Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation

Drafted by

The Conservation Measures Partnership

Version 1.0

29 June 2004

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Core Member Organizations
African Wildlife Foundation (AWF)
Conservation International (CI)
The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)
World Wide Fund for Nature/World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

Collaborating Member Organizations
Foundations of Success (FOS) (Coordinator)
Cambridge Conservation Forum (CCF)
Enterprise Works Worldwide (EWW)
World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA/IUCN)

29 June 2004

For information regarding these standards – or to provide comments on them – contact
The Conservation Measures Partnership at CMPinfo@ConservationMeasures.org

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Executive Summary

In order to achieve our goals, the conservation community must determine the extent to which our actions are working – and we must be able to diagnose why some actions succeed while others do not. In recent years, there has been great convergence among conservation organizations in thinking about how best to plan and implement conservation actions. That said, the conservation community has yet to arrive at a common and complete understanding of the steps and principles of good project management.

Making the most of the extensive, trial-and-error experience gained by conservation organizations while designing, implementing and appraising their conservation projects, we have developed a set of project cycle or adaptive management open standards that are reflected in the work of all of our organizations and are, we believe, fundamental to effective conservation. These standards are less a recipe that must be followed exactly than a framework and guidance for conservation action.

Our goal in developing these open standards is to bring together common concepts, approaches, and terminology in conservation project design, management, and monitoring in order to help practitioners improve the practice of conservation. In particular, these standards are meant to provide the steps, principles, tasks, and guidance necessary for the successful implementation of conservation projects. As members of the Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP), we hope that by developing these open standards, our colleagues in our respective organizations – and across the conservation landscape – will have clear guidance on how to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of their projects for maximum conservation gain. In addition, we anticipate that these standards will comprise the foundation of another activity being initiated by CMP – the development of a conservation audit process.

We have organized the main components of these open standards – principles, tasks, and guidance – into seven steps that comprise the project management cycle including conceptualization, planning, implementation, analysis, adaptation, communication, and iteration. Although we present the standards as a linear series of steps or stages, the entire process is rarely applied in a linear fashion from start to finish – instead it is typically only a rough approximation of the more complex series of back-and-forth movements that a project goes through.

We intend these standards to be used once it is clear where you and your organization will work or what you want to conserve. In addition, they are not "site" specific and thus apply across a variety of scales. Finally, we encourage feedback from anyone one who puts these standards to the test – please e-mail us your comments at

CMPinfo@ConservationMeasures.org

What Are The Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation?

A key question facing all conservation practitioners and organizations is: "Are our actions effective in achieving our conservation goals?" It is imperative to answer this question in order to be able to adapt and change our actions over time, to learn about which actions work and do not work, and to convince our donors and society that conservation is a worthy investment.

The conservation community finds itself at a critical time in its evolution – a time when there is great convergence in thinking about how best to plan and implement conservation actions. Making the most of the extensive, trial-and-error experience gained by conservation organizations while designing, implementing and appraising their conservation projects, we have developed a set of project cycle or adaptive management open standards that are reflected in the work of all of our organizations and are, we believe, fundamental to conducting good conservation. These standards are less a recipe that must be followed exactly than a framework and guidance for conservation action.

All conservation efforts at any scale can be either explicitly or implicitly described as "projects" – a set of actions undertaken to achieve defined goals and objectives. All of the organizations involved in the Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP)[1] apply some form of project cycle management to their conservation projects. While there is some variation in the way this is carried out, there is also a great deal of consistency. We, the member organizations of CMP, agree that all projects should go through a robust conceptualization, planning, implementation, and monitoring process. And we agree that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should be fully integrated into the project cycle. That said, the conservation community has yet to arrive at a common and complete understanding of the steps and principles of good project management.

Our goal in developing these open standards is to bring together common concepts, approaches, and terminology in conservation project design, management, and monitoring in order to help practitioners improve the practice of conservation. In particular, these standards are meant to provide the principles, tasks, and guidance necessary for the successful implementation of conservation projects. We have borrowed and adapted the term *open standards* from the information technology field to mean standards that are developed through public collaboration, freely available to anyone, and not the property of anyone or any organization and can thus be freely redistributed. What is important is not only the standards themselves, but also the means that participants follow to create and manage the standards. In the development of open standards, any interested party may contribute to their modification through participation in an industry-sanctioned governing

[1] The Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP) is a consortium of conservation organizations listed on the title page of this document whose mission it is to improve the practice of biodiversity conservation by developing and promoting common standards for the process of conservation and measuring conservation impact. For more information, visit our website at www.ConservationMeasures.org

body. For the conservation community, this means that these proposed standards are common property, constantly evolving and improving through the input of a wide variety of practitioners, and adaptable to individual organizations' needs.

As members of CMP, we hope that by developing these open standards, our colleagues in our respective organizations – and across the conservation landscape – will have clear guidance on how to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of their projects for maximum conservation gain. In addition, we hope that these standards will serve to help us all know more clearly what is expected of us to achieve quality project management, thus providing a transparent basis for a consistent and standardized approach to external evaluation of our actions. Finally, we hope that these standards will promote and facilitate greater collaboration among conservation organizations – an essential ingredient if we are to be ultimately successful in achieving our goals.

How Are These Open Standards Being Developed and How Should They Be Used?

The *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation* are a product of the collaborative work of the Conservation Measures Partnership. As a starting point, CMP members used the results of the Measuring Conservation Impact (MCI) Initiative[2], a study that reviewed experience in seven fields – conservation, public health, family planning, international development, social services, education, and business – to determine common concepts of and approaches to good project design, management, and monitoring. The findings of MCI were compiled into a series of principles for project cycle/adaptive management. Building on these results, individual CMP member organizations contributed their experience in conservation project implementation to refine the standards and focus them more specifically on biodiversity conservation.

We developed these open standards to represent an idealized adaptive management process and provide a conceptual framework for good project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. For the operationalization of the open standards, we will develop a companion publication that will describe in more detail the options that are available for implementing each step in the adaptive management process. In addition, we will provide relevant examples to illustrate how these standards can be put into practice.

It is outside the purview of these open standards to describe all relevant selection and implementation guidance for all conservation tools and strategies under all conditions. The standards included in this document describe in more generic terms how a project manager would design, manage, and monitor any conservation project – independent of which tool or strategy she or he chooses. In addition, these standards are meant to guide *programmatic* decisions in project management, i.e., determining the best interventions for

[2] The MCI initiative was conducted by Foundations of Success (FOS) in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Conservation International (CI), and was funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

conservation success. They are not designed to address administrative processes and functions related to, for example, budget, contract, and human resource issues.

Periodically, CMP will update, refine, and publish the standards based on the continual feedback we receive from our colleagues from around the world who use them in the field.[3] We also anticipate that these standards will comprise the foundation of another activity being initiated by CMP – the development of a conservation audit process. We define a conservation audit as an independent[4] review of the process of conservation based on a set of predetermined standards. Audits form the basis of being able to look consistently and comparably across a suite of projects. The aim of undertaking audits is to raise the quality of the conservation process and to increase the likelihood of success. The audit process itself will focus mainly on the process of conservation, however, it is clearly essential to analyze the impacts of the conservation process – and the relationship between process and impacts. Finally, the audit will show how project managers respond to new information and analysis, thus emphasizing adaptive management and learning. We use the open standards described in this document as the framework to develop and guide the audit process.

Using these open standards to improve the practice of conservation is part science, part art. That is, it requires some skill and experience to take these very orderly and structured principles and artfully apply them to real-world situations. While inexperienced conservation practitioners can certainly benefit from these open standards as they determine how to initiate a new conservation project, experienced practitioners will more clearly understand the true challenges and opportunities associated with their implementation.

About this Document

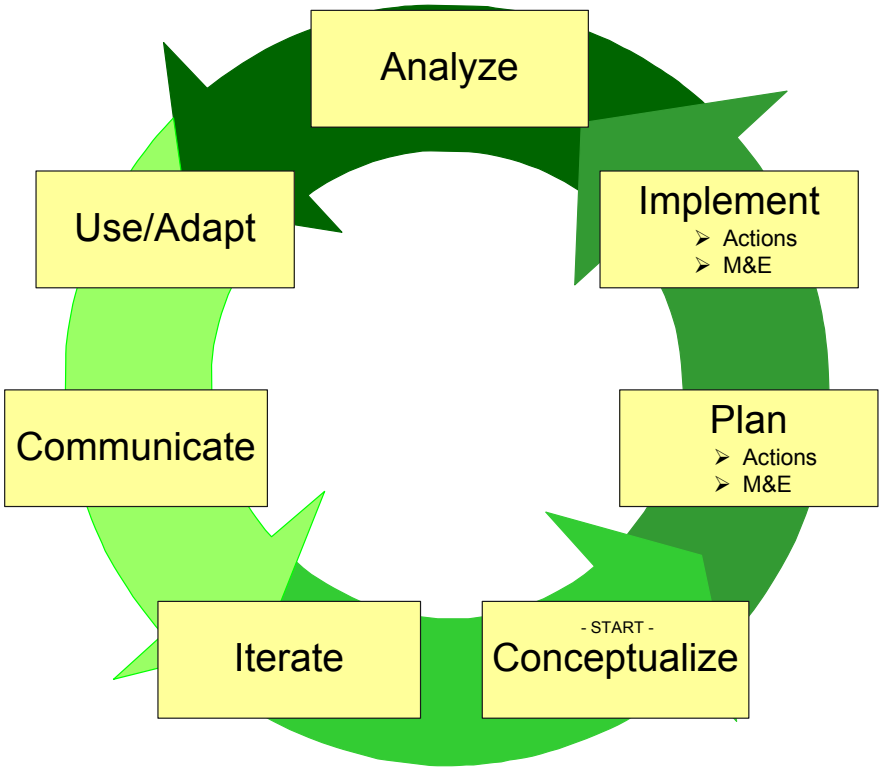
We have organized the main components of these open standards – principles, tasks, and guidance – into seven steps that comprise the project management cycle (see figure below). The structure of these generic steps – or some closely related form of it – is widely adopted in conservation and other fields that implement projects to achieve clearly defined goals. The steps include:

1. **Conceptualize** what you will achieve in the context of where you are working.
2. **Plan** both your **Actions** and **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).**
3. **Implement** both your **Actions** and **Monitoring and Evaluation.**
4. **Analyze** your data to evaluate the effectiveness of your activities.
5. **Use** your results to **Adapt** your project to maximize impact.
6. **Communicate** your results to key external and internal audiences.
7. **Iterate** – Go through the project cycle continuously to constantly improve.

[3] Please send your comments to *Attention: Open Standards* at CMPinfo@ConservationMeasures.org

[4] *Independent* means that no one directly related to the project being audited is on the audit team, though the project leaders and staff are critical to the audit process.

Generalized Project Management Cycle



The open standards described in this document are divided into categories representing the four components – steps, principles, tasks, and guidance – described above. Entries that are numbered only represent the *steps in the process* of designing, implementing, and monitoring effective conservation projects. Entries that include letters as well are specific *principles* that should be followed within each step. And for each principle, we provide the specific *tasks* that should be completed and some *guidance* for doing them. Of course, not all principles and tasks are appropriate under all conditions.

Although we present the standards as a linear series of steps or stages, the entire process is rarely applied in a linear fashion from start to finish – instead it is typically only a rough approximation of the more complex series of back-and-forth movements that a project goes through. For example, we were challenged trying to adequately capture the relationship between planning and implementation – it is hard to clearly determine if specific tasks and guidance should be included exclusively in a planning phase or an implementation phase when, in fact, they must be addressed in both. For the sake of simplicity, we decided to divide both planning and implementation into two parts – 1) actions and 2) monitoring and evaluation (M&E) – and put the bulk of our recommendations in the planning phase. This is merely for convenience – we in no way want to infer that planning is more important or carries more weight than implementation. They are, in fact, two necessary halves of a whole.

General Principles

There are a few key essential principles that apply not exclusively to any one step, but instead to all of the steps in these standards. Instead of listing them for each step, we describe them here. These essential principles include:

- **Involve stakeholders** – One of the first requirements is to define internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include your project team (which can be as few as two people) composed of NGO staff, local stakeholders, researchers, or whomever else you find important to include. External stakeholders include community members, government personnel, donor agencies, international community members, and other individuals and institutions that have some interest in and connection to the project. In conducting your project, it is important at every step to make sure you involve the appropriate internal and external stakeholders in the proper manner. (See Principle 1B for analysis of actors and stakeholders.)

- **Clearly define your timeline** – Each step of the standards requires careful planning and organization. It is thus imperative to make sure that you are clear about how much time and effort a given task will take and communicate this to your internal and external audiences. Of course, especially at the beginning of a planning process, your estimates may be, at best, "best guesstimates."

- **Budget sufficient financial resources and human capacity** – In most cases, each step of the standards requires some amount of financial resources to be developed, implemented, and monitored.

- **Document your decisions** – For just about every step, principle, and task, we could ask you to write down how you decided to proceed. Of course, this would quickly become repetitive, but we cannot emphasize enough the importance of documenting the reasons for your decisions at each step of the way. Not only does this give you the opportunity to analyze why things worked or did not, but also, it serves as a basis for others to understand the logic of your choices.

Assumptions

As you read through this document, keep in mind that there are a number of assumptions that we have made as we put it together. These include:

Some priority-setting has already taken place – These standards do not define where you and you organization will work or what you want to conserve (the purpose of priority-setting exercises). Instead, they outline how you should go about designing, implementing, and evaluating your project activities once it is clear where – or on what issue – you wish to work. Priority-setting is an essential precursor to these standards and should be completed before these standards are used, although some of the materials in the *Open Standards* are often addressed while establishing priorities. In addition, learning achieved during the application of these standards can be fed back into future priority setting exercises.

Few projects will start at the beginning of these standards – Most projects that will benefit from the application of these standards are already in operation. You can "retrofit" these standards to your project to help you identify gaps that need to be addressed to improve your project. Of course, if you are just beginning to think about initiating a new project, these standards can help you be comprehensive in your approach.

These standards represent the "ideal" – It is difficult to expect all projects to address all of the principles and tasks outlined in these open standards. A quick read of the standards may prove overwhelming at first – with a seemingly infinite number of issues to consider and things to do. But these standards are meant to provide a comprehensive view of what comprises the ideal in project design, management and monitoring. While they can be used as a goal to attain by any project manager, it is important to acknowledge that it may not be feasible – for a variety of reasons – to address each and every component of the standards.

Each project is different in potentially significant ways – Similar to the previous assumption, every project varies from the norm in some way. We have not developed these standards to be "one-size-fits-all", but instead we have written them in fairly general terms in order to provide project teams the flexibility they need to adapt and modify the standards to their particular conditions. In fact, we believe that it is these differences – and testing these standards in a variety of contexts – that will make the standards increasingly more robust and useful over time.

These standards will change over time – These standards are not written to be the last word in how to do effective conservation. Instead, they are meant to capture the prevailing wisdom on what it takes to do conservation well under a variety of conditions. To this end, CMP intends to constantly update and modified the standards as they are applied and tested in the field and as our knowledge increases about what works and what does not.

These standards are not "site" specific – These standards apply across a variety of scales and are not designed exclusively for site-based conservation actions. We see projects covering a variety of scales – from small-scale projects limited in geographic scope, to large projects that may stretch across ecoregions, landscapes, or corridors. In addition, projects may not be limited in geographic scale but instead may be more thematic in nature, including, for example, policy-based or species-focused initiatives. No matter the scope, these standards can be used to guide you in designing an effective project.

These standards are not divorced from strategy, tool, and indicator standards – The standards in this document are meant to represent the state-of-the-art in the conservation community's collective knowledge of the process for designing, managing, and monitoring conservation projects. They provide guidance on how to do conservation – independent of any strategies or tools that may be used. In addition to these process standards, it will be essential to develop similar analogous and associated standards for the wide range of strategies, tools, and indicators that project managers need to know how to use to achieve conservation.

Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation

Step 1. Conceptualize

This critical first step involves understanding the situation in which your project[5] will take place and clearly defining the problem you are trying to solve. The conceptualization step must take place with your entire team – and other important stakeholders – to make sure that everyone involved in the project has the same or a similar understanding of what needs to happen. Based on this step, you will define the goal and objectives of your project and the activities you will undertake to reach them. In many cases, organizations invest considerable time and financial resources into research that provides information necessary to carry out this step.

The principles in this step include:

- Principle – 1A. Be clear and specific about the issue or problem you intend to address
- Principle – 1B. Understand the context in which your project takes place
- Principle – 1C. Create a model of the situation in which your project will take place

Principle – *1A. Be clear and specific about the issue or problem you intend to address*

Before you begin to think about what you will do (i.e., your project activities) you must have a good understanding of the problem you wish to resolve or the issue you wish to address. This principle helps you think about the focus and scope of your particular project in the context of your organization's mission. By addressing this principle, you are more likely to design a project with a clear goal and that is consistent with all other activities of your organization.

Tasks

- ❑ Establish a clear and common purpose that fits your organization's mission. (For the purposes of CMP, this is related to biodiversity conservation).
- ❑ Define the scope of the area or theme you are focusing on.
- ❑ Identify biodiversity targets[6] and describe their current status.

Guidance

- Clearly articulate and document the issue or problem you are going to address and explain why it is important to do so.
- Involve appropriate stakeholders in identifying biological, social, economic, legal, institutional, and environmental concerns.

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[5] Project: a set of actions undertaken by any group – including managers, researcher, community members, and any other stakeholders – to achieve defined goals and objectives

[6] Biodiversity target: The biodiversity situation you intend to influence through your project activities. Impact of your project can be measured at the biodiversity target level. A biodiversity target is a description of the species, habitat, or ecological function you wish to conserve – it does not reflect what you want to do or how you will do it. (See definitions of "Goal," "Objective," and "Activities" below in comparison.) Targets can be small and limited or large and diffuse in scale.

Principle – *1B. Understand the context in which your project takes place*

This principle is one that is often overlooked – at least explicitly – in conservation projects, yet it is one of the most important ones to consider. Projects that are designed based on clearly defined and articulated needs and opportunities – both biological and social – are more likely to succeed because they will include activities that are more appropriate to the specific situation in which the project will take place. By understanding the perspectives and desires of various stakeholders, you will have a better chance of designing an intervention that will be acceptable to them. By clearly understanding the biological context – and the relative importance of various threats and opportunities – you will be able determine which interventions are more likely to succeed and design your project accordingly. Finally, fully understanding the context in which your project takes place allows you to determine the resources that you will require to achieve your conservation goals and objectives.

Tasks

- ❑ Conduct a thorough situation analysis. This includes analysis of:
  - Threats[7]
  - Needs, opportunities, and risks[8]
  - Actors/stakeholders[9] and the roles they play in resource management
  - Audiences[10]
  - Strategic partnerships – both current and potential.
- ❑ Rank threats to determine which ones you need to address – and in what order.
- ❑ Identify resources (inputs – financial, staff, capacity, knowledge) available to your project.

Guidance

- ➢ Focus on biological, social, economic, political, and institutional factors.
- ➢ Analyze past and future trends.
- ➢ Be clear about the information you need to collect.
- ➢ Use whatever secondary data and information exist.
- ➢ Use direct observation where possible.
- ➢ Use credible methods when primary data are required.

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[7] Threats: There are two primary kinds of threats: 1) Direct threats are human-induced actions and events that immediately affect the biodiversity target or physically cause its destruction (also referred to as proximate threats); and 2) Indirect threats are human-induced actions and events that underlie or lead to the direct threats (also referred to as ultimate threats and root causes)

[8] Needs and opportunities: In this context, needs are defined as the actions or resources that may be required to make conservation work, and opportunities are the biological, physical, social, economic, and political potential to support conservation goals.

[9] Actors/stakeholders: This includes the people who will be influenced by, have an impact on, or will help implement conservation actions.

[10] Audiences: There are two types of audiences: 1) Internal audiences are the people on your project team or within your organization; and 2) External audiences are those people outside of the management of the project including stakeholders (not on the project team) and the wider public.

- Use multiple methods, interviewers, and questions to "triangulate" information.
- Be realistic – only collect data you can feasibly use in your analysis.
- Involve experts in assessing the severity of the problem to be addressed.

Principle – *1C. Create a conceptual model of the situation in which your project will take place*

Creating a conceptual model[11] allows you to come to an explicit agreement with your project team and all other stakeholders on the specific factors and processes that influence conservation within the context of where you are working. A conceptual model will provide you the opportunity to illustrate cause-and-effect relationships that you and your team assume exist in your project area – before your project is implemented. Then, once you move into the planning phase (the next step) you will be able to add your goals, objectives, and activities into your model to clearly show how you expect them to influence the system and lead to the achievement of your conservation goals. In other words, your model will help you to articulate and illustrate the underlying assumptions inherent in your project. This is important not only to promote better communication within your team, but also to assist you to communicate the purpose, direction, and expected impacts of your activities to other people outside of your project.

Tasks

- ❑ Clearly articulate your core assumptions by showing causal links/relationships between factors (targets, threats, needs, and opportunities).
- ❑ Create a graphical/text/mathematical representation of your conceptual model – use whatever format best illustrates to your project team and key audiences the state of the context within which you are working.

Guidance

- Keep your model as simple as possible but make sure it is also as complete as possible.
- Build your model as a team.
- Use models to keep team members on same page.

Step 2. Plan

Once you understand the context in which your project will take place, you need to determine how you will move forward to achieve what you want to accomplish. Planning at this level takes place as two distinct but completely related components: planning your actions and planning your monitoring and evaluation (M&E). In addition, this planning step really goes hand-in-hand with the next step – implementation. All of the principles and tasks you see in this step are then carried out in the next step. Rather than list them twice, therefore, we have chosen to list the principles and tasks in the planning section only. However, you will need to refer to the planning section as you implement your

[11] Conceptual model: A diagram of a set of relationships between certain factors that are believed to impact or lead to a conservation target.

project. Because there are two components of planning and implementation – actions and M&E – we have divided each of the following two steps into two sections.

2.1 Plan Your Actions

This step involves planning the specific actions you will take to achieve conservation. It is the step in which you identify the critical factors that you will target with your actions so it involves thinking strategically about how your interventions will create a desired change to reach your goals and objectives. Clearly articulating your goal, objectives, and activities in this step will make it much easier to identify the specific information you will need collect as part of your M&E efforts so it is a critical step to complete before moving on to the next one.

The principles in this step include:

- Principle – 2.1A. Develop your goal and objectives
- Principle – 2.1B. Strategically select activities that will accomplish your goal and objectives
- Principle – 2.1C. Develop a formal action plan

Principle – *2.1A. Develop clear goal and objectives*

Developing clear goals and objectives is the essential first step in putting together an action plan that describes how you expect specific activities will lead to conservation impacts. Your goal and objectives should represent what you expect to achieve over the short-, medium-, and long-term of the project. Objectives should focus on key factors in your model – factors that you believe are important leverage points based on the analysis you completed leading to the development of your model.

Tasks

- ❑ Develop a goal[12] that describes the desired future status of your biodiversity targets.
- ❑ Identify "key factors"[13] in your model that you will address with your project.
- ❑ Develop objectives[14] that describe the desired future status of threats and opportunities (or in specific cases, ecological restoration) – and that contribute to the attainment of your goal.[15]

[12] Goal: A goal is a general summary of the desired state that a project is working to achieve. A good goal meets the criteria of being visionary, relatively general, brief, and measurable. It should be ambitious yet realistic. (It is also known as the final or desired impact or outcome.)

[13] Key factors: Key factors are those variables in a conceptual model or results chain that are particularly critical in relation to the conservation target and can be targeted with specific actions.

[14] Objective: A specific statement detailing the desired accomplishments, milestones, or outcomes of a project. A good objective meets the criteria of being: impact oriented, measurable, time limited, specific, and practical. If the project is well conceptualized and designed, realization of a project's objectives should lead to the fulfillment of the project's goal. (Also know as milestones or outcomes.)

[15] In restoration projects in which the focus is not the abatement of specific threats, objectives can be linked directly to the improvement of key ecological attributes of specific biodiversity targets.

- ❑ Explicitly link your goal/objectives to results of your situation analysis – i.e., make sure your goal and objectives address some need or issues that is identified in your situation analysis.
- ❑ Link your goal/objectives to your model.
- ❑ State your goal and objectives as measurable changes.

Guidance

- ➢ Involve program staff in estimating what target level is realistic to achieve, based on the past experience of comparable programs.
- ➢ Continually discuss objectives with team and stakeholders at predetermined intervals.
- ➢ Use interdisciplinary teams where appropriate to develop appropriate goals, objectives, and activities.
- ➢ Analyze alternative ways to address the problem.
- ➢ Make sure your goal, objectives, and activities are politically, socially, ecologically appropriate.

Principle – *2.1B. Strategically select activities that will accomplish your goal and objectives*

Based on the goal and objectives you have developed, you can determine the most appropriate activities that have the highest likelihood of achieving success. In order to do this, you may need to consider a range of options, learn as much as you can about the conditions under which they have worked in the past, and then make an informed decision about which ones to use. Once you have decided on the activities you will include in your project, you can update your model incorporating your goal, objectives, and activities.[16]

Tasks

- ❑ Develop a range of potential activities.[17]
- ❑ Strategically select the activities that you will undertake (based on the criteria listed in the footnote for "Activity.")
- ❑ Make explicit the links between your activities and your objectives and goal by incorporating your activities into your model, showing how they will contribute to the attainment of your objectives and goal.

Guidance

- ➢ Strategically select activities that will have highest returns.
- ➢ Look for high leverage opportunities.

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[16] Determining which tool or strategy is the best one to use is not a trivial task. At present, there is no comprehensive guide – describing the conditions under which specific tools work – designed to help practitioners make this decision. While it is not the purview of these process-oriented open standards to include selection and implementation standards for all conservation tools and strategies, CMP hopes to contribute to developing this body of knowledge in the future. (See Step 3 for additional information.)

[17] Activity: An activity is a specific action or set of tasks undertaken by project staff designed to reach each of the project's objectives. A good activity meets the criteria of being: linked, focused, feasible, and appropriate. An activity is also sometimes called an intervention.

- Use results chains[18] to interpret results for management and as communications tools.
- Take into account the effects of other public and private sector programs that may complement or contradict your project.
- Examine the context in sufficient detail to be able to identify probable influences on the project.
- Make sure impacts are sustainable – plan for phasing out the project.

Principle – *2.1C. Develop a formal action plan*

Developing a formal action plan involves explicitly writing down all that you have done in this step – including developing your goal, objectives, and activities. In addition, you will need to clearly define the specific tasks you and your team will need to do and the specific roles and responsibilities of each team member – including participating partner organizations.

Tasks

- ❑ Develop the specific tasks required to complete each activity.
- ❑ For each individual team member and organization that will be involved in the project, write out roles and responsibilities.
- ❑ Discuss and agree upon roles and responsibilities among team members.

Guidance

- Be politically sensitive.
- Pay attention to existing governing structures and your stakeholder analysis.

2.2 Plan Your Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

In this step, you will determine what data you need to collect as part of your ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts. Effective M&E collects the minimum amount of information with the minimum amount of financial and human resources to provide you with the optimal data to effectively manage your project. M&E serves as the backbone of effective adaptive management; it generates the information you need to determine if you are on track and what to do if you are not. Although extremely critical, it is the step that it most often left out of project management.

The principles in this step include:

- Principle – 2.2A. Focus your M&E on what you need to know
- Principle – 2.2B. Develop a formal M&E plan

[18] Results chain: A results chain is a diagram or narrative that shows the causal linkage between an activity and a biodiversity target through a series of intermediate factors.

Principle – *2.2A. Focus your M&E on what you need to know*

All too often project teams either collect no data and information or too much data and information because they are unsure of what is needed. The point is, by focusing your M&E efforts squarely and almost exclusively on your goals, objectives, and activities, you are more likely to collect only that information that will be useful to you as you adaptively manage your project.

Tasks

- ❑ Explicitly link your M&E to your goal, objectives, and activities and focus on factors linked to key programmatic assumptions (results chains).
- ❑ Clearly define the audiences who will use the M&E results.
- ❑ Plan for how you will disseminate the results of your evaluation.
- ❑ Characterize what you will do when you learn things – how you will react.

Guidance

- ➢ Use your model to help determine what you need to measure.
- ➢ Carry out your M&E at the appropriate geographical and social scales – match them to the scale you expect to influence with your intervention.
- ➢ Be clear on how M&E of your project fits into the activities and priorities of your organization.
- ➢ Design your M&E system to generate information that is appropriate for its intended use and audience.
- ➢ Design your M&E system to isolate and assess the effects of your intervention.
- ➢ Consider process and impacts as well as potential confounding factors and other factors that influence what you are trying to achieve.
- ➢ Prioritize focus of evaluation – if you have to choose, start by measuring the most important objectives.
- ➢ Design your M&E to meet – not exceed – the required level of sophistication. Collect only what you need, not what is merely interesting.
- ➢ Consider the impacts of your M&E on the targets you are trying to conserve and the human populations with which you are working.

Principle – *2.2B. Develop a formal M&E plan*

Once you have identified the information you need to effectively manage your project, you should define the indicators and the methods you will use to collect and analyze it. Developing a formal M&E plan also involves defining roles and responsibilities and the timing of your monitoring activities. By developing a formal M&E plan, you can better coordinate and streamline the data collection and analysis needs of an effective adaptive management system.

Tasks

- ❑ Define and use the best possible indicators[19] for your M&E plan. (The "What.")
- ❑ Select appropriate methods[20] to collect M&E data for each indicator. (The "How.")
- ❑ Write out your methods using criteria mutually agreed upon by your team.
- ❑ Define the timing and frequency of data collection for each indicator. (The "When.")
- ❑ Pretest and calibrate indicators and methods before using them in your M&E system.
- ❑ Clearly determine the roles and responsibilities of individuals and institutions that will collect M&E data. (The "Who.")
- ❑ Plan for the storage and processing of each type of data in advance.

Guidance

- ➢ Accept informal evaluation procedures for small programmatic changes – use explicit and formal evaluation procedures for major decisions/changes.
- ➢ Use M&E methods that don't disrupt work.
- ➢ Plan your investment of resources in your M&E system to be consistent with the action you are taking.
- ➢ Take into account the skills of the staff that will be collecting the data. Most methods require specialized training and close supervision to yield valid results.
- ➢ Consider the cost-benefit of different methods. Obtaining extremely precise findings is apt to be expensive.
- ➢ Consider how much time would be needed to collect and analyze the data generated by different methods.
- ➢ Use multidisciplinary teams for broad perspective.
- ➢ Be sure that your assessment results make sense.
- ➢ To the extent possible, keep your M&E system flexible and able to adapt to unforeseen circumstances.
- ➢ Look beyond expected impacts to assess actual, unexpected impacts.
- ➢ Be fair, complete, and honest – report both positives and negatives.
- ➢ Make finding available to those involved or who were promised results.
- ➢ Define and use indicators that can be collected as part of daily project management.
- ➢ Use proxy indicators[21] if direct measurement is not feasible.

Step 3. Implement Actions and M&E

Clearly, this is a critical step in the entire project cycle process. After all, it is the step in which you actually carry out your project activities. Up until this point, the open standards have dealt with designing and planning your activities. Implementation is putting all of the

[19] Indicator: A unit of information measured over time that documents changes in a specific condition. A given goal or objective can have multiple indicators. A good indicator meets the criteria of being: measurable, precise, consistent, and sensitive.

[20] M&E methods: A specific technique used to collect data to measure an indicator. Methods vary in their accuracy and reliability, cost-effectiveness, feasibility, and appropriateness. They generate quantitative or qualitative data and, for M&E purposes, should be comparable over time and across indicators.

[21] Proxy indicator: A substitute for an indicator that cannot be directly measured or assessed.

planning efforts you conducted in the previous section into action. We could list each and every principle and task from the planning section and slightly modify them to reflect their implementation, but this would be redundant. We decided that – for the sake of efficiency and keeping this document relatively short – we would list the relevant principles and tasks in only one section. Since planning comes first – and you cannot implement a good project without careful planning – we chose to put them in the previous step - Plan. Therefore, the implementation step requires executing each principle and task described in the previous section. There are a few additional things to keep in mind and we list them below.

It is outside the purview of these open standards to describe all relevant selection and implementation guidance for all conservation tools and strategies under all conditions. The standards included in this document describe how a project manager would design, manage, and monitor any conservation project – independent of which tool or strategy she or he chooses.[22]

While implementation can be thought of as being merely the operationalization of planning, there are some additional aspects of project management for which some general guidance could be provided in this step. In particular, there is both a science and an art to choosing the right partners, defining rules of engagement, and working with host governments. We will develop and explore these topics in subsequent versions of these open standards.[23]

Tasks

- ❑ Implement your action plan.
- ❑ Implement your monitoring and evaluation plan.
- ❑ Modify your plans as the situation and/or your understanding of the situation changes.

Guidance

- ➢ Don't get stuck in planning paralysis.
- ➢ Be realistic about the amount of time it may take to attain change.
- ➢ Be realistic about how much you can achieve.

Step 4. Analyze

This step involves analyzing the data you have collected as part of your routine monitoring. Unfortunately, this is a step that is often underestimated by project managers, leaving them with lots of collected information but no one or no way to analyze it. It is, therefore, very

[22] Developing comprehensive guidance (in effect, also "standards") related to all conservation tools and strategies would be a significant contribution to the practice of conservation – one that would greatly complement these process-oriented open standards. As part of CMP's ongoing work, it expects to contribute to developing more specific guidance for the identification, selection, and implementation of appropriate conservation strategies and tools.

[23] We are particularly eager to get input and suggestions on this step of the open standards. If you have ideas on specific guidance that should be included in this step (and not covered in Step 2), please send us an e-mail with your thoughts to CMPinfo@ConservationMeasures.org

important to plan for analysis as early as possible in the project management cycle. Of course, without adequately taking this step, project teams find it more difficult to observe and understand changes that may be happening within their project. This makes effective problem-solving and improvement difficult.

The principles in this step include:
- Principle – 4A. Analyze your M&E information on an ongoing basis
- Principle – 4B. Analyze why an intervention succeeded or failed
- Principle – 4C. Communicate results within project team

Principle – *4A. Analyze your M&E information on an ongoing basis*

Analysis of M&E information – including data – should not happen at only one point in time during the life of the project. To continuously understand what is going on in your project – and to be able to change things in a timely fashion – it is essential to be analyzing your information on an ongoing basis. Information can be analyzed as part of routine project management making it a more integrated task instead of an additional burden that occurs periodically.

Tasks

- ❑ Systematically check, clean, and code raw information as soon as you get them.
- ❑ Analyze results against predetermined standards or criteria.

Guidance

- Analyze information as soon as possible and as "close" to the field as possible.
- Use analytical methods that produce understandable results.
- Plan for and use expert technical assistance when needed.
- Ensure methods and measures are comparable over time and, to the extent possible, across variables.

Principle – *4B. Analyze why an intervention succeeded or failed*

One of the most important aspects of adaptive management is that it allows you to systematically assess why certain activities succeed or fail. Your M&E data provide you with the opportunity to see whether the assumptions you laid out in the planning steps above hold true in reality. By testing these assumptions – and determining if you achieved your goal and objectives – you are in a better position to adapt and change your project activities accordingly.

Tasks

- ❑ Consider your results in the context of your model.
- ❑ Assess if your goal and objectives were met and if these truly had impact.
- ❑ Review and test the accuracy of your assumptions.
- ❑ Analyze the utility of your indicators.
- ❑ Determine if thresholds of your goal and objectives were adequately set.

Guidance

- Choose analytical methods that are more efficient in isolating program effects from other influences.
- When possible, use rigorous analytical designs and/or statistical analyses.
- Approach interpretation with caution. Avoid declaring causality when methods do not warrant such claims.
- Refine analysis by discussing results with stakeholders.
- Do not overstate conclusions.
- Analyze the effectiveness of your monitoring system as you analyze the effectiveness of your program interventions.
- Analyze your results in a systematic but creative fashion.
- Do not get sidetracked on interesting but programmatically irrelevant analyses.
- In interpreting your data, keep in mind the difference between statistical significance and practical meaning.

Principle – *4C. Communicate results within project team*

For this principle, we are referring to the internal communications[24] that are essential to effective coordination of your project team and keeping all relevant internal stakeholders informed of your progress. First and foremost, adaptive management is designed to provide project teams the information they need to better manage their actions. It is critical therefore, that information be processed and shared in a way that is appropriate and relevant to project members.

Tasks

- ❑ Provide clear management recommendations to the right people based on your analysis.
- ❑ Provide all necessary details to help interpret results.
- ❑ Provide alternatives and contingencies based on the results.

Guidance

- Throughout the project, work closely with decision makers and program staff so as not to surprise them with your findings or recommendations.
- Determine the appropriate level of specificity for your recommendations.
- Consider your program context when formulating recommendations.
- Provide highlights of important issues.
- Be constructive in the way you communicate results.
- Phrase results in action-oriented terminology.

[24] Internal communications: Communications that are designed to share among the people that are directly involved in the project, including staff, local community members, and others stakeholders that are collaborating in some way.

Step 5. Use/Adapt

Collecting data as part of routine M&E activities is done for a purpose. It is done to determine how effective your interventions are and what you need to do to adjust your project to more efficiently reach your goals and objectives. In this step, you use what you have learned during the analysis step to modify and optimize your actions.

The principles in this step include:

- Principle – 5A. Adapt your action plan and M&E plan based on your results

Principle – *5A. Adapt your action plan and M&E plan based on your results*

All the planning you did in Step 2 was not meant to be a one-time event that then gets filed or shelved, never to be seen or used again. Instead, in order to systematically learn over time and to continue to improve the effectiveness of your project, you must revise your action and M&E plans according to what you learn from the results of your analysis. Changes to your action plan will necessarily lead to changes in the underlying assumptions of your project – and your goals and objectives. Therefore, you will need to update your M&E plan to reflect your new suite of actions.

Tasks

- ❑ Reexamine your key assumptions in light of what you have learned. Change them if need be based on your analysis.
- ❑ Revisit your conceptual model and revise it based on what you have learned.
- ❑ Describe expected benefits and costs associated with your recommendations.
- ❑ Work with managers to ensure use of analysis.
- ❑ Make changes to the goal, objectives, and activities in your action plan as needed based on your analysis.
- ❑ Modify your actions in the way your analysis informs you to do so.
- ❑ Identify gaps between program objectives and actual performance, analyze why these gaps have occurred, and develop strategies for improving performance.
- ❑ Document changes in management objectives and strategies (so others will understand the how and why behind your management system).
- ❑ Determine the adequacy of your M&E methods and indicators and modify them if needed.

Guidance

- Plan for the use of your analysis at the beginning of the project.
- Make sure evaluation serves the needs of managers so results are used.
- Make sure time is set aside for your entire team to review, digest, and plan to use the analysis.
- Use results to increase cost-effectiveness.
- Use results to see if you need to adjust monitoring or communications.
- Use findings to identify action needed to improve programs.
- Use evaluation results to determine if current strategies are the most effective way to reach your organization's long-term goals and mission.

Step 6. Communicate

In this step, we are referring to the external communications[25] that take place as part of the conservation process. It is a step that every project needs to do. While some forms of communications can also be a strategy that specific projects may employ to counter threats at their site – for example, developing a radio program to educate farmers on the benefits of sustainable agriculture – we are specifically referring to the type of communications that project teams undertake to inform their external stakeholders on the progress of their project.

The principles in this step include:

- Principle – 6A. Develop a clear dissemination strategy aimed at your audiences

Principle – *6A. Develop a clear dissemination strategy aimed at your audiences*

In order to create a message that external audiences will understand, it is essential to understand how they want to receive the message and what they would be interested in learning. Developing a clear communication and dissemination strategy provides you with a systematic way of reaching your external audiences most effectively.

Tasks

- ❑ Review the audiences you have identified in Step 1b.
- ❑ Identify the message you need to deliver to each audience.
- ❑ Determine the best way to communicate with your audience (part of your audience analysis).
- ❑ Develop and distribute communication products.

Guidance

- Tailor your results to your audience and how they like to learn.
- Communicate in the language and style that is appropriate to your audience. Avoid use of discipline-specific language, such as statistical terms or social science terminology.
- Continually consult your audience throughout the M&E process to make sure you know what they want.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your communications by providing a mechanism for users to provide feedback on your communication products.
- Disseminate results to users in a timely fashion.
- Prepare your audience to understand the meaning, limitations, and interpretation of results prior to their actual release.

[25] External communications: Communications that are designed to reach stakeholders and audiences that are not a part of your project team. This may include donors, policy makers in government and other agencies, other members of the conservation community, and the broader public.

- Frame the findings and their implications in a context relevant to your audience's situation.
- Present your results graphically and in text.
- Don't present more detail than your audience wants.
- Prioritize your communications products.

Step 7. Iterate

This step simply means "to do again." While you should not get stuck in an endless loop of a project cycle, it is important to remember that project management is a dynamic process that requires you to constantly adapt and change over time. This step reminds you to revisit your original assessments of the context within which your project takes place. Do the conclusions you drew from your analysis still hold true? Are there new factors or relationships that you had not previously considered that you believe should be incorporated into your model or addressed by a specific goal or objective? This step lets you look at all the other steps in the project cycle to determine if you need to augment or further develop any of them.

The principles in this step include:

- Principle – 7A. Revisit steps in the overall process on an regular basis
- Principle – 7B. Create a learning environment

Principle – *7A. Revisit steps in the overall process on an regular basis*

From time to time, you should look at each step in the project cycle and determine if you need to make changes to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of your project.

Tasks

- ❑ Modify individual steps based on what you have learned.
- ❑ Develop a plan to continually evaluate your project design, implementation, and monitoring.

Guidance

- Continually strive to improve your project through effective monitoring.
- Promote "reflection-in-action" that is, constantly analyze what you are doing, as you are going it.

Principle – *7B. Create a learning environment*

In order to apply these standards, you need to work in an organizational environment that promotes learning and adaptation over time. This process is not an easy one. It often requires taking some chances and questioning the conventional wisdom related to specific conservation tools and strategies. In order to have the freedom to operate effectively, project teams need to be provided the institutional security and context that affords them

the knowledge that innovation and questioning assumptions are valued in their organizations.

Tasks

- ❑ Get commitment from leaders before moving forward.
- ❑ Provide a safe environment for questioning the status quo.
- ❑ Systematically document progress and process.

Guidance

- ➢ Encourage experimentation.
- ➢ Create a "safe-to-fail" environment.
- ➢ Take advantages of unexpected results ("surprises").
- ➢ Keep an open mind.
- ➢ View the problem and situation from various perspectives.