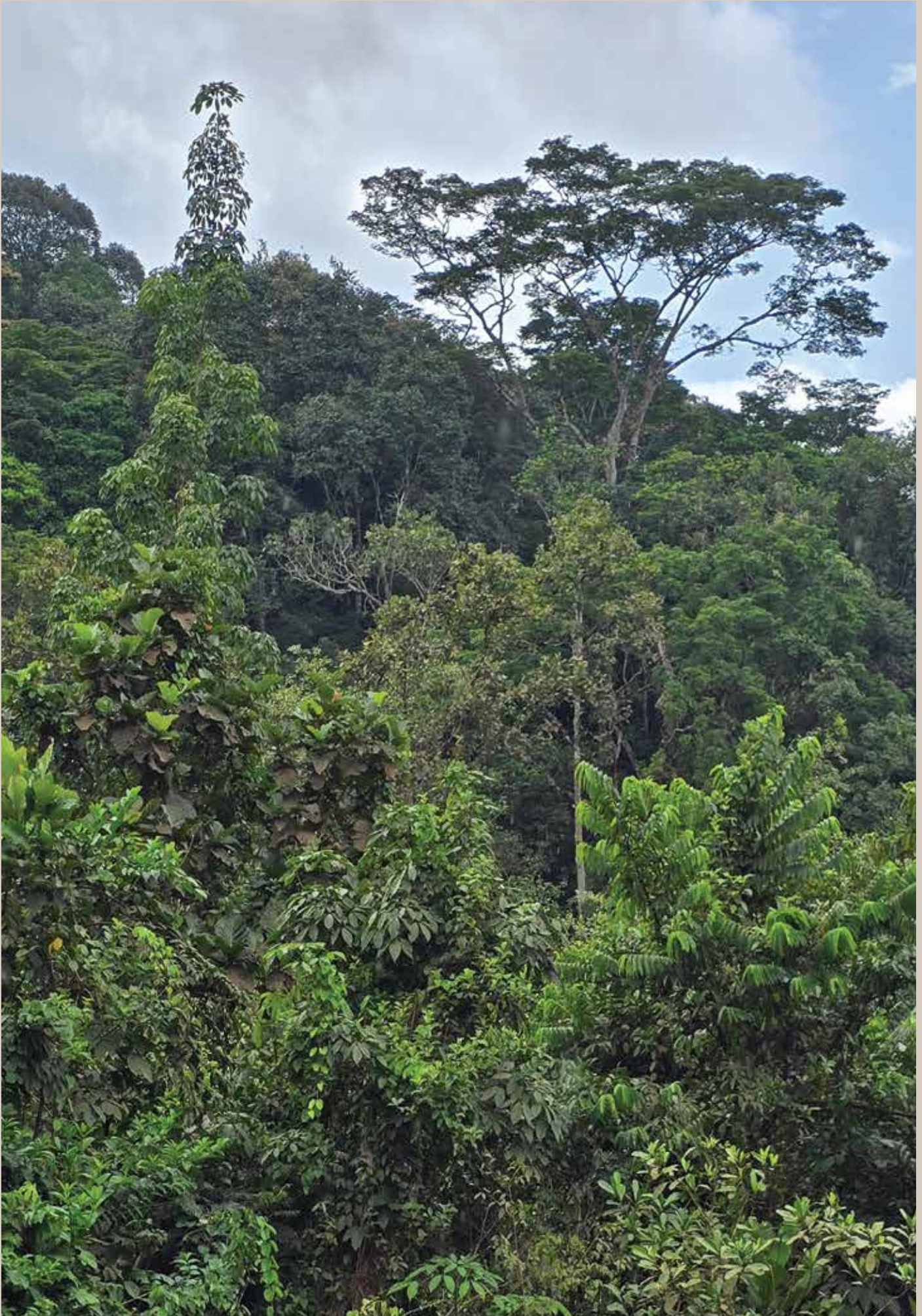
There is an absence of a clear communications strategy and a lack of dedicated communication expertise which limit our visibility and impact communication. While we have made commendable progress, we struggle to effectively showcase these achievements and link them to broader conservation and community outcomes in a compelling and strategic manner. This limited capacity further reflects in our organization's inability to keep its website and social media handles functioning with engaging narratives. This not only reduces our visibility but also hinders our ability to attract new funding opportunities and partnerships essential for sustaining and scaling our work.

“I think they are great relationship people and if they could find powerful ways to tell their story of the interconnected impact of their work to diverse audiences that would be great”

**Katy Scholfield,
Director of Strategic Grantmaking,
Arcus Foundation.**

“They are struggling to get resilient funding and still being opportunistic in funding”

**Chris Kidd,
Senior Policy Advisor(FPP)**



Strategic Framework

The Problem We Aim to Address

Weak enforcement of progressive land and forest laws, limited government capacity and resources, and unchecked private sector activity have left rural communities unable to assert their rights, benefit fairly, or sustainably manage their lands — deepening mistrust and marginalization in Liberia’s natural resource governance.

Vision

A Liberia where customary communities thrive with secure land rights, fair benefits, and sustainably managed forests, living in harmony with nature and each other.

Mission

Securing rights so Liberian customary communities drive solutions for the betterment of people and biodiversity.

Core Purpose

Inform and defend rights to uphold self-determination of customary communities in Liberia to drive their own solutions for better lives and healthy environments.

Value Proposition

SESDev is uniquely positioned to lead community-centered land and forest governance in Liberia, combining deep grassroots trust, legal expertise, and a steadfast commitment to justice. Since 2009, we have worked in some of the country’s most remote and contested areas, helping communities secure land rights, strengthen governance, and assert their voices in national policy. With a holistic, rights-based approach and a reputation for integrity and persistence, SESDev serves as a trusted bridge between customary communities and national and global actors — ensuring that development, conservation, and climate solutions are grounded in local leadership and lawful process.

Values



We create space for every voice to be heard:

We create inclusive spaces for all voices to be heard. We don't speak for others; rather we encourage them to speak on their own behalf. We listen with respect and openness, and try to encourage others to do the same.



We uphold the right to self-determination:

We believe that every person and community must make the decisions that shape their future. Our work is rooted in respect for community leadership, autonomy, and land rights.



We are trusted and reputable and we don't take that for granted:

People count on us. We take that responsibility seriously and act with integrity and consistency, and we operate out of respect for all those we work with. We also strive to do what we say we are going to do.



We believe access to information is power:

We work to ensure that everyone has the information they need to make informed decisions — especially those whose voices are too often left out. We aren't always the experts or knowledge-holders, but we find those who are and ask them to share.



We're fueled by passion and purpose:

We are driven by a deep commitment to communities and land and resource rights. Our passion keeps us laser-focused, avoiding mission drift.



We're okay with mistakes, because we learn from them:

We reflect on what works and what doesn't and then we adapt and adjust so we can do better going forward.



Our Theory Of Change

IF...

we strengthen the capacity of key government institutions, they better understand their roles and responsibilities and better facilitate rights, processes for communities

Then

Key government agencies are more capably engaging with communities

IF...

communities (and women in particular) are fully informed, they have the systems and resources to assert and implement their rights and knowledge and support for improved livelihoods that are not harmful to the environment

Then

There is inclusive and informed decision making at the community level

Communities are upholding their rights and are driving solutions for the betterment of people /nature

Customary communities in Liberia have improved livelihoods

Natural Resources are managed sustainably

Communities and government are holding the private sector to account negotiating better deals

A Liberia where customary communities thrive with secure land rights, fair benefits, and sustainably managed forests, living in harmony with nature and each other



Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development

Key Pillars of Work

To realize our vision of a Liberia where customary communities thrive with secure land rights, fair benefits, and sustainably managed forests, SESDev works across four strategic pillars. These pillars focus on building informed, empowered communities; strengthening civil society coalitions; supporting capable and responsive government institutions; and ensuring communities benefit from their lands and resources through sustainable livelihoods. Together, they reflect our commitment to justice, inclusion, and long-term resilience — and form the backbone of our theory of change.



Strengthening Community Rights and Inclusive Resource Governance

SESDev believes that access to clear, relevant, and timely information empowers communities to make informed decisions and advocate for, and defend, their rights. We make important information accessible to ensure communities are equipped with the tools they need to engage meaningfully in governance and resource management. We also strengthen local resource governance and management systems and create inclusive, safe spaces where all voices, especially those of women are heard and valued. We do this by facilitating the development of participatory land use planning (PLUP), management by-laws, resource governance committees, providing legal literacy and strengthening local management capacities. Through community-driven processes including FPIC development, we promote transparency, informed decision-making, and gender-equitable leadership in natural resource governance and land rights security.



Collaborative Influencing

Recognizing that no single organization can address the complex challenges of resource governance, we actively collaborate with civil society networks, coalitions, working groups and other organizations whose mission aligns with ours. With such like-minded organizations, we champion community land and resource rights, grounded in a deep commitment to people and justice. By building strategic alliances and amplifying a unified voice, we strengthen our influence on policy and decision-making at all levels. Through the power of the collective, we harness complementary expertise to expand our reach and enhance the impact of our work in securing lasting change for communities.



Government Engagement and Strengthening

Our work consists of supporting key government institutions involved in land and resource governance, particularly the Liberia Land Authority (LLA), National Bureau of Concessions (NBC), and Forestry Development Authority (FDA) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These agencies are critical to ensuring laws are enforced, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is respected, and communities see government as an ally, not a proxy for private interests. We engage these institutions through targeted capacity building, policy dialogue, and logistical support to improve their presence and performance at the community level. By doing this, we aim to ensure that land formalization and concession oversight processes are inclusive, lawful, and aligned with the rights and needs of local people.



Resource and Livelihoods Sustainability

We support communities to derive fair and sustainable benefits from their land and natural resources, without reducing their value to purely economic benefits. Recognizing agriculture as a key livelihood in rural Liberia, we promote sustainable livelihood development initiatives including climate-friendly agricultural practices like agroforestry and biodiversity monitoring to mitigate the impacts of environmental degradation from resource exploitation. We uphold traditional knowledge and practices that protect nature and strengthen climate resilience. Playing a supportive role, we mediate between communities and ethical investors or private sector actors, helping to negotiate fair agreements that reflect community priorities and promote business enterprise development rooted in justice and sustainability.

Goals, Objectives, and Targets

Goal 1:

Key Government agencies are engaging more capably with communities in 9 key counties

Goal 2:

There is inclusive and informed decision making in communities in 9 key counties

Goal 3:

Strengthening Our Institutional Capacity to Deliver at Scale



SESDev will deepen its support to rural communities to secure, manage, and protect their customary lands and natural resources. By strengthening local governance systems, promoting equitable participation of women and youth, and advancing the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, SESDev aims to build communities that are organized, informed, and empowered to claim their rights and shape decisions that affect their lives and environments.

Through inclusive, community-led enterprises and livelihood initiatives, SESDev seeks to promote economic self-reliance and resilience in rural Liberia. This goal focuses on helping communities translate secure land rights into tangible benefits—creating fair, sustainable, and environmentally responsible economic opportunities that reduce dependency, improve wellbeing, and foster dignity and long-term prosperity.

SESDev will expand its role as a leading advocate for social, economic, and environmental justice by influencing national and regional policies that uphold community rights and sustainable development. Working in collaboration with government, civil society, and international partners, SESDev will use research, dialogue, and evidence-based advocacy to ensure that development in Liberia respects human rights, protects the environment, and promotes fair and inclusive growth.

Goal 1: Key Government agencies are engaging more capably with communities in 9 key counties

Working within our sphere of control and influence, we will support and accompany critical government institutions such as the National Bureau of Concessions (NBC), Forest Development Authority (FDA), Ministry of Internal Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Ministry of Agriculture to deliver their core mandate and responsibility towards communities.

Objective 1: Key institutions' capacity is strengthened and they are fulfilling their obligations towards communities

Facilitate workshops and training on laws and implications to improve their awareness and understanding of community issues and rights.

Objective 2: Roles and Responsibilities are understood

Facilitate inclusive meetings and multi-stakeholder forums to promote information sharing, build trust, and strengthen relationships between communities, government agencies and other key actors.

Produce and disseminate legal analyses and monitoring reports to inform communities, stakeholders, and policymakers, and to support evidence-based advocacy and decision-making.

Simplify legal documents into user-friendly documents for community use.

Objective 3: Rights processes not stalled by government

- Provide logistical and resource support to key government agencies (e.g. transportation, fuel, operational funds) to strengthen their capacity to supervise, engage with and support communities effectively.
- Engage in joint advocacy initiatives in collaboration with the CSO Oil Palm Working Group, the Civil Society Working Group on Land Reform, and the NGO Coalition to influence national policy and reform agendas.
- Establish and strengthen a national coalition for women's land rights to amplify women's voices, influence policy and promote gender-equitable land governance.
- Establish and strengthen a national coalition to champion rights-based conservation efforts.

Key Targets

By 2027:

- EPA is ensuring that FPIC is being adequately implemented, starting in 2027 and ongoing to 2030.
- Ensure existing developed FPIC guide is effectively implemented.
- Rollout a comprehensive awareness raising work at government level while also informing communities that FPIC is their right.
- Land title surveys completed and land titles issued, enabling all previously supported communities to have land titles.
- National level coalitions on women land rights and rights-based conservation are established with some level of capacity built.

By 2028:

- Through collaboration, FDA and Liberian Land Authority are ensuring that all land claims are identified and delineated before any PA gazettement process begins – backed by a signed MOU between the two agencies.
- FDA is effectively engaged, ensuring that draft FDA regulations are passed and implemented on community-led conservation, which would let communities establish protected areas on their customary lands.

By 2030:

- MIA is upholding the rights of the communities, especially in Sinoe, Grand Kru, Maryland, Lofa, Nimba, Rivercess and Cape Mount , Gbarpolu counties, and they are not interfering with community forest jurisdiction.
- NBC capacity strengthened where there are concessions, so that they are upholding the rights of the communities.
- NBC ensures that the grievance process is established and is enforced by Ministry of Justice.

Goal 2: There is inclusive and informed decision making in communities in 9 key counties

Objective 1: Communities (and women in particular) are fully informed

- Deliver key information to communities on land and community rights through town hall meetings, community dialogues, and one-on-one engagements to raise awareness and empower informed decision-making.
- Establish and strengthen support systems that promote and protect women’s land rights, including access to legal aid, awareness campaigns, and engagement with traditional and formal institutions.

Objective 2: Communities have the systems and resources to assert and implement their rights

- Support communities in developing and formalizing community bylaws to strengthen local governance and resource management.
- Conduct training and workshops to build community capacity in designing and implementing FPIC processes, including the development of context-specific FPIC materials.
- Strengthen the governance and technical capacity of community forestry bodies to ensure sustainable forest management and equitable benefit sharing.
- Facilitate and provide guidance to communities throughout the land formalization process, including self-identification, mapping, and engagement with relevant government authorities.
- Provide ongoing technical and legal assistance to communities to support land rights protection, resource governance, and negotiation with external actors (e.g. companies or state agencies).

Objective 3: Communities have improved livelihoods that are not harmful to the environment

- Conduct a participatory needs assessment using questionnaires and focus group discussions to identify existing livelihood opportunities and community priorities for development.
- Develop and formalize community-led systems and best practice guidelines to guide and support the implementation of prioritized livelihood activities based on the needs assessment findings.
- Provide appropriate tools, equipment (e.g. milling machines), and/or seed capital to support self-initiated and sustainable enterprise development.
- Facilitate access to extension services by linking local producers with technical experts to support improved production techniques, business planning, and market engagement.
- Support the development of participatory land use plans to guide sustainable resource use and minimize unintended environmental impacts from livelihood activities.

Objective 4: Communities are connecting to learn and support each other in natural resource management (NRM)

- Establish and strengthen peer-to-peer community networks and exchange visits to build local capacity, promote inter-community learning, and support joint advocacy and rights defense.
- Facilitate inclusive engagement with women through targeted gatherings and safe spaces to ensure their meaningful participation in community decision-making.
- Coordinate community-led monitoring and governance initiatives across counties to improve accountability, transparency, and shared learning especially between newer and more experienced communities.

Key Targets

By 2026:

- Complete land formalization in Sinoe (two districts).
- Strengthen inter-community advocacy networks in Nimba.
- Begin program implementation in Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount (legal awareness, threat response).
- Launch governance and livelihoods support in Rivercess.
- Expand implementation support in Lofa, Vahun District (to capitalize on above-average livelihood readiness).

By 2027:

- Deepen work in Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount: build land governance structures, support legal protections.
- Initiate regional cross-learning exchange between older and newer counties (Nimba, Lofa, Gbarpolu, G. Kru, etc.).
- In Nimba, deliver a full suite of livelihood support across 24 towns.
- Assess and begin engagement in Grand Kru, Grand Gedeh, and Maryland

By 2028:

- Achieve substantial community benefit realization in Lofa (Vahun District).
- Expand implementation and sustainable livelihood programming in: Lofa (Vahun District), Rivercess, Grand Kru, Nimba, Maryland.
- Deepen community monitoring and governance capacity across all counties.
- Scale up programs in Grand Kru, Grand Gedeh, and Maryland to strengthen governance systems, launch livelihood pilots, and women's land rights initiatives.

By 2029:

- Strengthen regional advocacy alliances and peer-to-peer support networks across the nine counties.
- Document success stories and lessons learned to shape national policy influence (e.g. community-conserved areas, FPIC protocols, carbon governance).
- Support final phases of land formalization in Gbarpolu, Grand Cape Mount, and Rivercess counties, etc.

By 2030:

- All nine counties have communities that are legally informed, governance-ready, actively managing land and forests, accessing fair benefits, and improving livelihoods.
- Strong inter-community learning and advocacy ecosystems.

Goal 3: Strengthening Our Institutional Capacity to Deliver at Scale

To fulfill our vision of empowered, thriving communities sustainably managing their lands and forests, SESDev must invest in its own foundation. This goal focuses on strengthening governance, expanding our team, building strong systems, deepening partnerships, improving communications, and securing the financial sustainability needed to scale. These six pillars will ensure we grow responsibly, stay accountable, and remain a trusted ally to the communities we serve.

Objective 1: Strengthening Governance and Leadership Accountability

Currently, we lack a functioning board, leaving our leadership without formal oversight. To grow with integrity and ensure transparency, we will establish a well-structured, diverse, and credible board of directors. A functioning board will provide essential checks and balances, strategic guidance, and external accountability, which are critical as we expand our operations and partnerships.

Objective 2: Expanding and Supporting Our Team

Our people are our greatest strength. To deliver this strategy across nine counties, we will scale our team intentionally — adding a National Projects Coordinator, nine Project Officers, and 40 Community Animators to support local implementation. We will also enhance technical capacity in key areas such as land formalization, FPIC, biodiversity monitoring, and gender-responsive governance. At the national level, we will recruit a Policy Officer to support strategic advocacy and coordination.

Our expanded team will be supported by core operational staff in finance, HR, administration, communications, and M&E, ensuring a strong foundation for responsible and effective program delivery.

Objective 3: Developing Robust Internal Systems and Procedures

Growth requires structure. We will invest in developing and implementing comprehensive policies and systems across HR, finance,

procurement, planning and safeguarding. Strengthened monitoring and evaluation systems will allow us to measure impact, adapt in real time, and meet donor requirements. Our internal planning and learning processes will also become more deliberate, helping us document insights, replicate successful models, and maintain quality across an expanded program.

Objective 4: Deepening Strategic Partnerships and Coalitions

SESDev's collaborative spirit is one of our key assets. We will continue to work actively within coalitions such as the CSO Oil Palm Working Group, Land Rights Working Group and NGO Coalition, while strengthening partnerships with government institutions such as the Liberia Land Authority, NBC, EPA and Ministry of Internal Affairs.

We will also build new partnerships with international actors — especially those aligned with our rights-based conservation values — positioning SESDev to influence not only national but also regional and global policy processes on land, climate, and biodiversity.

Objective 5: Amplifying Our Voice Through Stronger Communications

Despite strong results, SESDev's work is often under-recognized. We will invest in external communications to increase our visibility and influence. By documenting success stories, building our digital presence, and participating more actively in national and international dialogues, we aim to shift narratives, attract new allies, and ensure that community voices shape development and conservation priorities.

Objective 6: Securing Sustainable and Diversified Financing.

Our current annual operating budget of approximately \$500,000 has been stretched to deliver impact across multiple counties. To scale our work and meet the goals of this strategy, we must grow our budget to at least \$2.3 million by 2030. This will allow us to fund multi-year district-level programming (estimated at \$150,000–\$200,000 per district), build operational infrastructure, and attract and retain the right talent.

We will prioritize building a more diverse and stable funding base — deepening relationships with current donors such as ARCUS, Forest Peoples Programme, SIEMENPUU and Rights and Resource Initiative, while pursuing new partnerships with funders aligned with our mission. Improved grant management systems and financial transparency will underpin our efforts to build donor confidence and long-term sustainability.

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