



# Connecting to find solutions

Annual report 2023

GRID-Arendal  
June 13, 2024



*In the pursuit of a sustainable future, GRID-Arendal proudly presents its Annual Report for the year 2023.*



*As a non-profit environmental communications foundation, we transform environmental data into innovative, science-based information products and provide capacity-building services. **“Environmental knowledge for change”** is our core business.*

## Foreword

Foreword UNEP

As we reflect upon yet another extraordinary year, one marked by unprecedented environmental challenges and new climate records, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) stands resolute in its commitment to advocating for nature. UNEP is constantly working with partners worldwide to ensure that the knowledge we gather about the state of our environment is shared and used to enhance our collective efforts to tackle the triple planetary crisis of – climate change, biodiversity and nature loss and pollution and waste.



Jian Liu  
Director, Early Warning and Assessment  
Division

In 2023, we further strengthened our partnership with GRID-Arendal, through formal recognition of GRID-Arendal as a Global Environment Outlook (GEO) Collaboration Centre. The signing of new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signifies a formal acknowledgment of the long running partnership between GRID-Arendal and UNEP in supporting the development, preparation, and launch of the UNEP Flagship report the Global Environment Outlook.

GRID-Arendal has consistently proven itself as a valuable partner for UNEP. Their contributions include reports such as: *Wastewater - Turning Problem to Solution*, *Into the Blue: Securing a Sustainable Future for Kelp Forests* and *Science-Policy Interface for Plastic Pollution*. UNEP also recognizes the significant support GRID-Arendal has given in connection with the international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution (INC).

As we continue our journey towards a nature-positive and sustainable future, UNEP remains committed to working collaboratively with partners such as GRID-Arendal. Through working together, we can solve the serious triple planetary crises facing our society and environment for the people and planet.

## Foreword MD

For every problem, whether consciously or not, we seek to find solutions. At GRID-Arendal, our greatest “problem” to solve is the triple planetary crisis and the challenges we face when it comes to the impact of humans on our environment. But coming up with solutions is not a solo effort. Connecting is key, and the best way to find solutions without needing to re-invent the wheel each time is through communication. This year, we cooperated with partner organisations all over the world on topics spanning from revealing the impact of climate change on the no-longer-so-permanent permafrost, to empowering policymakers on a quest towards a plastic-pollution-free future. While there is much left to be done, GRID-Arendal has achieved a great deal this past year, and I could not be more proud of our dedicated staff working towards the solutions that may very well help save our planet.



New MD Karen Landmark with Peter Harris,  
former MD

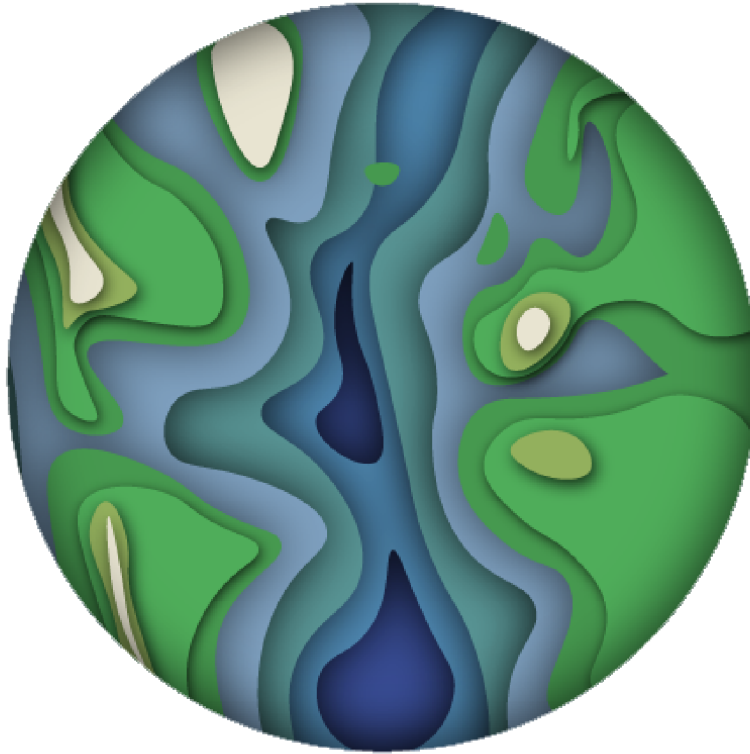
My adventure in Arendal has now come to a close. I wish the new Managing Director Karen Landmark many exciting years at GRID-Arendal's helm.

I want to thank our staff and partners, particularly our key partnerships with the United Nations Environment Programme and the Norwegian Climate Ministry. It has been a privilege these last 9 years to lead an organisation that has changed and adapted throughout its existence, not simply keeping up with the times, but ensuring that the environment remains a prominent feature on the world's agenda.

## GRID-Arendal in numbers

In 2023, GRID-Arendal worked to create impact via 76 projects around the world. This reflects our commitment to addressing critical environmental challenges on a global scale.

# 76



around the world

We signed 25 new contracts, expanding our partnerships worldwide. These agreements indicate recognition of our expertise and the increasing demand for our services.

# 25



## New Contracts

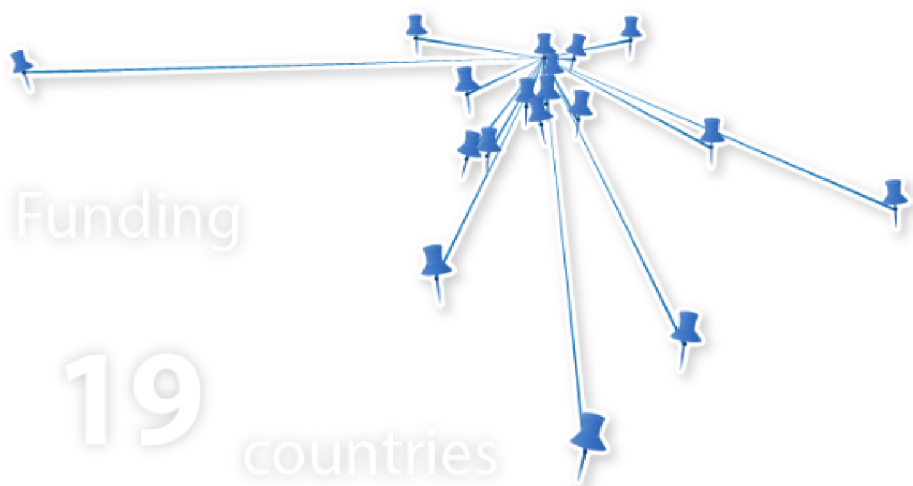
Our organisation worked in many externally funded projects, with over **100 partner organisations** during 2023.

# 100



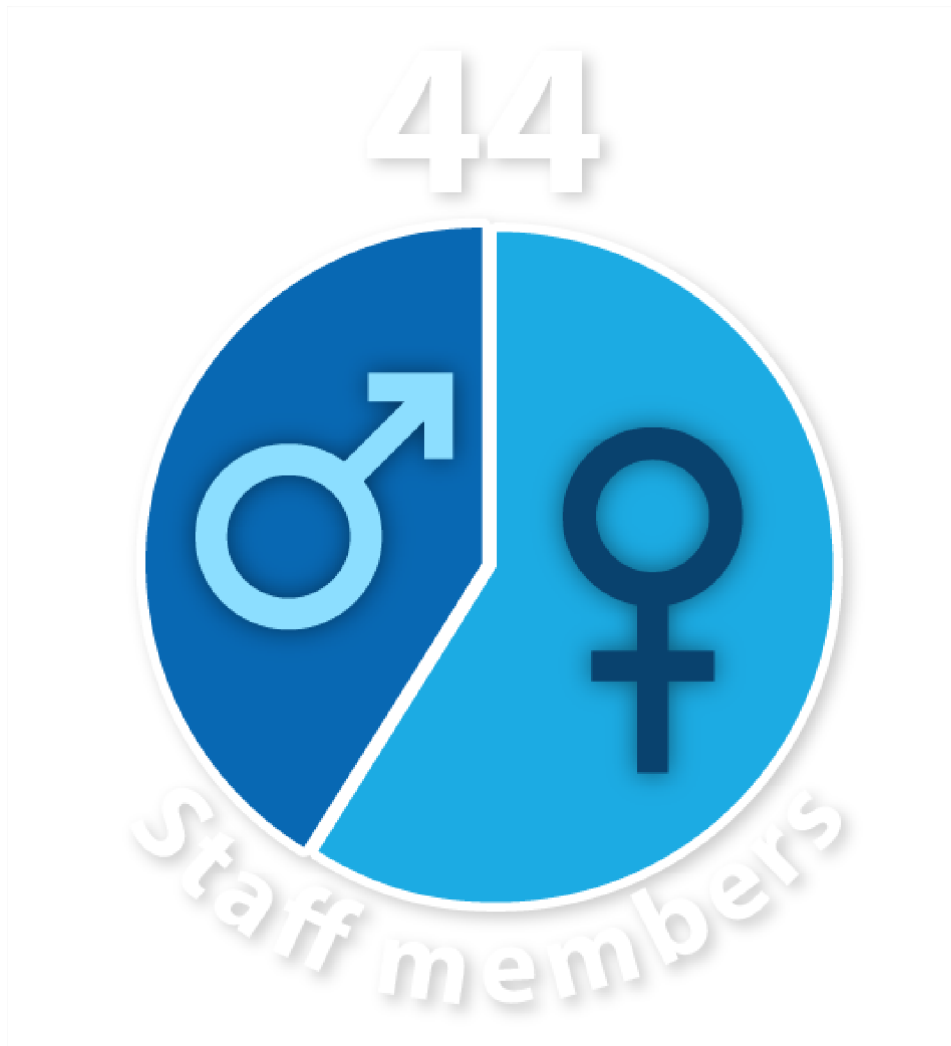
## Partner Organisations

We received funding from 19 different countries, with most coming from Norway (Norad, Ministry of Climate and Environment) and Kenya (UNEP).

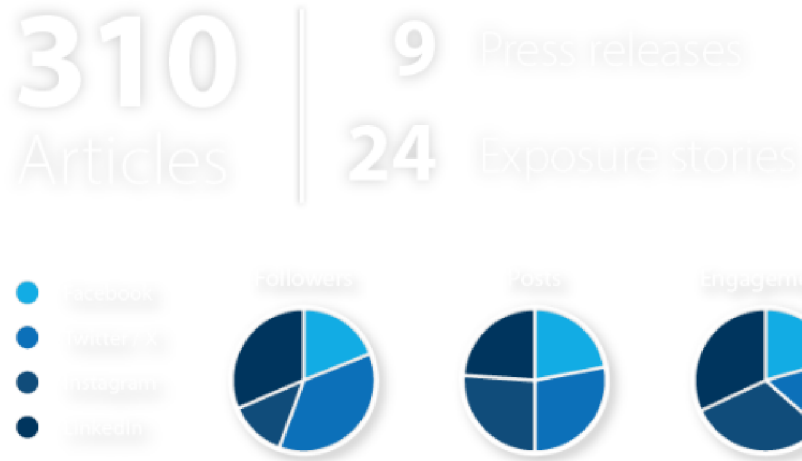


At GRID-Arendal, diversity is our strength. We have 44 staff (26 women and 18 men) from 20 different nationalities. We value

diverse backgrounds and perspectives as an essential component of driving meaningful change.



In 2023, GRID-Arendal's media presence expanded significantly, with 310 articles written by journalists around the world reaching a potential audience of 27 million—an impressive 229% increase! This growth reflects acknowledgment of our work in global issues. We shared key developments via nine press releases and provided in-depth insights via 24 exposure stories. We have a vibrant social media presence on these channels: Facebook, LinkedIn, X & Instagram.



## Highlights 2023

The impact of climate change is here and growing. 2023 was the hottest year on record, bringing more intense storms, droughts, and wildfires. All of Earth’s species are under massive pressure; ecosystems are collapsing, forests are being razed to the ground, and soils are becoming infertile. Millions of people are dying each year from exposure to pollution and chemicals.

This has sparked a worldwide effort, with 2023’s climate discussions marking the decisive shift away from fossil fuels. The operationalisation of the Loss and Damage fund, boasting pledges exceeding US\$700 million, was a notable milestone. Additionally, a new Global Framework on Chemicals was established, and we witnessed the inaugural year of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Currently, negotiations are in their concluding phases for a global instrument addressing plastic pollution, a significant outcome of UNEA-5. Notably, numerous other global and regional multilateral environmental agreements, many facilitated by UNEP, underscore the comprehensive approach taken in addressing environmental challenges.

GRID-Arendal proudly collaborates with UNEP, contributing to the collective effort to address the triple planetary crisis encompassing climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. Throughout the year, GRID-Arendal

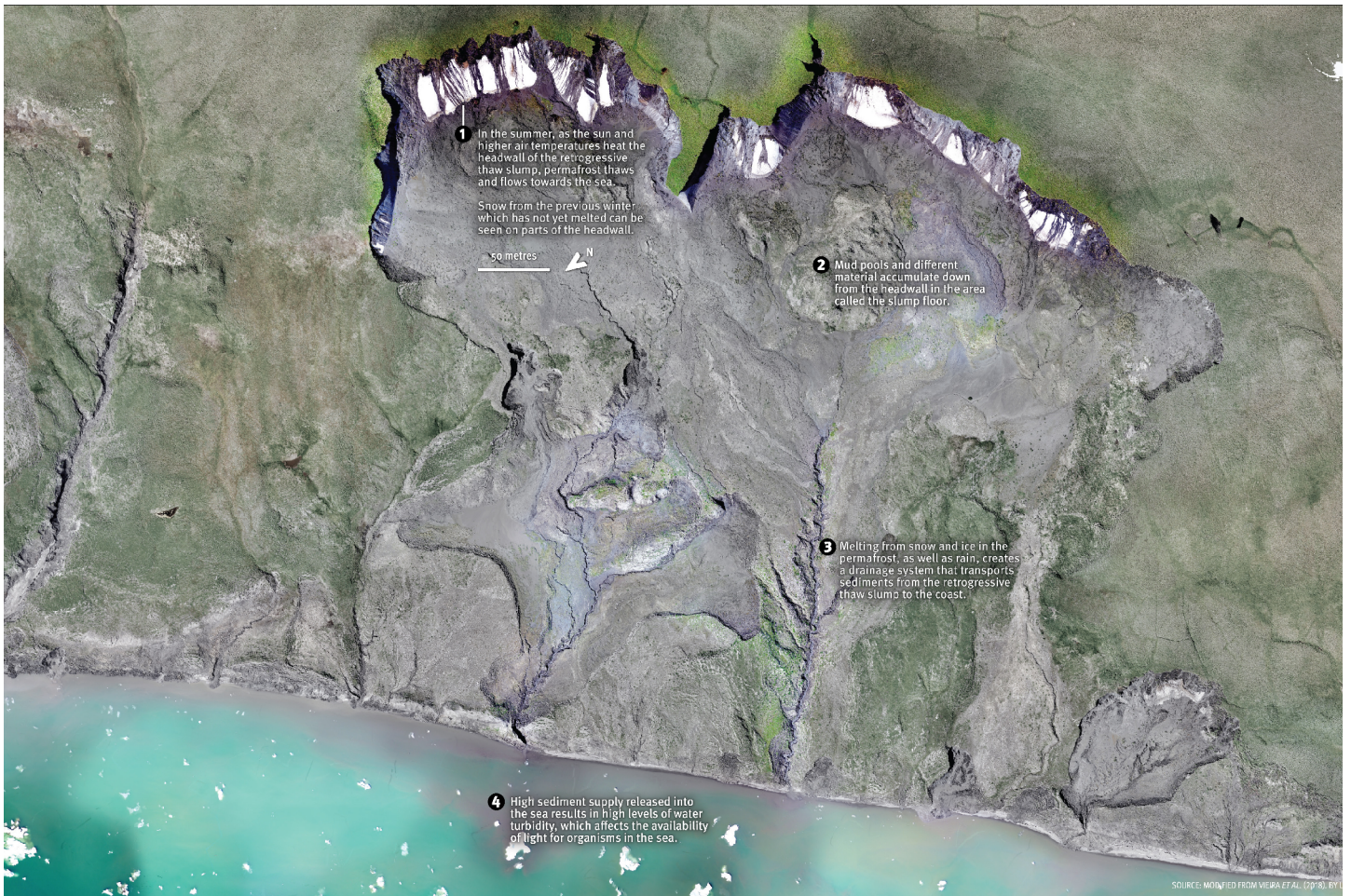


produced 27 publications. These publications serve as crucial scientific resources, aiding our endeavours to inspire decision-makers to take nature-positive actions.

## **Polar and Climate Programme**

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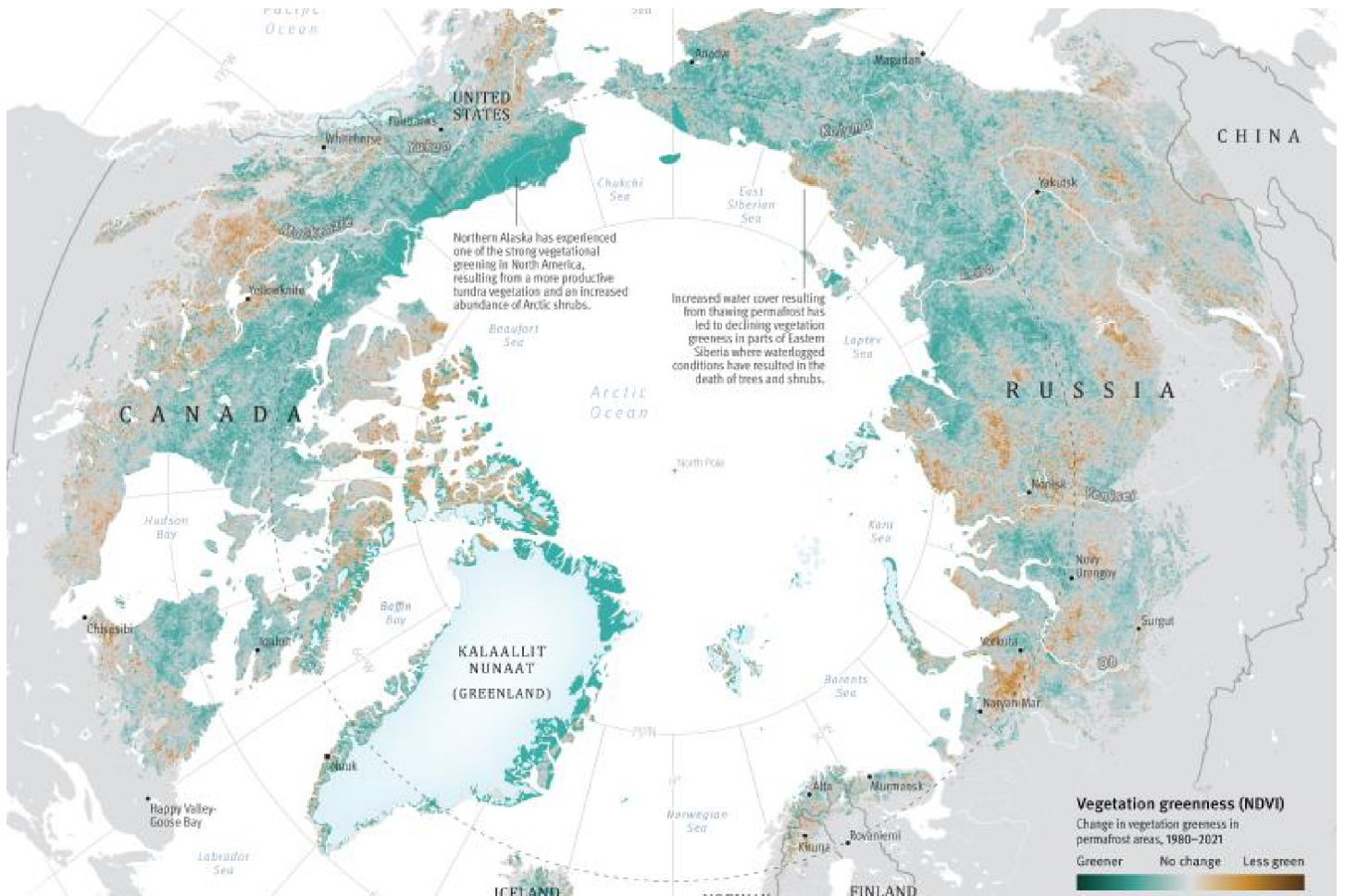
Rising global temperatures have left their mark, with permafrost thaw causing changes in landscapes, shoreline erosion, altering ecosystems, damaging infrastructure, and impacting the lives and livelihoods of Arctic residents. This was a key focus area for the Polar and Climate Programme in 2023.



The results from the “Nunataryuk” project (led by the Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI)) are highlighted in the [Arctic Permafrost Atlas](#). This comprehensive publication, created in collaboration with project partners, features 176 pages of maps, illustrations, photographs, and concise descriptions of permafrost and its transformations.



The atlas includes portraits of individuals who reside and work in the permafrost region, providing a vivid depiction of life on permafrost.



It is far from being an academic product in the traditional sense, as it gathers the knowledge from the voices of scientists, Indigenous Peoples, northern residents, and local practitioners to provide a dynamic and inclusive view of the challenges faced by the “country of permafrost”.

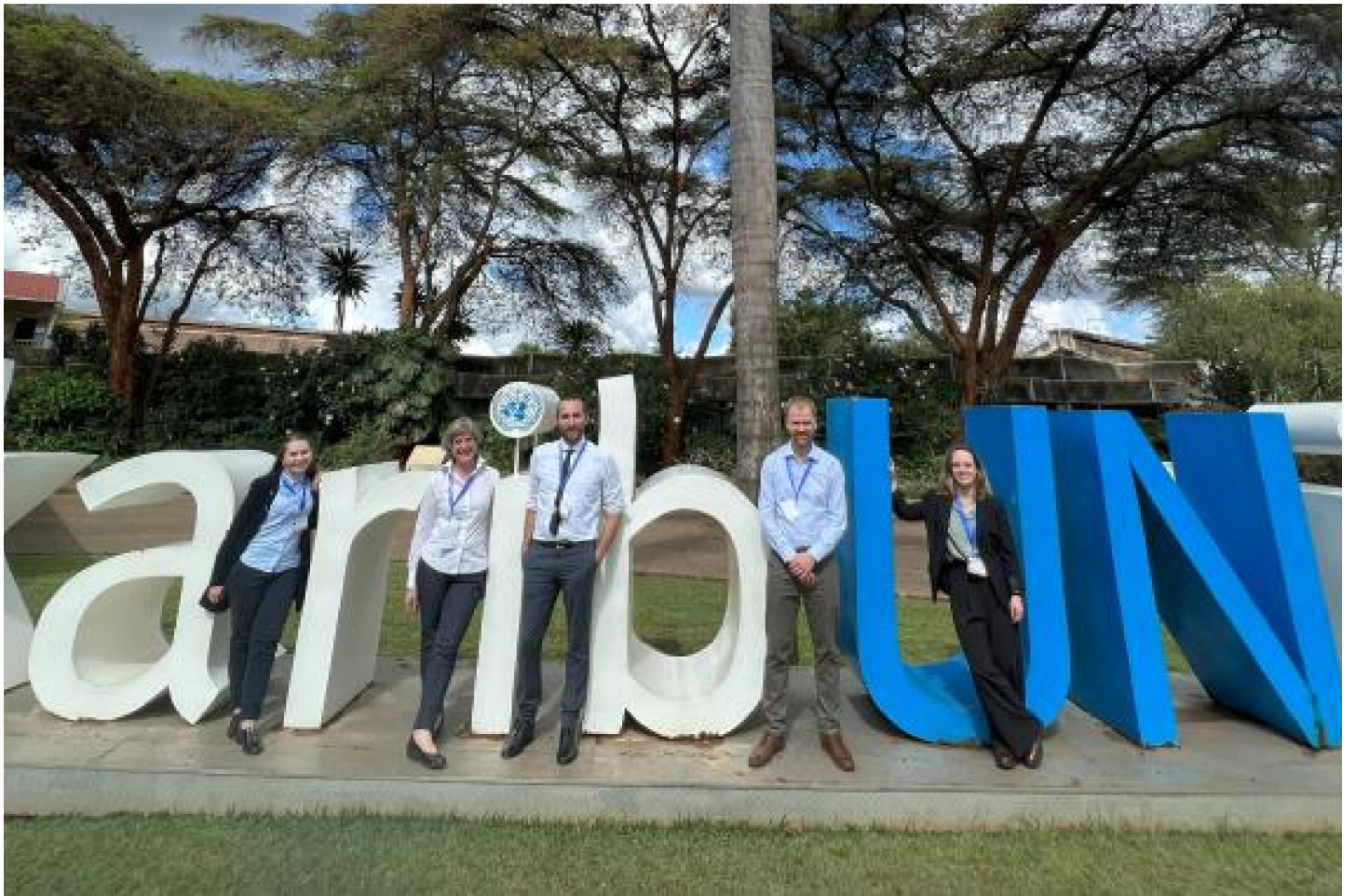


### Ten local solutions for global impact

This year, we published a coffee table book, in collaboration with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD): [Resilient Mountain Solutions: Ten Local Solutions for Global Impact](#). In this book, we present ten different types of [nature-based solutions](#) that combine social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development with adaptation, resilience, and preparedness for future risks from climate change.

## Waste and Marine Litter

Waste and marine litter are a significant issue, impacting ecosystems, economies, and societies. Through a range of activities, GRID-Arendal works towards a pollution-free planet with healthy ecosystems. This year, the work of the Waste and Marine Litter Programme focused on the ongoing negotiations of the international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, as well as ongoing work on nutrients and wastewater.



## **Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution - INC**

GRID-Arendal has been involved in the Plastics Treaty work in 2023 in a multitude of ways: by working closely with the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, working on the Science-Policy interface, and building capacity of negotiators and stakeholders.

## **High Ambition Coalition (HAC) to End Plastic Pollution**

A group of like-minded countries is committed to developing an ambitious international legally binding instrument based on a comprehensive and circular approach that ensures urgent action and effective interventions along the entire lifecycle of plastics. GRID-Arendal supports the coalition by providing communication services and organising events to raise awareness of its strategic goals and promote stakeholder collaboration and engagement.

In 2023, GRID-Arendal supported the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution by organising a series of webinars with speakers from academia, business, NGOs, and civil society



## **AFRIPAC**

In 2023, GRID-Arendal, in partnership with IUCN, launched a project called AFRIPAC aimed to empower five African nations' negotiating skills for a strong Global Treaty on plastic pollution.

The project aims to increase and strengthen knowledge and collaboration in Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, and Sierra Leone, and to further support the five countries to:

- Ensure global commitments to end plastic pollution are strengthened,
- Improve National action plans and policies, and
- Align national and regional instruments to global policy to prevent marine litter

Developing countries face unique challenges and often lack specialised skills to negotiate these types of treaties. To be



effective participants in the UN global plastics treaty negotiations, Small Island Developing States and Least Developed countries will need to have access to the most coherent and relevant knowledge and data to support their positions.

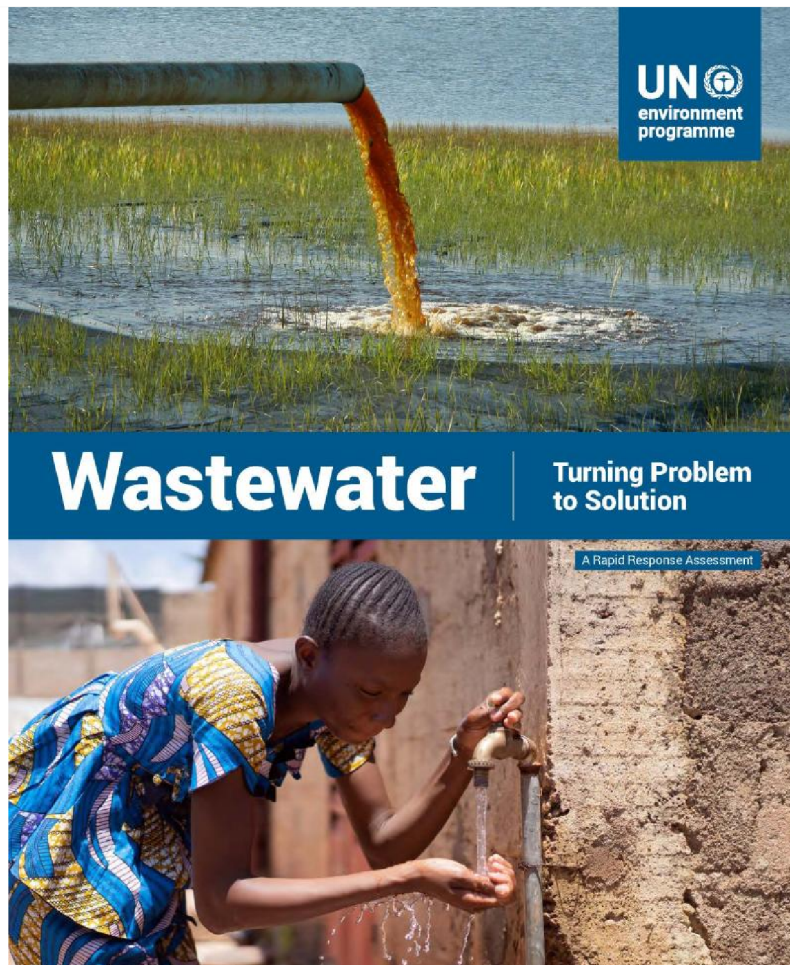
In 2023 we hosted a series of workshops on technical and legal needs for the negotiators, and stakeholders along the plastics lifecycle. Initially a needs assessment was done to identify the specific needs of the countries.



### **Science-policy work: Science-Policy Interface report**

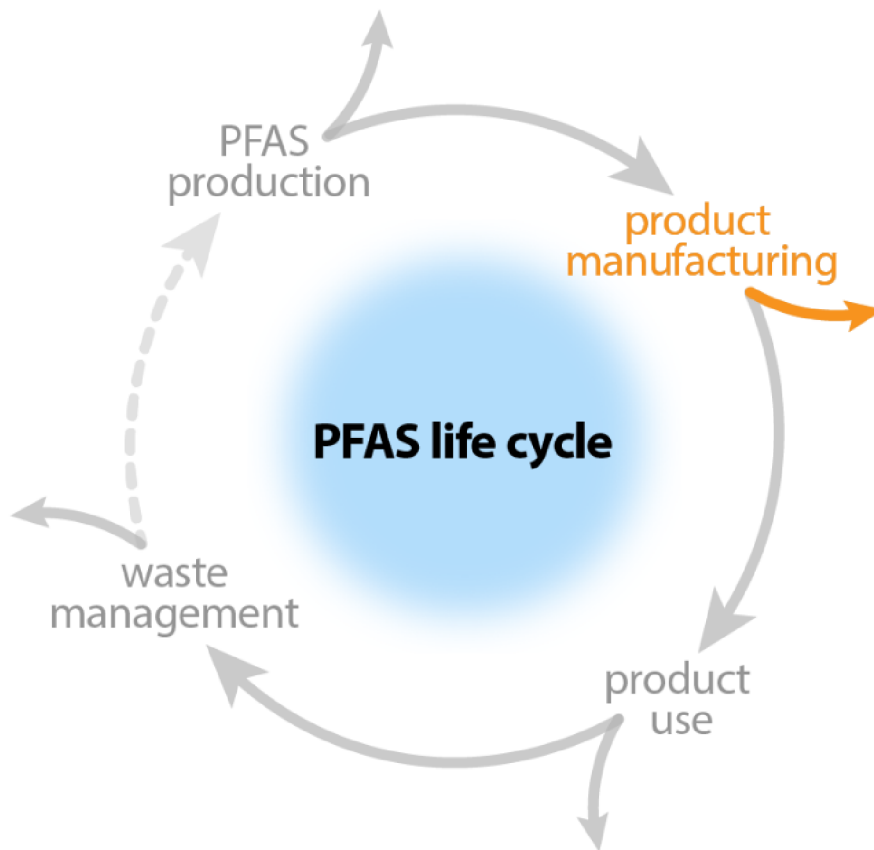
The report "[Science-Policy Interface for Plastic Pollution](#)" was organized within the framework of the Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues in the run-up to two major events: the third session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-3), which took place from 13 to 19 November 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya, and the second session of the ad hoc open-ended working group to prepare proposals for the Science-Policy Panel to Contribute Further to the Sound Management of Chemicals

and Waste and to Prevent Pollution, which took place in December 2023.



More than 10 years have passed since the release of the report '[Sick Water: The Central Role of Wastewater Management in Sustainable Development](#)', and despite some progress, significant amounts of wastewater are still being released untreated into the environment with negative repercussions for the environment and human livelihood.

This year we launched the report [“Wastewater - Turning problem to solution”](#), which urges decision makers and action takers from all regions of the world to implement three key actions to overcome some or all of seven barriers, and to put in place all or some of the six building blocks described in the publication. This report was launched during World Water Week on 23 August 2023.



### **Source to Sea**

The carbon-fluorine bond in the chemical structure of PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) is one of the strongest bonds known in nature. This stability is what makes PFAS problematic in the environment, as they do not easily break down. For these reasons, PFAS are commonly referred to as ‘forever chemicals’ and are of concern as exposure to PFAS can have negative impacts on the health of ecosystems and humans. [This StoryMap](#) - developed under the [Source to Seas – Zero Pollution 2030 project](#) - looks at these forever chemicals, their impact in Europe, and the case of the 3M factory in Belgium.

## **Marine Environment**

The Marine Environment Programme addresses a broad range of interlinked marine challenges and supports developing countries in achieving their international commitments including the SDGs, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Paris Agreement. The programme focuses on the larger

cross-cutting marine challenges, like ocean governance and blue carbon economy. The activities are implemented across various governance levels, from local coastal communities to national and international fora.



**Securing a Sustainable Future for Kelp Forests global synthesis report** is the most comprehensive knowledge review on kelp to date, revealing the state of science on the world's kelp forests and providing recommended actions to build the recovery of the world's kelp forests.

Aiming to improve our understanding of the value of kelp forests and provide recommendations to protect and sustainably manage them, the report also provides a range of policy and management interventions and options that can be used to maintain these remarkable ecosystems into the future and to support the people and economies that have depended on them for generations.



## **PANORAMA**

The world is facing unprecedented environmental crises. When addressing the multiple environmental issues, it is vital that organisations work closely together towards sustainable development.

**PANORAMA – Solutions for a Healthy Planet** is a global partnership promoting examples of inspiring, replicable solutions across a range of conservation and development topics, to enable cross-sectoral learning and upscaling of successes. PANORAMA serves a wide variety of institutions and individuals, allowing them to distill and share their experiences, challenges, lessons learned, and success factors in an online platform, helping practitioners to learn alongside their peers how similar challenges have been addressed, and to take action building from practices that had a positive impact in nature conservation and sustainable development. The PANORAMA platform currently hosts more than 1,400 solutions from over 1,000 solution providers (NGOs, government institutions, private sector, etc.) across the globe.

GRID-Arendal is a partner of PANORAMA, coordinates **PANORAMA Blue** (marine and coastal community) with other partners, and has supported PANORAMA's communications and outreach with the production of stories, newsletters, videos, and more.

## **Transboundary Governance and Environmental Crime**

The Transboundary Governance and Environmental Crime Programme works across a diverse range of projects, including the activities of the Tehran Convention and its Caspian Environmental Information Centre, the UNEP Playing for the Planet Alliance, and the Earth Observation for Sustainable Development project. Moreover, it supports the development of work on circular economy as well as a wide range of environmental crime projects. 2023 saw significant efforts go into working with partners in Guinea to reinforce fisheries governance, as well as contributing to national mapping and monitoring infrastructure.

# FIGHTING ILLEGAL FISHING IN GUINEA



REINFORCING  
FISHERIES  
GOVERNANCE IN  
GUINEA

Reinforcing fisheries governance in Guinea

The fisheries sector of Guinea is of paramount importance to its society and economy, yet it is known to have considerable problems with illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

**This project** aims to reinforce the fisheries' governance in Guinea and reduce IUU fishing activities in its Exclusive Economic Zone.



Environmental crime is a multifaceted threat. It encompasses illegal logging and timber trade, illegal fisheries, illegal mining, poaching, illegal wildlife trade, toxic waste transportation and dumping, and more. This crime sphere not only harms the environment but also fosters corruption, undermines human security, damages livelihoods, local economies, and sustainable development prospects.





Since 2015, GRID-Arendal's **Investigative Environmental Journalism Grant Programme**, funded by Norad and run by GRID-Arendal's Transboundary Governance and Environmental Crime Programme (TG&EC), has been a pillar of support for journalists in this field.



Valentin Emelin, Head of GRID-Arendal's TG&EC Programme and creator of this grant program, reflects on its evolution:



*“It’s heartening to see the increasing diversity and impact of the investigations. Each year, the calibre of applications continues to impress, and this is the first year that the majority of shortlisted applicants and winners were women.”*

## **Production and Communication Office**

The Production and Communication Office - most commonly referred to as PCO - works with the content programmes to adorn their work with impactful visualisations.

Tasks involving the processing of information to create tangible products often have a similar workflow. Sharing the lessons

learned from projects passing through the PCO led to meaningful discussions about improving daily work processes.

Taking advantage of the large variety of competences of the team, we allocated time specifically for reviewing products from the past and present to gain valuable new insights.

Simultaneously, taking some time to sit down and discuss products during team meetings incentivized collaboration beyond projects. Therefore, this focus not only improved efficiency of the work, but also the bond of the team.

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The triple planetary crisis infographic is a great example of a collaborative project. This project is among the first "interactive infographics" that GRID-Arendal produced (Try it out on the right!). What makes this type of graphic valuable, is that a lot more information can be included as compared to a static graphic!

Production required some research and development, to which several PCO members contributed. This newly found knowledge was then used in several other projects.



### **Storymap: Human Wildlife Coexistence – Royal Bengal tigers in Bhutan**

This StoryMap is among the more traditional products that GRID produces. Nevertheless, care was taken during the design process to create a more immersive experience for the reader.

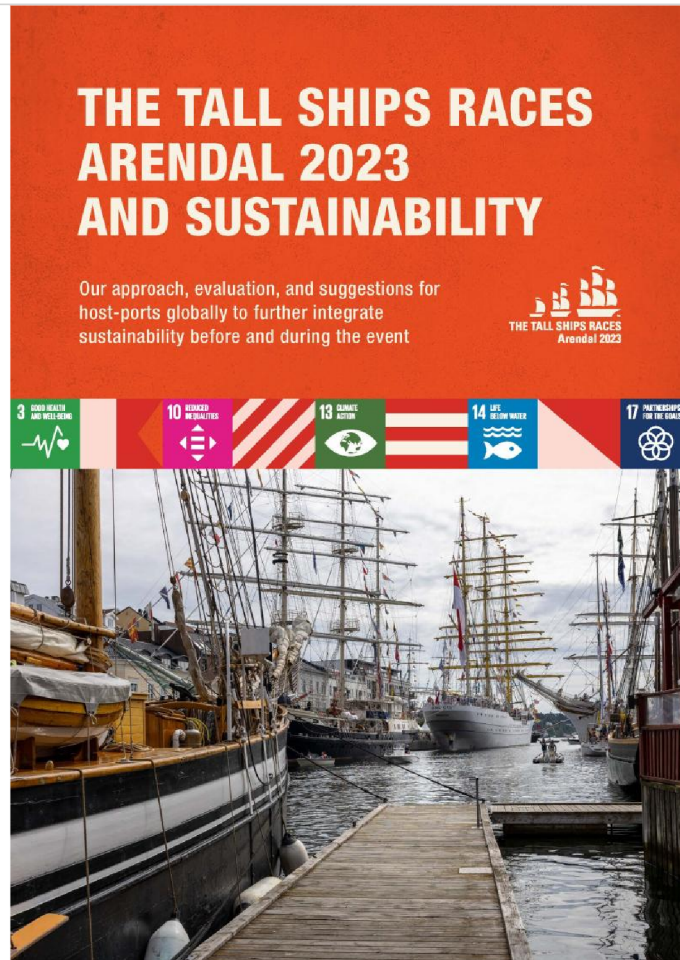
It contains a variety of captivating photos, video interviews, and beautifully designed maps. In the end, this led to the StoryMap being very well received by the audience: it was a finalist in the

2023 ArcGIS StoryMaps Competition! Check it out yourself in the link below.

## Human Wildlife Coexistence - Royal Beng...

Solutions for Mountain Communities facing a Changing Climate

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/37a2a12ac45042a7856cc97efce6e3d5>



This year we worked locally with Arendal town organising the 2023 Tall Ships Races. We helped them to focus the event on becoming greener. Tall Ships Races Arendal has taken a proactive approach towards sustainability by making the sustainability committee part of the event's core organising team. Together with our large group of volunteers, we worked on integrating sustainability into each aspect of the event.

Our efforts were guided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet,

now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. GRID-Arendal helped support this work, and we do believe it in line with our focus on becoming more green.



Arendalsuka is the largest political gathering in Norway held annually since 2012. The event's mission is clear: strengthen the belief in political empowerment and democracy through open debate and involvement. Over the course of 5 days, the city of Arendal is filled with an interesting and educational variety of exhibitions and events.

This is an important arena for GRID-Arendal to connect with politicians, stakeholders, and partners, enabling us to engage in subjects relevant to the work we do. All of this right here in Arendal and our very own backyard!

Follow the link below to view our events that took place during [Arendalsuka 2023](#)

# Project Support Office

The Project Support Office (PSO) was created in May 2022 to provide operational, financial, and administrative services to projects and to the organisation. Its functions cover the following areas:

- Project management support
- Procurement of consultants
- Document management
- Management of UNEP (UN Environment Program) contracts not under a content programme
- Support to the Board and Senior Management Team
- Office support and other services

PSO provided support to project kick off and close out meetings, and to the implementation of projects to ensure that implementation is tracked, monitored and in compliance with financial requirements and regulations as well as donor agreements. PSO was involved in assisting project managers (PMs) in putting together budgets for project proposals.

A new GRID-Arendal Procurement Policy was issued in November. The policy sets out the principles that shall govern the procurement of goods and services of GRID-Arendal. The purpose of the policy is to minimise procurement-related risks by establishing the standards for professional procurement to ensure that GRID-Arendal obtains Value for Money in all its procurement activities, and that procurement is conducted in a transparent, efficient, and cost-effective manner that respects ethical principles, sustainability, and the environment.

PSO played a crucial role in the functioning of the organisation. It contributed to a range of day-to-day office services including

the following: answering phone calls and emails; greeting clients and visitors; managing office supplies; maintaining office equipment; coordinating events and office activities; sorting and distributing mail; organising health and safety training; and others.

## **Financial Report**

Here is the Annual Financial Report

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## **Conclusion**

As we move into the future, GRID-Arendal is aiming for even greater impact. Through our collaborations with the United Nations Environment Programme and partners worldwide, we will continue working for positive, sustainable solutions for the global challenges we are facing.

In closing, we extend our gratitude to our team, partners, and supporters who make our mission possible. Together, we will continue to turn environmental data into actionable insights, fostering a world where sustainable practices are the norm. Thank you for being part of our journey towards a brighter and greener future.

This version of GRID-Arendal's Annual Report has been adapted into a digital format. [Please click here for PDF format.](#)

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