

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/video/scaling-sustainability/>

Actor Harrison Ford shares his longstanding commitment to preserving nature through Conservation International, joined by the organization's CEO, M. Sanjayan. In conversation with Stanford Professor of the Practice Tina Seelig, the environmental leaders urge entrepreneurs and engineers to build disruptive innovations, while describing how strategic thinking is at the heart of the self-sustaining solutions they launch around the world.



Transcript

(dramatic instrumental music) - [Harrison] Today's greatest threat is not climate change, not pollution, not famine, flood or fire.. It's that we've got people in charge of important shit who don't believe in science.. So what are we at Conservation International going to do? We're working to change the conversation around nature.. We're focusing on jobs and livelihoods and security.. It's not about animals and trees and icebergs.. It's about the ability of a community to survive.. It's about your child.. What you're putting in your body.. Your future.. We'll help equip communities and businesses to lead..

Show them it's in their own self interest to protect nature.. We'll give people the tools they need to change their world.. (dramatic instrumental music) there is a new generation of leaders.. I have a thought for them.. Go for it.. All in.. Stick with it.. If we don't stop the destruction of nature nothing else will matter.. Simple as that.. (dramatic instrumental music) (audience applauding) - Okay, our first guest is Dr..

M.. Sanjayan who's an environmental scientist specializing in the role of conservation and saving people and nature.. He serves as Conservation International's Chief Executive Officer.. Our other guest is Harrison Ford who serves as Vice Chairman of the Board of Conservation International.. He is strongly committed to environmental concerns and has served on the Board of Conservation International for decades.. Please join me in welcoming our special guests.. (audience applauding) So thank you so much for coming all the way to Stanford to talk to our students.. How many of you are familiar with Conservation International? Raise your hand.. Okay, only a few.. Well this is an incredible opportunity to educate everyone and I think we're gonna have a really meaningful discussion..

Can you tell us a little bit about the organization? The mission, the vision.. Why has this organization been around for so long? Sanjayan, maybe do you want to start? - Who hasn't been around for so long.. - Harrison, do you want to start? - I wouldn't know where to finish.. Why don't we ask Sanjayan to? - Sure.. - Is that a problem that we need to solve? - The ocean is talking.. - Maybe.. - I'll try, okay.. So I'd just say Conservation International has been around for about 30 years.. Almost exactly 30 years, a little bit more than that.. And it was founded on a very simple premise..

And that is people need nature to thrive.. That it's in your own enlightened self interest to protect these things.. The land, the water, wildlife that's around us because it ultimately provides everything that we have.. From your jobs, to food, to medicine to virtually the air we breathe.. When people ask me what's the mission of the organization I usually just sort of cut down to one simple line which is we try to protect that part of nature that is of most value to people.. And it's important that I balance that out with that word that it's most important to people.. And if you ask the simple question why.. Why not just protect all of nature? I'd be fine with that.. I personally would be fine with that.. But it turns out that if you really want conservation to stick..

You want it to stick in faraway places that you may never get to see.. Like Liberia or Suriname or Madagascar or Indonesia or Brazil.. Places that we work in.. Then at the end of the day when once our attention shifts somewhere else we have to have created some kind of virtuous cycle that will allow that conservation of nature to continue long after we're gone.. And if people aren't involved in that dialogue then it won't happen.. It will always be a niche, it will always be a hobby.. It will always be something that people who have will participate in, and people who don't simply just don't have the opportunity to.. - So

this wonderful video is really moving.. But it also points out that there are a lot of people in very powerful positions who aren't engaged in this.. And in fact, deny that this is a problem or want to avoid it..

How do you deal with that? How do you deal with solving this problem when there are people who are really not engaged? - Well, part of the way of dealing with it is to create economic alternatives to unsustainable development.. That's one of the very things we started with.. When I joined Conservation International 30 years ago we had a three to five million dollar budget.. And we were picking up Tagua nuts which are palm nuts and selling them to Patagonia to make buttons out of.. And we were giving people an economic alternative to unsustainable development.. And that continues to be the model that I think is most useful.. So people who are involved in entrepreneurial enterprises I think are a big part of the solution to create new ways of addressing the issues.. To take advantage of the technology to create jobs and a marketplace that helps affect the condition of nature.. One of the things that's been most feasible is a notion of monetizing the services of nature.. Putting an actual value on it and allowing that information to generate change..

We can't provide for ourselves.. We don't have the technology, we don't have the capital to provide for ourselves what nature provides to us in its healthy state.. Clean water from an undisturbed water shed.. Clean air, which we've got a very pressing need for.. Sources of food, sources of pollination.. All of these things are the services of nature that we cannot afford as human beings to replicate for ourselves.. And there are economic opportunities.. And I'm delighted when I see the amount of.. I just, I saw Al Gore two years ago at TED in Vancouver.. And he gave a talk ten years after his first talk..

He talked about how the effects of climate change, the detrimental effects of climate change had progressed even faster than anticipated.. But an even greater, even more important than that perhaps was the fact that the cost of alternative sources of energy had come down much more.. That while the degradation was going on at a greater rate than thought, the costs of alternative energy were becoming less and less.. So there is great hope in technology.. There's great hope in the business model for change.. - Can I? - Please, please.. - Let me just add one thing to that.. So I completely agree.. Look, the folks right now either in this country or around the world who are still in denial.. I hope that's something good to drink..

(audience laughs) Are doing do willfully.. There is probably a small percentage of the population who somehow doesn't really believe it.. But I think really smart business people, really smart politicians, really smart individuals they are making a choice to ignore what's right in front of them.. It is no longer a question of you don't know.. It just does not ring true to me.. And everywhere around the world that I travel I see leaders in business and leaders in civil society and government repeatedly emphasize this message that the time is now.. Sustainability is a real issue we need to deal with.. Protection of nature is something we really need to deal with.. This morning, I had breakfast with the Vice President of Guyana.. Interesting guy, he's an indigenous leader..

Guyana is a small country in South America where 85% of the country is forested.. And we're sitting right here, just very close to here.. And he looked at the hills.. He's basically looking over at the, so the hills that divide this area from the coast.. Sort of I'd say like Woodside and the hills above that.. And he's like, "how is all of that still green?" Like, why isn't it all houses? And I said it's the water shed for San Francisco.. And there's like a light bulb going off in his head because that's exactly what we're talking about in Guyana, with him.. But what was the light bulb for him is that he just sort of thought.. Look, this is the richest place on the planet you can possibly imagine.. And even here, people need an economic incentive in order to protect nature..

- So we have a room full of people who are very entrepreneurial.. Many of these folks are gonna go out and start companies.. How do you bake this type of thinking into new ventures? So that when they get started this isn't something that gets added in later.. It gets something that's baked in in the beginning thinking about these things.. In the way you manufacture, the way you distribute.. The types of products you provide.. How do you do that? Is that something that you spend time thinking about and working on? - Yeah.. - Well I think Walmart for instance spent a lot of time thinking about it.. And changed their business model significantly to be able to represent to their customers and to their employees that they were doing their part in creating sustainable supply roots for the products that they offered.. I think it worked to their advantage..

And it reduced their costs.. So I mean, there's one example of a company that has made real strides in that area.. - Great, and I know that there are lots of stories.. I spent some time on your website which was very impressive in terms of the breadth and depth of the types of things you're doing.. It would be great if you could maybe share a couple of stories of examples of this type of transition and the type of levers that you've been able to use in order to effect change.. - From the very beginning of Conservation International we had on our original Board a man named Chuck Hedlund who is an executive of Exxon Oil.. We thought a lot of the conservation community resisted our working with people in the extractive industries.. But we worked with Exxon to improve their practices in the field to create a system of best practices.. Which not only helped protect the people who were living close to their oil fields and the places where they were doing their work.. But made them more attractive to their shareholders..

And we thought, I mean Conservation International was, people found that suspicious that we were willing to work with business.. But business had really stepped up to the plate for us.. And I think our history with business has been very, very important.. - Yeah and generally very positive.. - Yeah.. - So having worked at Conservation International and been involved

for so long.. Have you seen some significant shifts in the way the organization is looking at change and the types of opportunities? Has there been some insight that has led to different types of programs? - Well we started out talking about biodiversity and migration pathways for animals.. And really we, our definition of the work that we need to do that needs to be done, shifts from day to day.. We really have found that our most important product is strategic thinking.. Ways of addressing the issues that continue to crop up..

Ways to manage the available resources.. And to move people to be, to positively contribute to the solutions for the environmental problems that we have.. - I mean I'd say look.. We're a relatively modest sized organization.. We're small enough to be nimble but big enough to have an impact at the scale of say, a country.. And if you're in that space you want to be either the first or you want to be the last.. There is value to being both, right? In terms of the cost of entry and the impact you can have.. You know, couple of things just in reflection on sort of the questions you asked about entrepreneurship and how the business.. When we started, and look I've only been at CI for three years and I've been the CEO for all of seven months.. And that's a day by day enterprise so we'll see how that goes..

But I'll say that I've been in conservation for a long time.. And the one thing I've noticed with businesses is.. Your business are doing it because it really is in their own interest.. Now sustainability equals availability.. Companies are no longer doing it because of CSR reasons.. You're not doing it simply to be a good player or a good actor.. It's well beyond that right now.. So when we started with Starbucks.. A company that if you go into Starbucks pick up a bag of coffee, look at the back you'll see our logo on it.. That's a hard thing to do..

Get your logo onto something so branded like Starbucks right? It happened over a period of almost 20 years.. When we started they had like 5% of their coffee chain in a sustainable supply.. Today it's essentially 100%.. So every drop of coffee that you buy at Starbucks basically comes from a farm.. We're talking 350,000 farmers in dozens of countries around the world.. Where you cannot cut a tree down in order to grow coffee.. You have to send your kid to school if you're going to sell coffee to Starbucks.. And then a variety of other metrics.. They are including pesticide use, water use, etc.. Now Starbucks is doing it partly to be a good social citizen..

But they're doing it also because genuinely there's fundamental issues about land that is available for coffee growing in an era of climate change, in an era of dramatic change.. So it really is in their own interest to be ahead of this.. And I think Walmart and all the other companies are doing that as well.. When CI gets involved in a project, for the most part we're hopefully trying to be a little disruptive.. We're kind of coming at something and starting to ask a question like.. How can we think about this project in an entirely different way? And sort of step back and see if there's something fundamental we can shake that can just tip the whole thing over.. And there's not a lot of value in being a player that's just going to do something that everyone else is doing.. At least for our organization at the scale that we work in.. - So what kind of levers of you view that you have when you go into these organizations or these whole systems? Where are the places where you go okay, if I push this button something big is going to happen? - So can I give you one story? So this is one of my favorite stories about really an innovative project that someone at CI did.. So there's a woman named Sarah Frazee..

She works in our South Africa office.. She's worked in this program for like 15 years.. Really trying to figure out something.. A lot of Southern Africa, we're talking about Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, countries like that are heavily fenced.. And the fences have been put in sort of during colonialism and then after that.. And it divides land that you have cattle in and places that you have wildlife in.. And the reason for that is they want to keep cattle away from wildlife because of transmission of certain diseases like foot and mouth disease.. Foot and mouth disease won't harm you or the eat you eat but it could impact dairy production.. So they want to keep them apart.. Now what started off as a kind of a good idea of growing local cattle industry really had very perverse incentive..

Because what happened in South Africa for example is that the people who ended up with the land that is disease-free, tended to be either white or privileged or somehow politically connected.. And the people who ended up with all that wildlife land to have cattle on, tended to be mostly black mostly indigenous, mostly communities.. So they have lots and lots of cattle but absolutely no market for it.. Just to put this in perspective in a country like Botswana.. You have 300,000 people employed in the cattle industry.. 300,000 out of a population of two million.. Of that, only 700, 700 out of 300,000 have access to market.. So this is a major problem.. So how do you change it? You can't talk to community about grazing better or being more wildlife-friendly.. A chief told me in South Africa right outside Kruger National Park..

The premier wildlife destination in all of Africa.. Said to me, "I will care about your rhinos when you care about my cattle." So the traditional model has been trying to take these cows and doing some sort of quarantine.. It doesn't work, for lots of reasons I can tell you later.. So what our person did eventually is hit upon a pretty brilliant idea.. She created a mobile butcher shop, a mobile abattoir.. So instead of moving the cattle to market she just brought the market to the cows.. So she built a machine, she built the whole thing.. It's like state of the art.. We have the intellectual property on it.. She also created an online auctioning system..

So long story short.. If you go to Kruger National Park right now you can go and stay at \$2,000 a night lodges owned by people like Richard Branson.. There's a fence, right outside the fence is the poorest black community in all of Southern Africa.. Right there, right next to this \$2,000 a night fence.. Those community members, for the first time ever.. This summer,

were able to sell their cows into the park for those lodges that you stay in.. Before that the meat was coming from at least 200 miles away and in one case was coming from Norway, imagine that.. You're importing beef from Norway to feed tourists in a lodge when there's cows six kilometers away.. So it was just this transformation that had major social impact.. It's like it's subversive what she did..

She created a system by which you can bring that there and now we can actually talk to this community.. Now the community is actually starting to ask.. Okay, I get it.. I get why this park actually adds value to my life.. Because this thing that I care so much about, my cattle I can actually sell, I have a market for it.. So innovation is not just, in that case there's engineering.. There is kind of an online app that she created that brings all the people together for the right sale.. But it's also fundamentally asking a question about justice and society.. And asking why is it this way and how can we tip it? - What an interesting story, thank you.. - Yeah and she's an amazing person..

- I'm sure that there's so many stories like that.. In a few minutes I'm gonna open it up to questions and we'll sort of go back and forth with questions from the audience and also questions from me.. So start thinking about your burning questions here.. That was an interesting story.. And I wonder how you measure success.. Okay, because success in the short run and the long run are really interesting things.. In an organization such as Conservation International I'm sure you have some metrics that you, you've got some dashboard there you're looking at and saying.. How are we doing against our goals? - Never well enough.. So there continues to be a struggle to perfect the models that we have.. But metrics are very important and they need to be transparent as well..

And that was a very important part of how we organized our work.. And a lot of the work that's done through CI, is we pass through funds which we are able to get from governments from international institutions to people who are, who have a have a model of change.. But we are very concerned with the metrics of measuring the effect of those things.. And that's why when I talk about the strategy of this organization that's a central focus for me.. - Absolutely.. There's a beautiful quote on the wall somewhere, or on the floor around here about the question that you ask nature and the answer that nature gives back is sort of, measurement is sort of the answer that nature gives back.. You can't ask the question if you don't have the right measure setup for it.. It's a massive challenge for every conservation organization.. It's easy in some ways to say I'm saving this species or this place.. But the minute you get beyond that and you talk about a whole river system or a whole landscape or seascape, it becomes really complicated..

So we have approximate metrics of activity but then we also look at the longer term things which have to do with both human well-being but also the state of that ecosystem.. For me, what I use in some ways as a measure is I want to ask myself.. Can this project stand on its own feet even after we're gone? There is no pride in being in a place for a very long time if you are a non-profit.. Because your job should be to put yourself out of a job in every place you work.. And if you approach it in that way you're approaching it with a lifecycle of a project.. It means that within 10 years I want every project that we do to essentially be self-sustained, self-generating.. Create a virtuous cycle within that project.. Now, you might have some level of philanthropy in there.. But philanthropy cannot be the driver of that kind of persistent change.. There has to be the kick in the ass to get things going..

- So how do you create a movement? I mean, we were chatting about this earlier.. Are there any analogies of other issues that have been really difficult to tackle and what can we learn from them? - Right now there's a lot.. You go first because I definitely have a feeling about this.. - Well I have a lot of feelings and it's very complex.. Movements.. We spent a lot of time talking about helping to create a movement for change.. The problem in my mind is that movements are much more likely to sell t-shirts than they are to make change.. And they very quickly shift.. But it's very hard to use a movement to create the specific kinds of activity which are necessary to make the change.. But again we're seeing today students of this high school in Florida are making, are in a position because of the very, the feeling that is part of their dilemma..

Part of what they're talking about.. It's so strong emotionally that it cuts across a lot of resistance.. And I'm seeing what I think is a moment where we may begin to address the issue of gun violence because of the passion and the immediacy of their access to the means of communication.. And the way we feel when we see these things.. I'm very hopeful about that - So do we have to have situations like that with regard to the environment to stimulate a movement? Does it have to be a crisis? - I don't know if it has to be.. But the first time I came to America I was 12 years old and my parents brought me here on a vacation and we went to two places, New York and Los Angeles.. And that was my impression of America in the 80s.. Which that basically killed my chance of coming to school in America for my parents.. But I distinctly remember landing in Los Angeles and not being able to see any of the buildings because of the pollution in the air.. It was extraordinary..

And now you fly in on a routine basis and it's completely different.. And if you fly to go into China.. You know, this year I was just in Beijing like a month ago.. It had unusual air quality, in terms of good air quality.. You could actually see the buildings across the road and things like that because they've done a pretty intense campaign to get rid of coal fired sort of heating plants in their houses.. I think if there's something immediate like that.. Citizens in Delhi, citizens in Beijing are demanding change in terms of air quality.. And I think it'll happen faster than we predict.. Like it did in Los Angeles.. When something like that just seemed like just the way it was always going to be..

But I think for some of the other change that we talk about.. What's happening to the civication of the oceans or even

climate change and sort of that.. So it's harder, I agree it is a bit harder.. I think you need some empathy.. And I think you need people to be able to see a pathway to make that change real in their lives.. Because I think despair alone won't get you there.. You have to have some level of shock or despair coupled with the ability to actually do something about it.. - I think also, I'm reminded of a situation when I was trying to get my parents to recycle years and years ago.. And they thought it was very quaint that I was recycling.. You know newspapers, we had newspapers in those days..

And until the dump in their town got filled up and they were getting charged lots of extra money for having another garbage can.. And guess what they started doing, recycling.. So that once they had a financial incentive.. So I think there are people who are motivated for very different things.. So do you think about those different levers? Some people are gonna be motivated by empathy and the long term vision.. And those people who really you just have to hit their pocketbook.. - Yeah for sure, look.. I protect nature because I just love it.. I still hang onto a little place in Montana because I like going for a walk in the woods knowing there's something bigger than me that could jump out of the forest and bite my head off.. (audience laughs) And it kind of works for me..

It just puts a little bit of interest in all our lives.. But that proposition.. Save the forest because it might kill you.. It's just clearly not gonna work for the majority of the planet.. So I think you need to meet folks where they are.. And you have to make whatever the cause is that you think is so important.. How is it that Harrison and myself and our Board and some of my friends who are in this audience are dedicating, in my case and in many of our cases a huge part of our lives to this because we think it's so important? And yet, so many people we see feel like or seem like they're walking around the world with blinders on.. Right? And that strikes me, it scares me.. And I think part of it has to do with making it reasonable and interesting and important to their life in something that matters to them.. Not in terms of what matters to me..

I think the big challenge with the environment to be honest, is we've always been screaming the message about why it's important to whoever is screaming that message.. As opposed to meeting folks where they're at.. - Right, so who gets the first question? Back there.. Will you stand up and speak really loud? Thank you so much, that was really very moving.. So for those people who might be listening on the podcast and didn't hear.. She's from Costa Rica and was talking about the impact that Conservation International has had very specifically on the country.. Thank you so much.. - It's not a plant, I promise - Yeah, yeah.. (audience laughs) - But Costa Rica is really a leader when it comes to valuation of nature and natural capital.. And they have been a transformative nation in a lot of ways..

We bring people from Rwanda and from Kenya and other countries to visit Costa Rica to sort of learn about how Costa Rica has really created a little bit of an economy.. A green economy.. - Right, did someone else have a question? Great, over here please stand up.. So I'm gonna repeat the question.. The question is.. How do you implement these programs with cultural sensitivity? Because you're going into places of the world that are quite different than where you may come from.. - Well first of all, we have staff in those countries.. We don't impose ourselves on these countries.. We have people, scientists, people who work in that country.. We have indigenous people who have protected their part of nature working with us..

And we're very sensitive to local cultures and the importance of engaging people in an appropriate way.. We don't work very much in the United States except to influence the policy of the United States government to access the potential that the United States government has to support international conservation.. But in our field programs we do, we work with local people.. - And in Hawaii.. That's the one place that we do have field presence.. A lot of that program is with Hawaiian, indigenous Hawaiian communities.. So we have pretty strong policies on prior informed consent.. It kind of drives the way in which we engage with communities.. That's a policy for CI, we abide by it.. We're quite strict about how that engagement happens..

Most of our staff are from the countries that we work in as Harrison said, and I think you start the conversation by actually asking folks.. What is it that you want? And it's surprising, those answers tend to be quite straightforward and something that virtually everyone of you will also understand.. - Right.. So we've got a room filled with students from across different disciplines.. Lots of engineering students.. If you're an engineering student, raise your hand.. Great, lots of engineering students.. What about people from humanities who are in the room? Great, a lot of those.. Any one in business, business students? Okay, they didn't find their way across campus.. One over here, okay..

Law students.. Do we have any lawyers in the room? Okay but anyway, we've got a really diverse group.. How would you? (audience laughing) - It's a bi-modal, so it's basically like two peaks.. - Lots of different types of engineers, okay.. Lots of different.. (everyone laughing) But these engineers want to change the world, okay.. We've got electrical engineers and mechanical engineers and computer scientists.. How would you encourage them to think about the types of things they can do? Here they are looking and wanting to make an impact.. I mean, the students I meet are really hungry to find ways that they can do things that have a positive impact on the world.. - Me or you? - Sure I'll take it..

Look, you're probably doing what you're doing because at one point I was doing exactly the same thing in that, you wanted to make a difference.. And I think the awesome thing about this is as you start into this career, as you start into college, you start into life in that sense.. You really want to make a difference.. Somewhere along the way that gets sort of you know, it falls to the wayside sometimes.. But that's where you're starting from.. The field that you're choosing to participate in, in terms of engineering.. And I'm using that in the broadest sense of the word.. It is fundamental to the way in which we will

interact with the natural world and with each other in the future.. You just drive around here, go around the world you'll see that.. The interesting thing about it is that this technological revolution that has pretty much impacted every field from healthcare to transportation to how I do my banking to online dating, to every field you can possibly think of..

Has not really had much of an impact when it comes to conservation.. There have been kind of like only two sort of scientific breakthroughs that I can think of.. and I can tell you what that is later.. But I just don't see that happen in my field.. Yet what we're doing is fundamental to life on Earth.. The most fundamental engineering problem that you can really want to solve.. So I think there's a huge scope and a huge opportunity and opening for people who understand science, people who understand engineering to apply that to problems that have to do with the natural world.. I'll give you one tiny example.. I mean I gave you that example.. You might not think a mobile butcher shop is what you want to design somewhere along your way..

But believe me, it was amazing what we came up with over there.. But I'll give you a different kind of project.. So Philippines.. Philippines, the coast of Philippines was kind of wiped out by a huge typhoon that came through called Haiyan.. It came in three years ago.. We went down there with engineers from Bechtel.. You've heard of Bechtel, it's a Bay Area company.. Huge engineering, I think the second largest engineering company in the world.. And we talked to the community about what we could do to prevent that happening again and having this devastating impact on the coastline.. And the engineers wanted to build some form of sea wall..

Some kind of structure engineered solution to stopping a huge wave.. The conservationists, we just wanted to plant mangroves and coral reefs.. And so we were at an impasse.. Then we talked to the community and said.. How big were the waves? And they pointed to the top of the palm trees.. And both sides, Bechtel guys and our scientists realized that neither of our solutions would work because at that height, no engineered hard structure would have solved what was actually coming.. So what we came up with is a hybrid design that has some hard engineered points but also has 400 meters of mangroves that have been restored and a coral reef offshore.. And working with scientists from MIT in this case but we could have done it with Stanford as well with the Engineering School.. (audience laughs) Right.. - Of course..

- So we worked with students at MIT to really model this out.. And they came up with this solution that would actually serve the needs of that community but also provide lots of service.. That's the future.. And that green gray infrastructure and that design I think is what will ultimately save the coastlines of the Philippines.. - What's interesting about that story is that it also required engineers from lots of different disciplines to work together, right? - Absolutely.. - This was not just the mechanical engineer.. They needed to have people who understood all sorts of other aspects of the environment to be able to solve that problem.. - Completely right.. - Yeah, did you want to add something? - No, I think the other component was that this was, these potential solvers of the problem were convened by an organization that was bent on conservation.. That Conservation International organized this unification of different disciplines..

And that's part of the morality of our work is that we're not just focused on what's happening in our own backyard.. But where we understand that what happens halfway around the world has a great influence on us.. And that we can't just work in our own backyard.. We can't just solve the nearest problems.. We have to be available to bring whatever resources we have to the rest of the world.. - What's also interesting is that you work so closely with so many other organizations.. Right, this is, it sounds as though you are supporting other people who have problems that they've identified and solutions that they want to implement.. What are the sizes of those other organizations? Are these lots of small grassroots organizations that come to you and say.. Hey, can you give me a few thousand dollars? Or are these really big organizations? So paint a picture of the type of groups that you work with to actually implement these changes.. - Sure..

So last year our budget was about 160 million dollars.. Of which about 40 million went straight out to partners.. So we take partnerships very seriously.. We feel like it's the best way we can increase our impact without growing our organization.. We don't really have a desire to make CI bigger.. We have a huge desire to make our impact 10x.. And so the way to do that is through partnership.. And those partnerships can literally range from an indigenous community working on one problem around fisheries for example that involves a dozen people, to the government.. Like literally working with their state government or with another conservation organization much bigger than us or the World Bank.. So it can really sort of span that spectrum..

We have probably about 600 partners that we work with.. The day after tomorrow, Harrison and I and a few others will sign a big partnership agreement with NASA on some tools that we're creating about predictive tools that'll help us map out degradation of land around the world.. At like a 250 meter resolution which is pretty good to get global coverage on.. So the partnerships can range.. And the great thing about it see, and it's fun because one day you're literally talking to one community in one village and the next day you're engaging with a University or a Beijing Academy of Sciences or a national government.. - We found that the best solutions are replicable.. They can be tested in one place and refined in one place but then they can be replicated in other areas where the problem is the same.. - So that's interesting.. Will the same group replicate it or did you say okay let's write up a little case study and then have another group take it to their region? - I think what I'm talking about is refining the process.. Understanding the elements that lead to the problem and finding ways to a solution and replicating that in another place..

- Great.. - And I'd admit that we're not that great at writing those things up.. So in some ways we are a secret that doesn't need to be a secret.. We've done well with some things.. But I think the sort of that need to solve the next thing doesn't allow us often, the time and the opportunity which is really important to reflect on it and be able to case study it in a way that it can spread.. - Great, great.. - You know, look.. I think this question of externality is a big one.. And in some cases, we are able to do that.. I'm not using pollution specifically..

But in things like, the use of water or what happens to the product after someone buys it.. Like some time ago, we got convinced by companies that the disposability of something, whatever we buy is our responsibility and not theirs.. Have you guys seen that famous crying Indian commercial that you always see on Earth Day? If you watch this, this is like embedded in people I think in our generation.. Go watch it.. It was like this commercial that it's basically a Native American who actually turns out to be.. Actually I don't think he was actually Native American.. I think he was like an Italian actor.. But he's going down this river and he sees pollution and he starts crying.. And it convinced a lot of America to pick up litter.. Right, it was the big first littering, anti-littering movement..

Ant to be honest, littering is pretty low in this country compared to lots of other parts of the world.. That often plays like on Earth Day.. That was paid for.. Again the bottle.. That was actually.. I actually know who is doing this.. That was paid for by the American Beverage Industry.. And it was very clever.. They did it because I think they wanted to shift the onus of responsibility from people who are selling it to people who are buying it.. They got all of us suckers to say this our problem..

We got to deal with it.. - Interesting.. So you just started at Conservation International not too long ago and have took the helm only a few months ago.. You've been there 30 years.. Let's flash forward 20 years.. What's the organization gonna look like? What are the metrics you've hit? What does success look like 20 years down the line? - Well, 20 years down the line I'll no longer be involved with this organization.. (audience laughing) But there's a good chance that Sanjayan might.. So I'll let you answer that question.. (everyone laughing) - You haven't seen Blade Runner or any of those movies? You might be involved.. No, okay alright..

(audience laughing) 20 years from now.. Look, I hope that more of you are engaged with us.. I hope that we have turned the tide on this deafening that we hear sometimes from leaders in terms of just not wanting to either believe the data or believe the science.. And we've sort of got beyond that point.. I truly believe that we'll be in a place where incentives, technology incentives and valuation of nature will be built in to the way we do our work.. It's really hard to predict what's 20 years away.. I think of five years and I can sort of see that.. I honestly, I promise you.. Look, I'm just gonna name drop for a second here.. But I was recently with Gordon Moore who is a founding board member at CI..

A great friend of Harrison's.. And Gordon you know, I asked him.. Like, did you ever see all of this stuff that we can do with a chip? And he said no, we didn't.. When the furthest we got was my son and I would walk around the house and we'd point to things where we thought a chip could go in.. We'd be like the toaster, we could put a chip in there.. Or the refrigerator.. But like all of this, this whole ecosystem that was created was never in his mind, according to him.. So I find it very difficult to sort of ask what is 20 years going to look like.. I will tell you something.. If we don't take care of some of these issues now..

By 20 years, the cost of doing so will be too great to really handle.. The price of conservation never gets cheaper in the future.. It's as cheap as it's gonna get today.. And we, you and us are the first generation that actually knows what's coming around the corner.. And so it really is in our own best interest to do something about it.. - Okay.. So my last question to both of you is one I like to ask.. I'd like each of you to go back a couple of decades to visualize yourself when you were a student in school and think about what you wish you knew when you were 20.. (audience laughing) (everyone laughing) - I was a desperately poor student.. A very, very difficult time in my life..

And I regret deeply that I didn't take advantage of the opportunity.. This is what you might expect from your elders.. But it's true, I didn't really discover my utility in college.. Towards the end of my college years I began to understand that I had, what moved me might be potentially useful to me.. I found a community in storytelling.. And that's what eventually became my life's work.. So that's a pretty short story.. (everyone laughing) - When I was 20, I was trying to convince my parents or fool them into thinking that I was in Med School.. (everyone laughing) When I had really no intention of going that route.. When we would, I grew up in West Africa..

And my parents encouraged my hobby which was a love for nature and being outdoors and following things around.. But they always saw it as a hobby.. We'd get David Attenborough's Original Life on Earth series on VHS tapes and I'd watch that whole thing and I would kind of say I want to do that.. And they'd say, quite literally that's for white people.. In my language, but that's what they would say.. And they were fine encouraging it as a hobby.. And around the age of 20 I started realizing that there might be something that I could do productively to follow this passion that I was sort of developing.. And kind of go into it, all in.. So it was a really interesting time where I was like literally taking classes just to send those grades in and then just go do something else.. What I would do differently if I could go back and do it again..

I would pay a lot more attention to college.. Guarantee you that.. Like it's just amazing how little I actually got out of 20 something years of education.. I could do that today in like a year.. Like all of that you could actually do.. Like I can't understand what I spent all my time doing.. Right, amazing.. But here's some things I would've done a little differently..

Communications.. So like kind of Harrison said..

Obviously he went about that in a very different and profound way.. Being able to tell a story is a really important thing for an entrepreneur to have.. And if you see some of the people, particularly around here who made these amazing changes and have convinced you that you could do something that no one else could.. It's through that power of communication.. I would have taken it more formally.. I learned it just accidentally.. That would've been something I would've done more.. I would've probably gone harder into statistics because understanding it helps you understand the world in a very unique way.. And then I probably would have.. Well those are the two things..

I would really lean in heavy on the stat side.. I would have leaned in very heavily on the comm side.. Writing or speaking or whatever you take.. Don't underestimate how powerful that is.. Even, maybe especially for engineers.. - Well thank you so much for sharing your stories with us.. This was really powerful.. (audience applauding)..