

TEN YEARS TO TURN THE TIDE

2026 - 2036

Based on the “Ten for Ten” Strategy Document

February 27, 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Hivos describes the fundamentals of its strategy for 2026 to 2036 in a document titled “Ten Years to Turn the Tide - *Supporting civil society in times of surging authoritarianism and inequality*” (working title aka Ten for Ten).

This theory of change (ToC) is based on it and provides a strategic framework for Hivos' programming. It will guide program development and choices, partnerships, resource allocation, and learning across regions and themes, as well as the M&E framework and linking and learning strategy.

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.

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Over the past two decades, the world has undergone a series of interconnected crises that have reshaped the context in which Hivos works. The 2008 financial and food crises evolved into a broader collapse of the promises of neoliberalism and globalization. Deregulated markets, free-flowing capital, and the growing power of multinational corporations generated recurrent shocks that deepened wealth gaps, food insecurity, and mistrust in institutions. These pressures intensified during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, which laid bare further inequities across gender, race, class, and geography.

Meanwhile, wealth and power have concentrated at unprecedented levels. Economic elites and (tech) corporations increasingly dictate political agendas, bypassing democratic institutions through opaque financing, lobbying, and media control. Disinformation and algorithmic amplification corrode trust, weaken oversight, and silence critics.

Institutions meant to safeguard democracy—media, civil society, courts, legislatures—remain in name but are hollowed out in practice.

This environment has given way to a global wave of authoritarianism. Today, democratic backsliding rarely happens through sudden coups; instead, it advances gradually, through legal and administrative measures that steadily restrict civic space, weaken opposition, and silence dissent. Media freedom, the right to protest, and the safe operation of civil society are increasingly under attack. Women, LGBTIQ+ communities, Indigenous peoples, and migrants are targeted to polarize societies, reinforce patriarchal, nationalist or even xenophobic agendas, and reduce the agency of whole groups.

Global instability adds another layer of pressure. Climate change is accelerating social fragmentation, increasing sovereign debt burdens, and sparking competition over strategic resources, from minerals to water to digital infrastructure. Rising militarization and a weakened multilateral system complicate international cooperation, while the Global South faces new threats from the geopolitical power plays of stronger countries.

The full, unhindered exercise of human, civil, and political rights is fundamental for keeping civic space open and growing and for seizing new opportunities to shape just, rights-based governance models. So, in this context, movements and other civil society actors are central to resisting authoritarianism, reshaping power, and sustaining democratic possibility—making them the strategic focus of Hivos' work.

TARGET POPULATIONS

Although the exact definition of each group will depend on the context and program, Hivos has identified the following as its target populations: civil society organizations and informal groups; independent media and cultural actors; human rights defenders; networks; community organizations, and other organized civil society actors. Movements can be (un)organized or (in)formal democratic networks of individuals, groups, or organizations. From the Global Women's March or Climate Action Network, to the Gen Z protests or Indigenous land rights movements, they amplify the voices, narratives, and demands of people directly affected by injustice.

While NGOs, academics, lawyers, and popular artists can all be important parts of these movements, Hivos prioritizes community-based organizations led by people directly affected by an injustice because they combine legitimacy, lived experience, and transformative potential.

In short, we refer to our target populations as "**movements and other civil society actors**" and see them as strong, vocal, and purpose-driven civil society, engaging in open and informed dialogue.

Across regions, these movements and other civil society actors share a common reality. They operate in increasingly restricted and polarized civic spaces, facing digital surveillance, bureaucratic and resource constraints, hostile narratives and fake news, criminalization, and physical or online threats. Yet they also represent some of the most innovative, resilient, and interconnected forces driving democratic transformation. Wielding new forms of mobilization, digital tools, collective care, and knowledge production, they collaborate and create cross-movement alliances to defend and expand civic space.

Therefore, this ToC treats these actors not as passive recipients of support but as strategic co-creators of change—capable of shaping narratives, proposing solutions, and leading the collective response to attacks on human rights and democratic values.

Intersectionality: Special attention is given to groups facing multiple forms of exclusion (e.g., women, LGBTQ+, Indigenous peoples, youth, migrants/refugees).

Hivos considers itself a part of these broader global movements for democracy, equity, justice, and sustainability, with responsibility and agency to speak, act and be heard.

OUR PROGRAM PARTNERS

Hivos builds alliances and forms partnerships with many actors to claim, protect, and expand civil and political rights. We are all driven by the same principles: equity, inclusiveness, humanism, solidarity, care, and courage.

We use "partner" to refer to the local civil society organizations, community-based groups, movements, and sometimes social enterprises or institutions that Hivos works with to achieve social change. These partners are active co-creators, bringing their own knowledge, networks, and agency to joint initiatives.

They may include international and local organizations, donors ranging from individual supporters to multilateral cooperation agencies, as well as traditional development cooperation actors, private

sector entities, educational institutions, cultural and research organizations, and social movements, among others. Partnerships are a deliberate means of redistributing power, resources, visibility, and decision-making to civic actors closest to the struggle.

We use the term "program partner" if we have a contractual relationship with them. This collaboration may take the form of regranting, international advocacy, capacity-strengthening activities, dialogue facilitation, co-creation of safe tools and systems, public campaigning, communities of practice, and advocacy strategies, among others, depending on the context and the nature of the partnership.

Finally, all partners must follow Hivos' safeguarding standards and policies.

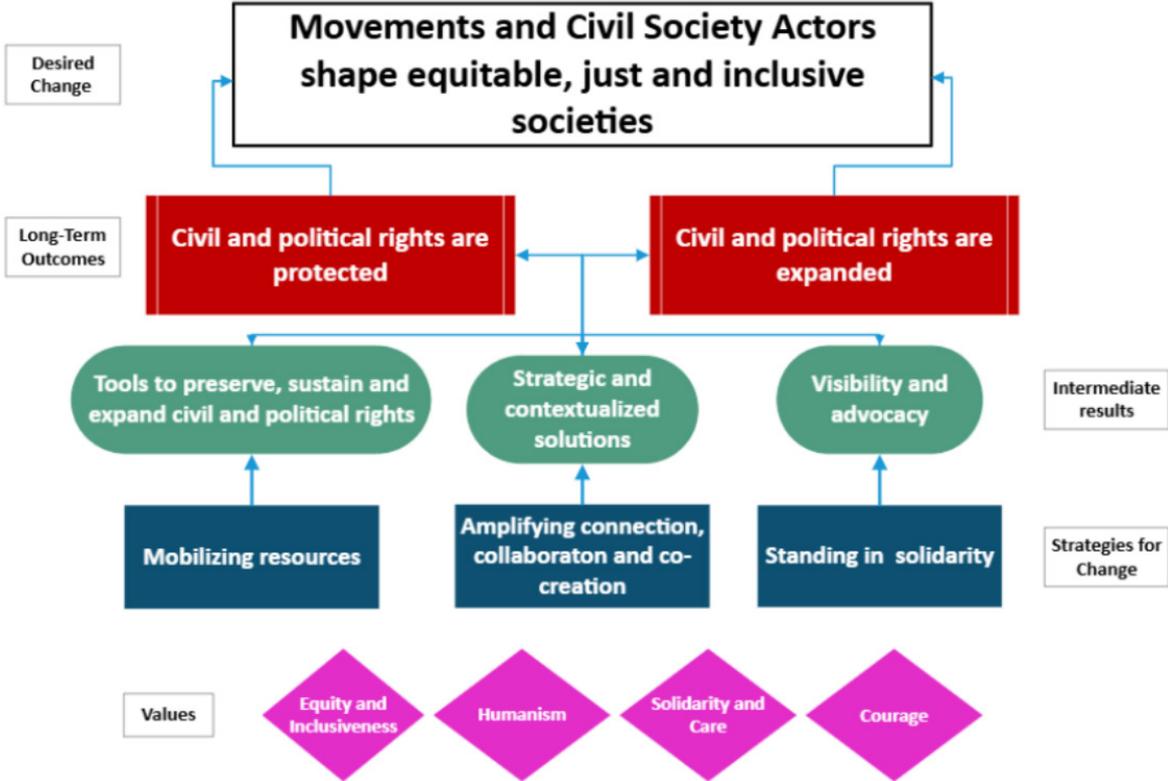
TOC ELEMENTS AND PATHWAYS OF CHANGE

Hivos believes that rightholders' individual agency, actions, and claims—galvanized into movements—is what brings sustainable systemic change.

While Hivos' programs are primarily informed by a deep understanding of local and regional dynamics and tailored to respond to them, the global ToC provides an overarching framework for strategic coherence and impact. These strategies are:

- 1) Mobilizing and providing resources—financial so movements and other civil society actors can preserve, sustain, and expand vibrant and resilient civic environments.
- 2) Convening and participating in spaces that amplify connection, collaboration, and the co-creation of transformative strategies and solutions
- 3) Standing in active solidarity with movements and other civil society actors by supporting and joining their efforts to defend, protect and expand civil and political rights.

Hivos Theory of Change is captured in this visual:



Desired change

With the target populations as primary architects and decision-makers, the change we aim to achieve in society is:

Movements and other civil society actors actively shape equitable, just and inclusive societies that respect civil and political rights.

In our vision, an equitable, just, and inclusive society is built on a diverse civic environment that protects collective interests and upholds civil and political rights—rights inherent to every person, yet increasingly under threat. Inclusion and justice guide this exercise of rights, grounded in Hivos' core values: humanism, equity and inclusiveness, solidarity and care, and courage. Courage empowers civic actors to resist repression, overcome setbacks, and create new civic spaces where diverse voices can be heard.

We recognize, however, that in some contexts, openly discussing civil and political rights can be counterproductive or even dangerous. In such environments, we will adapt our language to reflect local realities—without compromising our values or beliefs.

Our aim is to achieve the following long-term outcomes (Domains of Change):

Long term outcome 1

Movements and other civil society actors actively shape equitable, just and inclusive societies that respect civil and political rights.

As threats to civic space take different forms, and are growing more complex and persistent, collective mobilization is essential to resist and reduce their impact. Responses must be diverse as well, matching the complexity of the context and the kind of threats faced.

Some responsive actions are immediate and focused on survival, while others strengthen care networks and solidarity systems, protecting the integrity of individuals and movements at the heart of civic action.

Effective protection requires diverse, sustained resources: tailored protection strategies, awareness campaigns, knowledge production and sharing, and robust collective safety practices. Together, these enable civil society to navigate shrinking civic space, safeguard their work, and continue advancing transformative agendas.

Long term outcome 2

Movements and other civil society actors actively shape equitable, just and inclusive societies that respect civil and political rights.

This outcome envisions civil society as proactively demanding people's rights and creating new spaces to defend democratic values and justice, building on existing ones.

By promoting and expanding civil and political spaces, movements can induce governance to become inclusive, participatory, and rights-respecting. This strengthens resilience against authoritarianism, ensures marginalized communities are represented, and builds societies where justice and equity are embedded in everyday life.

Hivos has identified the following **assumptions as preconditions** for realizing these long-term outcomes:

- **Movements and other civil society actors can maintain operations despite repression or shrinking of civic space.**

- We have access to policymakers and strong links with the public sector, enabling lobby and advocacy and the ability to convene.
- Regulations, policies, or practices restricting civic space are challenged or reversed.

These assumptions are further dealt with in the sections on risk analysis and mitigation measures.

As part of the pathway toward the long-term outcomes, Hivos has identified the following intermediate results as steppingstones:

Intermediate results

IR1: Tools to preserve, sustain and expand civil and political rights
 Movements and civil society actors have tools to preserve, sustain and expand vibrant and resilient civic environments.

This intermediate result refers to the availability and use of tools that support civil society actors, movements, and human rights defenders in preserving, sustaining, and expanding civil and political rights. These tools include legal, digital, organizational, and protection-related means of helping civic actors respond to risks, navigate restrictive environments, and continue their work safely and effectively. Access to appropriate tools is essential to ensure continuity of action and reduce vulnerabilities.

At this level of the ToC, tools allow strategies to translate into concrete capacities. They support actors in protecting existing civic space while also adapting to evolving contexts and identifying opportunities to expand rights. As such, strengthened tools create the necessary basis for intermediate and long-term change to occur.

IR2: Strategic and contextualized solutions
 Movements and other civil actors implement strategic and contextualized solutions.

This intermediate result focuses on developing solutions that are strategic and grounded in context. Since civil society actors operate in diverse political, social, and cultural environments, effective responses must be based on local, regional, and global analysis, experience, and knowledge. Contextualized solutions help ensure that actions are relevant, feasible, and responsive to changing conditions.

They also enable actors to align their efforts, partnerships, and resources with clearly defined objectives, closely linking strategies to long-term outcomes, and thus increasing the likelihood that change processes are sustained over time.

IR3: Visibility and advocacy
 Civil society actors and movements are visible and positioned in advocacy spaces.

This intermediate result relates to raising the visibility of civic actors, movements, and their agendas and improving their ability to engage in advocacy with accompaniment from Hivos. Visibility allows actors to bring attention to key issues, challenge dominant narratives, and highlight rights-related concerns in public and policy spaces. Advocacy efforts aim to influence discourse, policies, and decision-making processes across different levels.

In the ToC, visibility and advocacy contribute to shifting power dynamics and creating pressure for accountability. By supporting these capacities, Hivos enables civic actors to engage more effectively with duty bearers and broader audiences, contributing to conditions that support the protection and expansion of civil and political rights in the long term.

As part of the pathway toward these intermediate results, Hivos has identified the following assumptions as key enablers:

- Donors will be interested in and able to fund our new direction, including basket funding.
- Hivos will mobilize sufficient unrestricted funds to support partners.
- Movements and other civil society actors see an added value in continuing to work with Hivos.
- We have access to and actively participate in relevant fora for convening, connecting, etc.

These assumptions are further dealt with in the sections on risk analysis and mitigation measures.



The pathways to accomplish these ambitious, yet attainable results are:

Strategy for Change 1: Mobilizing resources—financial, human, technological, and knowledge-based—so movements and other civil society actors can preserve, sustain, and expand vibrant and resilient civic environments.

Hivos works with movements and other civil society actors to access financial, human, technological, and knowledge-based resources. “Resources” go beyond direct financial support in the form of grants. They include time and staffing, integral security (including digital), data and evidence, mentoring, legal/admin capabilities, and evidence-based and actionable knowledge. Access must be equitable and fast enough to respond to volatility and windows of opportunity.

Operationally, this means flexible and rapid funds not tied to narrow project frameworks, on-demand technical support, holistic security support, and open knowledge assets. It also requires de-risking (safety and care protocols, legal support, due diligence that does not exclude community-led groups and individuals) and fair division of funds to partners. The effect we seek is continuity of action, measurable impact, greater adaptive capacity, and fewer disruptions from shocks.

Strategy for Change 2: Amplifying connection, collaboration, and co-creation: Convening and participating in spaces that amplify connection, collaboration, and the co-creation of transformative strategies and solutions across local, regional, and global levels.

Hivos convenes and participates in “safe and brave” spaces. Whether physical, digital, or hybrid, they foster connection, collaboration, and co-creating strategies and solutions that help build societies that respect civil and political rights. These spaces are inclusive, i.e. accessible, multilingual, just, and safe-by-design. They connect community knowledge, thematic expertise, and advocacy efforts so that narratives, agendas, and tactics can cross-fertilize and reinforce each other across borders without erasing local specificity.

In practice, convening spaces are themselves an output as they allow for mutual solidarity and can serve as a form of safety net. They can also produce more tangible outputs: system/change maps, shared problem frames, joint advocacy roadmaps, coalition governance rules, rapid coordination channels, and learning rounds (“what worked / what didn’t”).

Hivos’ role is catalytic: facilitating co-creation, underwriting safe participation (including care and digital security), and helping transform insights and lessons into regional and global advocacy tools.

Strategy for Change 3: Standing in solidarity: Standing in active solidarity with movements and other civil society actors by supporting and joining their efforts to defend, protect and expand civil and political rights.

Hivos takes a clear public stance when civil and political rights are under attack, joining the voices of those most affected. Beyond that, our active solidarity includes legal, financial, and political backing to safeguard activists and organizations facing repression. It also means emergency and protection measures, counter-narratives against hate and disinformation, and involving “unlikely” allies who reduce risk and increase leverage based on consent, agency, and do-no-harm.

Active solidarity is a relationship between equals, recognizing the leadership of local movements. Operationally, it is organized through clear protocols and focal points with the capacity and agency to take rapid action: rapid response in emergencies (including emergency grants, relocation or psychosocial support when needed), providing integral security, coordinated advocacy, and protecting digital footprints. It is also sustained: follow-up after emergencies, restoring capacity to act, and reconnecting people to networks and care support. The intended effect is that people, and their projects and movements, continue to shape public agendas rather than retreat from them.

To put this strategy into practice, the following internal preconditions are needed:

- The organization can build internal capacity, knowledge, and human capital to implement the strategy.
- Hivos understands explicit and implicit security risks and will implement and support mechanisms to mitigate possible backlashes that come with taking a position.

RISK ANALYSIS

Hivos’ ToC includes a set of risks grounded in assumptions that are preconditions for the effectiveness of the change strategies and their intended outcomes, as shown above. An assumption refers to an idea or hypothesis about how change occurs and the necessary steps for it to take place. When an assumption does not hold, it can undermine the causal logic of the ToC.

Risks are analyzed based on their likelihood (probability of occurrence) and their potential impact or negative consequences on the implementation of our projects. The guiding question in this analysis is: what happens if the risk materializes? These elements are explained in the matrix below.

Risk analysis matrix

This matrix matches the likelihood (high or low) of a potential risk with the impact level (high or low) of its consequences:

Likelihood	Low consequences	High consequences
High		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hivos could not mobilize sufficient unrestricted funds to support partners. • Movements and other civil society actors could not maintain operations despite repression or shrinking of civic space. • Regulations, policies, or practices restricting civic space could not be challenged or reversed.
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hivos would not have access to and actively participate in relevant fora for convening, connecting, etc. • Hivos would not have access to policy makers or strong public sector links enabling lobby and advocacy and the ability to convene. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movements and other civil society actors do not see added value in continuing to work with Hivos • Donors would not be interested in or able to fund our new direction, including basket funding. • The organization is unable to build internal capacity, knowledge, and human capital to implement the strategy. • Hivos does not understand explicit and implicit security risks and would not implement and support mechanisms to mitigate possible backlashes that come with taking a position.

Mitigation measures

This matrix shows the measures planned to reduce the impacts that risks of high and medium consequences could have on our initiatives, strategies, and outcomes, threatening our ToC design.

For those not identified as high risk, the recommendation is to monitor them periodically based on the DMEL organizational guidelines.

Likelihood and consequences	Risk	Mitigation
High Risk (high consequences and high likelihood)	Hivos could not mobilize sufficient unrestricted funds to support partners.	Diversify funding sources—including philanthropic donors and private foundations—and proactively promote unrestricted or flexible funding models in donor engagement.
	Movements and other civil society actors could not maintain operations despite repression or shrinking of civic space.	Provide tailored security support, flexible funding, and rapid-response mechanisms that allow partners to adapt operations, relocate activities, or shift modalities when restrictions intensify.
	Regulations, policies, or practices restricting civic space could not be challenged or reversed.	Strengthen alliances with advocacy coalitions, invest in evidence generation, and support coordinated lobbying strategies that increase pressure on decision-makers.
Medium Risk (low likelihood and high consequences)	Regulations, policies, or practices restricting civic space are not challenged or reversed.	Engage in solidarity-based advocacy and coalition-building, combined with legal and policy expertise, to challenge and counter restrictive civic space measures
	Movements and other civil society actors do not see an added value in continuing to work with Hivos	Establish continuous feedback mechanisms with partners—such as check-ins, satisfaction scans, or co-reflection spaces—to adjust support according to their expectations and emerging needs.
	Donors would not be interested in or able to fund our new direction, including basket funding.	Strengthen donor relationships by clearly communicating impact, maintaining transparency, and demonstrating strategic coherence, while proactively seeking new donors aligned with the vision.
	The organization is unable to build internal capacity, knowledge, and human capital to implement Change Strategy 3.	Strengthening internal capacity by investing in staff development, structured knowledge sharing, and role clarity to enable effective implementation of Change Strategy 3.
	Hivos does not understand explicit and implicit security risks and would not implement and support mechanisms to mitigate possible backlashes that come with taking a position.	Institutionalize context monitoring and security analysis, ensuring staff and partners receive ongoing training and updated guidance on risks and protective measures.

FROM THEORY OF CHANGE TO THEORY OF ACTION

We decide which initiatives and approaches to prioritize by asking, “How do we want to apply our strategies?” From a diverse portfolio, we develop new projects that align with this Theory of Change and the Ten Years to Turn the Tide Strategy. The selection and sequencing of initiatives depend on factors such as partner priorities, levels of risk, and political opportunities. Together, this constitutes our Theory of Action, which may include the following support measures, initiatives, and direct actions:

Providing essential resources to civic actors

- **Capacity strengthening**
Tailor-made and peer-to-peer training to enhance partners’ organizational and technical skills, improving their ability to operate safely, strategically, and sustainably in complex contexts.
- **Flexible and equitable regranting**
Funding mechanisms that adapt to partners’ priorities, risks, and realities, enabling timely and context-responsive action.
- **Safe tools, platforms, and documentation systems**
Secure digital and physical systems that enable safe communication, information storage, and evidence management.
- **Access to protection and emergency referrals**
Rapid facilitation of access to legal, digital, psychosocial, and other specialized protection services when human rights defenders and civic actors face urgent threats, including legal advice and representation when needed.

Convening spaces to connect, collaborate, and co-create

- **Convening multisector and multi-movement spaces (online/offline)**
Bringing together diverse actors to build trust, align agendas, and coordinate collective action.
- **Communities of action**
Collaborative spaces where groups and movements engage in joint advocacy, campaigns, and coordinated initiatives.
- **Communities of practice and cross-context learning**
Ongoing peer-learning spaces that enable cross-sectoral, cross-regional, and cross-team exchange of methods, challenges, and lessons learned.
- **Collective knowledge production and synthesis**
Co-creation of analyses, research, and narratives that distill shared insights and shape collective strategies.
- **Linking actors for shared strategies**
Connecting civic actors across local, national, and international levels to align efforts, increase leverage, and amplify impact.
- **Co-creating advocacy strategies with partners**
Collaboratively designing advocacy approaches that reflect partners’ priorities, contexts, and political realities.

Standing in active solidarity with civic actors

- **Advocacy in active solidarity (public and backdoor)**
Taking principled positions—openly or discreetly—to influence powerholders, respond to risks, and protect civic actors.
- **Public campaigning through activism and storytelling**
Using artistic expression and lived narratives to raise awareness, mobilize public support, and counter harmful or oppressive narratives.
- **Visibility and strategic positioning of civic actors in global spaces**
Ensuring civic actors are meaningfully represented and heard in regional and international arenas.
- **Unified and deliberate institutional communication**
Coordinated institutional messaging that defines our purpose, values, and identity to stakeholders and shows our consistency, accountability, and solidarity toward civic actors and rightsholders, building trust and reputation.
- **Strengthening protective and advocacy alliances**
Building and sustaining alliances with human rights organizations, HRDs, legal advisors, diplomats, media, and research institutions to expand protection, influence, and access.

ANNEX 1. ASSUMPTIONS IN DETAIL

Assumptions – Long term outcomes

Movements and other civil society actors can maintain operations despite repression or shrinking of civic space.

This refers to the ability of movements and other civil society actors to continue operating in very restrictive or dangerous contexts, facing threats ranging from physical harm to backlash and public attempts to discredit their work.

If movements and organizations are unable to do so, Hivos would also be unable to continue implementing a core part of the strategy, as this would represent a risk to safety, resources, and impact alike.

We have access to policymakers and strong links with the public sector for lobby and advocacy and convening

This is based on Hivos' ability to access and maintain relationships with policymakers and public sector actors, enabling effective lobbying, advocacy, and convening efforts. Without such access, our ability to influence decision-making processes, open dialogue, and challenge restrictive policies or practices would be significantly weakened.

Regulations, policies, or practices restricting civic space are challenged or reversed.

This reflects a necessary change resulting from the lobby and advocacy efforts carried out by movements, other civil society actors, and Hivos. If restrictive regulations, policies, or practices are not challenged or reversed, it signals that the strategy is not working as intended and needs to be adjusted.

Assumptions – Intermediate outcomes

Donors will be interested in and able to fund our new direction, including basket funding.

This assumes that institutional donors continue to see value in Hivos' strategic direction and are willing and able to fund it. And they are open to more flexible funding mechanisms, such as basket funding, that allow coordinated action and reduce restrictive conditions.

Hivos will mobilize sufficient unrestricted funds to support partners.

This assumes that Hivos will be able to secure sufficient unearmarked and unrestricted funding not tied to strict donor conditions. These resources are essential to respond quickly, fill gaps, and provide meaningful support to partners when they need it most.

We have access to and actively participate in relevant fora for convening, connecting, etc.

This assumes that Hivos will be able to access and actively participate in relevant local, regional, and global fora where actors meet, coordinate, connect, and shape agendas. Without access to these spaces, Hivos' role in convening and connecting actors would be weakened.

Movements and other civil society actors see an added value in continuing to work with Hivos

This assumes that movements, activists, and other civil society actors continue to perceive Hivos as a relevant, trusted, and useful ally. Their willingness to collaborate depends on recognizing that Hivos brings meaningful added value, whether through support, protection, visibility, convening power, or access to resources.

Assumptions – Strategy for Change 3

The organization can build internal capacity, knowledge, and human capital to implement the strategy.

This assumes that Hivos is able to strengthen internal capacity, including knowledge, skills, and human capital, to effectively implement the strategy and translate strategic ambitions into practice.

Hivos understands explicit and implicit security risks and will implement and support mechanisms to mitigate possible backlashes that come with taking a position.

This assumes that Hivos understands contextual dynamics and sensitivities, as well as explicit and implicit security risks associated with taking positions alongside activists. It also assumes that adequate mechanisms are in place to mitigate risks, manage backlash, protect people, and respond effectively when such situations arise.