

TEN YEARS TO TURN THE TIDE

2026 - 2036

Summarized version

PURPOSE

This Theory of Change (ToC) is Hivos' roadmap for the next decade. It guides how we design programs, choose partners, allocate resources, and learn across regions and themes. It also shapes our monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and linking and learning strategies. The ToC is aligned with Hivos' vision and mission, as outlined in the *Ten for Ten* strategy for 2026–2036.

CONTEXT

We live in a time of overlapping crises: broken promises of neoliberalism, growing inequality, concentrated wealth and power, and democratic values being supplanted by the "might makes right" credo. Disinformation and manipulated algorithms erode trust, silence critics, and reduce accountability. Authoritarianism often grows quietly through laws and administrative measures that shrink civic space. Civil society actors face surveillance, criminalization, hostile narratives, and threats both online and offline. Yet, they remain resilient and creative, driving democratic change.

The ToC presented here is aligned with Hivos' vision and mission.

VISION

We envision a just world in which everyone, regardless of their identity, background or circumstances, lives in dignity and freedom and can build a fair and sustainable future for themselves, their communities, and the wider society.

MISSION

Our mission is to defend and expand the civil and political rights that enable individuals, marginalized communities, their movements, and their organizations to claim and realize equality and justice.

OUR KEY PARTNERS

Our key partners are **movements and civil society actors** including NGOs, informal groups, independent media, cultural actors, human rights defenders, networks, and community organizations. We see them not as passive beneficiaries but as **co-creators of change**, bringing legitimacy, lived experience, and transformative potential. We pay special attention to intersectionality, supporting groups who face multiple forms of exclusion: women, LGBTQ+ people, Indigenous peoples, youth, migrants, and refugees.

Their role in the TOC:

- If individual agency and collective action are what drive systemic change, **then** movements and civil society actors must be at the center of decision-making.
- If they are treated as co-creators, **then** they can shape narratives, propose solutions, and lead responses to shrinking civic space.

TOC ELEMENTS AND PATHWAYS OF CHANGE

Hivos ToC

Our TOC states that:

- If we provide flexible funding, rapid support, holistic security, open knowledge, and de-risking mechanisms, **then** they can sustain vibrant civic environments and adapt to shocks.
- If we convene “safe and brave” spaces—physical, digital, or hybrid—**then** actors can connect, collaborate, and co-create strategies across borders while respecting local contexts.
- If we stand in solidarity—taking public stances, offering legal and financial backing, providing emergency protection, and engaging diverse allies—**then** civic actors can continue shaping public agendas instead of retreating.

If these three strategies advance, **then** we generate the intermediate results identified in the ToC:

- Movements and civil society actors **have tools to preserve, sustain, and expand vibrant and resilient civic environments.**
- Movements and other civil actors **implement strategic and contextualized solutions.**
- Civil society actors and movements **are visible and positioned in advocacy spaces.**

If these intermediate results take root, **then** movements and civil society actors are able to “respond to threats and protect civil and political rights” (Long-term Outcome 1), and then they can “claim and expand civil and political rights” (Long-term Outcome 2).

If these long-term outcomes are realized, **then** “movements and other civil society actors actively shape equitable, just and inclusive societies that respect civil and political rights,” which is the desired change at the heart of the Hivos Theory of Change:



FROM TOC TO TOA

The transition from the Theory of Change to a Theory of Action is guided by the question “How do we want to apply our strategies?” The Theory of Action prioritizes initiatives based on partner priorities, levels of risk, and political opportunities. It includes support measures such as capacity strengthening through tailor-made and peer-to-peer training; flexible and equitable regranting; safe tools and documentation systems; and access to protection and emergency referrals.

Additional components include convening multisector and multi-movement spaces, communities of action, cross-context learning, collective knowledge production, co-created advocacy strategies, advocacy in active solidarity, public campaigning through activism and storytelling, and strengthening protective and advocacy alliances.

These measures operationalize the ToC and allow actors to continue shaping public agendas rather than retreat from them. The ToA is built when a new project is designed based on this ToC, and the selected interventions should be properly contextualized.