SAFARI DEFENDERS INITIATIVE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2027–2031

Self-sustaining conservation, by design.

No wild place in Africa should be lost or struggling for lack of sustainable funding.



FOREWORD

“Philanthropic funding should finance the transition to self-sustaining conservation, not the perpetual cost of conservation. That is why every intervention we design creates the fastest path to sustainable tourism revenue.”

JOB OCHIENG
CO-FOUNDER AND CEO

Africa’s conservation areas are not short of nature. They are short of the commercial capability to turn that nature into income that pays for its protection. Because earned income covers SDI’s running costs, every dollar raised for our missions reaches conservation areas and the people who live with wildlife.

SELF-SUSTAINING CONSERVATION, BY DESIGN.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conservation areas struggle financially because they lack a sustainable tourism business model, not because they lack nature. SDI helps build that business model, then leaves it standing.

- 70% of Africa’s protected areas face severe budget shortfalls: about USD 50 per km² a year against the minimum USD 1,000 needed.
- 87% of Kenya’s 245 conservancies earn insufficient tourism revenue, with a majority having little or no tourism income.
- SDI builds the missing commercial layer: the product, the partnerships and the legitimacy that conservation areas need to generate sufficient tourism revenue and impact, through four missions delivered by two programmes.
- We aim to return more than twice every programme dollar to conservation areas as self-earned tourism revenue.



OUR PLAN AT A GLANCE

OUR FIVE GOALS 2027-2031

20

conservation areas running a tourism business model; at least 5 earning USD 1,000+ per km², flagship areas USD 3,000+

5,000

people benefiting through direct and indirect jobs and income

100

tourism businesses certification-ready, mainly through SI in Pello

3+

countries in Eastern and Southern Africa

10M+

USD in new investment mobilised into conservation areas

Enabled by USD 500,000 in capacity funding for SDI.

PHASE 1 • 2027–2028
Kenya and Tanzania

PHASE 2 • 2029
Scale in Kenya and Tanzania

PHASE 3 • FROM 2030
A Southern African country

WHO WE ARE

VISION

An Africa where no wild place is lost or struggling for lack of sustainable funding.

MISSION

We turn Africa’s underfunded conservation areas into sustainable tourism economies that fund their own protection and create opportunities for local communities and their partners to thrive.

HOW WE WORK

01 ADVISE

An investable sustainable tourism plan built with the area’s managers and communities

02 ASSEMBLE

The right operators, investors and buyers, bringing capital, skills, systems and market access

03 DELIVER

Hands-on support until products, deals and partnerships earn as planned

04 EXIT

Once revenue targets are met, the area and its partners run without us, and we move to the next landscape

OUR CORE VALUES

01 COMMUNITIES THRIVE
Tourism must improve the lives of people who live with wildlife, whether they own the land or live alongside it.

02 DIFFERENT BY DESIGN
We challenge conventional thinking to find better ways.

03 CO-CREATORS
We work closely with communities, conservation areas and partners.

04 RESPONSIBLE
Every business model we introduce or strengthen advances sustainable development in its destination: economically, socially and environmentally.

05 SCALABLE
Market-ready solutions that grow with a coalition of sustainable tourism partners.

06 EXIT, NOT DEPENDENCY
Catalytic, not permanent: we build systems that thrive without us.

Our work is anchored in six core values that keep our solutions ethical, scalable and co-created, so conservation areas, their communities and their business partners thrive.

OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

MAR 2025

The idea of SDI is conceived.

SEP 2025

SDI is registered as a Kenya-based nonprofit, with a coalition of 23+ partners.

DEC 2025

First sustainable tourism opportunity scoping in Northern Kenya, with a regional peacebuilding partner.

2026

- Kenya: two conservancy projects completed, one ongoing.
- Tanzania: two marine conservation area projects completed.



THE PROBLEM AND ITS ROOT CAUSES

Africa’s conservation areas struggle to fund their own protection through tourism, so they rely on donors, and protection weakens when donor funding falls. They also struggle to find the right tourism partner. Five root causes keep them there:

- R1 Capability gap: managers are trained in conservation, not tourism business.
- R2 Investment-readiness gap: without a bankable plan, capital does not reach conservation areas.
- R3 Funding-model trap: donor funding pays recurring costs and seldom builds a for-profit enterprise.
- R4 Market-access gap: assets are often built without a clear route to guests.
- R5 Sustainable partner information gap: fewer than 3.4% of Africa’s hotels are certified as sustainable; cost, time and uncertain returns are the biggest barriers.

THE OPPORTUNITY

70% of Africa’s 8,600+ protected and conserved areas face severe budget shortfalls.

$2.3BN a year in additional tourism spending is possible in African protected areas by 2030.

<3.4% of Africa’s 20,844+ hotels are certified as sustainable.

6x return, at least, on every dollar invested in protected areas and tourism (World Bank).

87% of Kenya’s 245 conservancies earn insufficient tourism revenue.

3/21 of Tanzania’s community Wildlife Management Areas have an exclusive photographic tourism agreement.



OUR STRATEGIC CHOICES

Where we will play, how we will win, and what we will not do.

WHERE WE PLAY

Priority 1: community conserved areas – conservancies, wildlife management areas and community-managed marine areas.

Priority 2: state protected areas and the ecotourism businesses within them.

Starting in Kenya and Tanzania, growing to at least three countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

HOW WE WIN

→ We build the business, not just the plan
→ 23+ vetted tourism partners
→ Community-benefiting, investor-ready deals
→ Low delivery cost through AI

WHAT WE WILL NOT DO

→ Fund recurring running costs
→ Take stakes in deals
→ Build infrastructure
→ Manage land

WHERE WE START

Kenya and Tanzania: large conservation estates, strong tourism economies and a clear revenue gap.



KENYA

→ 409 protected areas covering 71,534 km² of land, plus 245 conservancies
→ Tourism: 9.3% of GDP (USD 12.7 billion) and about 1.8 million jobs in 2025
→ The gap: 16 Mara conservancies earn USD 4.9 million a year in lease fees; 43 northern Kenya conservancies earned USD 1.3 million in total in 2019
→ SDI so far: two conservancy projects completed, one ongoing



TANZANIA

→ 872 protected areas covering 378,341 km² of land (about 40%) and 7,408 km² of sea
→ 21 community Wildlife Management Areas across 334 villages, with 16 more being established; only 3 have exclusive photographic tourism agreements
→ The gap: WMAs without investors earn little and lack the capacity to negotiate with them; game reserves received TZS 82 billion of the TZS 125 billion needed in 2022/23
→ The opening: the national WMA strategy (2023–2033) targets 10+ new investor agreements, WMA business plans and a tourism investment partnership framework
→ SDI so far: two marine conservation area projects completed

Sources: IUCN ESARO (2024); KWCA (2024); WTTC (2026); World Bank (2025); MNRT (2023).



PROGRAMME 01 • MISSIONS 1–3

WEZESHA

Wildlife Enterprises for Zero-Dependency through Sustainable Tourism and Human Advancement: SDI’s venture-building programme. It builds market-ready ecotourism enterprises, not just plans. “Wezesha” is Swahili for “to empower”.

→ Track A, investment readiness (30–90 days; USD 5,000 per conservancy): tourism strategy, investment case and introductions to investors and operators.
→ Track B, full stand-up (2–3 years; from USD 50,000, depending on the conservancy’s stage and needs): product, operator and management model, market access and the local tourism economy.
→ Two routes: direct engagements paid by a conservancy or association; or funded cohorts backed by funders.

WE EXIT A CONSERVATION AREA WHEN IT REACHES EITHER:

→ 70–80% of its annual tourism revenue target, or
→ at least USD 1,000 per km² a year in operational financing from tourism.

PROGRAMME 02 • MISSION 4

SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

Helps hotels, lodges, tour operators and other tourism businesses measure, improve and prove their sustainability and impact.

→ Impact services: impact strategy, reporting and certification support.
→ Sustainability Intelligence (SI) in Pello: an AI-powered sustainability assistant for hotel managers that makes sustainable practice, in-house fixes and certification readiness easy, at the click of a button.
→ Expert fixes: paid support for improvements businesses would find hard to make alone.



THEORY OF CHANGE

If conservation areas gain the commercial capability, the right partners and investment to run sustainable tourism business models, tourism revenue will fund their protection, lift local household income and make partnerships profitable.

IF areas gain capability, partners and investment → **THEN tourism businesses grow revenue and jobs** → **SO conservation areas can fund their own protection**

PATHWAY A — CONSERVATION AREAS
Investment cases and partnerships lead to operating businesses, growing revenue and jobs, so conservation areas fund their own protection.

PATHWAY B — TOURISM BUSINESSES
Scores and fixes lead to better practice and certification readiness, so tourism supports conservation.

PATHWAY C — SDI
Earns funding to strengthen our capacity and reach more conservation areas.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS WE WILL TEST

A1 Investors and operators commit once a credible investment case exists.
A2 Community governance is stable enough to sign and honour long-term partnerships.
A3 A fair share of tourism revenue reaches conservation budgets and households.
A4 Hotels value certification readiness and practical fixes enough to pay for them.
A5 Funders back the transition to self-funding, not only recurring costs.
A6 Tourism demand holds without a prolonged shock.



MISSION 01 • WEZESHA

UNLOCK TOURISM INVESTMENT

Give conservation areas without a tourism plan an investment case that investors and operators can act on. Delivered through WEZESHA direct engagements and Track A cohorts.

OPERATION 01/02
Build tourism strategies and investment cases: 21 conservation areas with an investment case by December 2027, and at least 8 more in 2028.

OPERATION 02/02
Connect conservation areas to investors and operators: USD 10 million+ in new investment mobilised by 2031, with communities benefiting through jobs, income and a voice in decisions.



MISSION 02 • WEZESHA

TURN AROUND UNDERPERFORMING ASSETS

Help lodges and camps in conservation areas that are not yet earning well become sustainable tourism businesses that pay for conservation. Delivered through WEZESHA Track B cohorts and direct engagements.

OPERATION 01/02
Diagnose and relaunch lodges and camps: 2 relaunch plans in 2027, and 20 areas running a tourism business model by 2031.

OPERATION 02/02
Build the tourism economy around each asset: community guides, cultural and nature experiences, and local suppliers.



MISSION 03 • WEZESHA

COMMUNITY-LED MARINE ECOTOURISM

Help coastal communities earn from the marine areas they protect. Delivered through WEZESHA.

OPERATION 01/02

Develop community ecotourism enterprises in marine conservation areas, designing the model on the Kenyan coast and drawing on SDI’s coastal work in Tanzania.

OPERATION 02/02

Connect marine enterprises to markets through tour operators and travel platforms.



MISSION 04 • SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT PROGRAMME

MAKE TOURISM BUSINESSES SUSTAINABLE

Help hotels, lodges and tour operators measure, improve and prove their sustainability. Delivered through the Sustainability and Impact Programme.

OPERATION 01/02
Provide impact and sustainability services to 5 businesses from January 2027.

OPERATION 02/02
Launch and scale Sustainability Intelligence in Pello: 100 tourism businesses certification-ready by 2031.

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Three phases, with board review gates at the end of 2028 and 2029. We expand only when the previous phase delivers.

PHASE 1 • 2027–2028
Kenya and Tanzania

2027 Independence; associate hired; 21 investment cases; 2 relaunch plans; SI built and launched.
2028 First investor commitments; first assets relaunched; six-month reserve; board review.

PHASE 2 • 2029
Scale in Kenya and Tanzania

2029 Scale in Kenya and Tanzania; second Track B cohort.

PHASE 3 • FROM 2030
A Southern African country

2030 Expand to a Southern African country.
2031 20 areas, 5,000 people, 100 businesses, 3+ countries, USD 10 million+ investment mobilised; USD 500,000 capacity funding.

HOW WE WILL CHOOSE NEW COUNTRIES (DECIDED AT THE BOARD REVIEW GATES)

→ Demand from conservation areas and a funder ready to back a first cohort → Large community or state conservation estate with untapped tourism potential → Policy that supports community conservation and tourism partnerships → Trusted partners on the ground from our coalition → Stable, safe access for guests

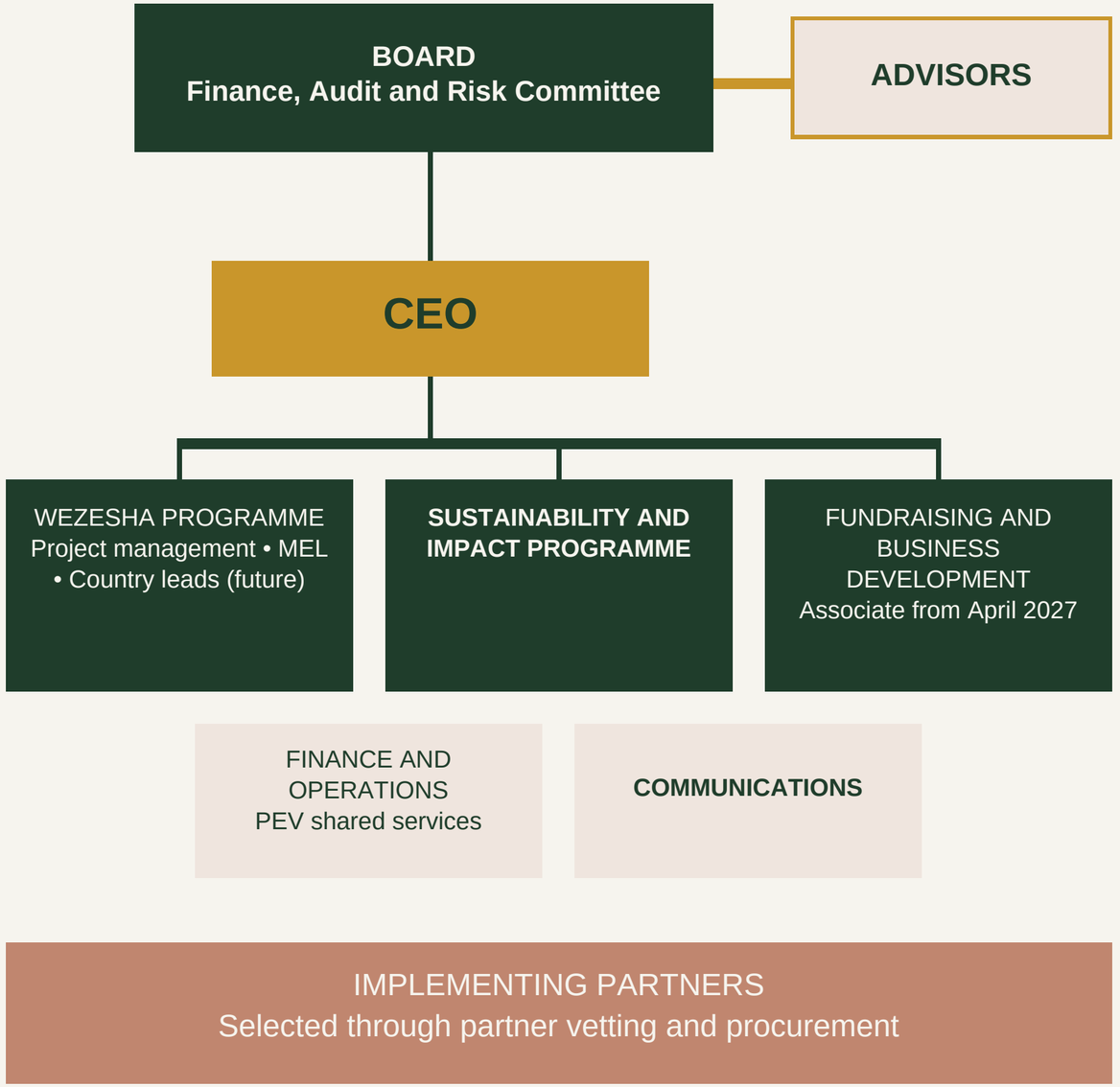
ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE

In Phase 1, the CEO leads both programmes. A Fundraising and Business Development associate joins in April 2027, and finance and operations come from PEV shared services at cost.

The Board oversees finances, growth opportunities and risk. Advisors give technical guidance.

Implementing partners are selected through partner vetting and procurement.

The team grows only as income and programmes allow.



FINANCING THE PLAN

Earned income pays for SDI. Programme funding pays for missions. Capacity funding builds the organisation.

→ Earned income covers SDI’s running costs from January 2027.
→ Fundraising needs: WEZESHA cohorts (Track A at USD 5,000 per conservancy; Track B from USD 50,000), marine cohorts, and USD 500,000 for SDI’s own capacity.
→ Principles: no client above 30% of income by 2028; a six-month reserve by 2028; full cost recovery; grants fund programmes, not SDI’s running costs.

EARNED INCOME TARGETS

2027	**USD 108,600**
2028	**USD 129,840**
2029	**USD 152,400**
2030	**USD 180,600**
2031	**USD 208,800**

RISKS AND MEASURING RESULTS

KEY RISKS AND OUR RESPONSES

Pipeline conversion: spread income across associations, funders and direct clients; track conversion monthly.
Investor commitment: involve investors and operators while the investment case is built, not after.
Community governance: assess governance before we engage; agree benefit-sharing and grievance processes in writing.
Tourism shocks: help areas mix domestic and international markets; hold a six-month reserve.
Key-person dependence: document systems, hire as planned and keep a board-approved succession plan.

Reviewed quarterly by the board’s Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

HOW WE MEASURE RESULTS

→ Five 2031 goals, each with indicators, 2028 milestones and 2031 targets.
→ Tracked quarterly.
→ Reviewed by the board every six months.
→ Reported publicly each year.

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JOIN US

→ Funders: back a WEZESHA cohort or SDI’s capacity.
→ Conservancies and associations: commission a direct engagement or nominate areas for a cohort.
→ Investors and operators: take up investment-ready opportunities that benefit local communities.
→ Tourism businesses: join the Sustainability and Impact Programme.

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