

Lessons Learned from Supporting ClientEarth in Developing Its Africa Strategy



ACE D&H Consultants recently supported ClientEarth in the development of its new Africa Strategy, an assignment that brought together national partners, community stakeholders, and ClientEarth staff to co-create a vision and pathway for environmental justice on the continent. The experience provided rich lessons on what it takes to deliver a decolonised, partner-centred strategy development process that balances analytical rigour with grounded lived experience.

The process was designed deliberately from the ground up. National partners initiated the work by conducting a detailed documentary review of their own journeys, achievements, gaps, and structural challenges. They also led political economy analyses that clarified the complex governance and power dynamics shaping environmental decision-making in their countries. Crucially, these partners engaged directly with community stakeholders, surfacing local priorities and contextual intelligence that could never have emerged through a top-down approach. This early investment in country-driven analysis laid the foundation for a strategy firmly anchored in lived realities rather than assumptions.

These bottom-up insights were then workshopped jointly, through online and face-to-face sessions facilitated by ACE D&H's bilingual evaluation and strategy experts. The bilingual support proved particularly important, allowing French- and English-speaking partners to engage equally, strengthening ownership, inclusion, and collective problem-solving. The participatory workshops enabled partners and ClientEarth staff to refine the theory of change, articulate a shared vision and mission for Africa, and identify strategic axes that reflected community priorities as well as ClientEarth's comparative advantage.

A central moment in the process was the face-to-face meeting in London, which built strategically on an existing partner event to maximise efficiency and minimise costs. This gathering created the space for deeper reflection, honest debate, and collective prioritisation over several days. It reinforced cohesion among partners and provided a rare opportunity for cross-country learning and alignment. One of the clearest lessons from this assignment was the transformative effect of leadership engagement.

The direct involvement of ClientEarth's CEO throughout the process ensured seamless alignment between the Africa Strategy and the wider organisational strategy. The CEO's presence signalled institutional commitment, strengthened trust with partners, and created the legitimacy needed to make ambitious decisions. ACE D&H has observed across multiple assignments that when senior leadership is active and visible, strategy development becomes a meaningful exercise with real prospects for influence, resourcing, and institutional backing. Conversely, the absence of such leadership often results in strategies that remain underused, disconnected from organisational priorities, or perceived as compliance outputs.



Finally, the assignment highlighted the importance of intentionally designing inclusion into the process. ACE D&H deployed bilingual consultants, while ClientEarth's dedicated country teams/facilitators supported partners in their own languages and contexts, making participation easier and more meaningful. This approach reinforced the core objective: developing a strategy that is not only analytically sound but also genuinely rooted in the voices, aspirations, and priorities of African partners and the communities they serve.

Overall, the collaboration with ClientEarth demonstrated the value of decolonised, partner-led strategy development grounded in political economy analysis, lived experience, and leadership commitment. For ACE D&H, this assignment reaffirmed the principle that strategies are most powerful when they emerge from inclusive processes that give equal weight to community insight, partner expertise, and organisational alignment.

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If you need expert facilitation for your next institutional diagnosis or strategy development process, please contact ACE D&H Consultants @ ace.dh@outlook.com.

