ISSUE BRIEF

Assessment tools for protected areas

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Assessment tools for protected areas

- While the number of protected areas worldwide is increasing, the extent to which they are meeting their goals remains uncertain.
- A range of management and policy tools can help to assess if and how protected areas are meeting their goals.
- This brief presents the most commonly used tools in protected area management and policy.

Overview

Protected areas, including parks and reserves, are established with specific goals relating to nature conservation, securing ecosystem services or supporting livelihoods and cultural values. Considering the vast and expanding number of protected areas worldwide, and the diverse and often competing goals they strive to meet, it is critical to assess how effectively they are being managed.

There are several tools protected area managers use to assess the extent to which policies are being implemented. Some help assess management effectiveness while others help evaluate policy relevance and support for protected areas.

The Dynamics of the Conservation Estate (DyCe), a project in which the Luc Hoffmann Institute was a partner, produced a review of the most widely used management tools, also highlighting tools that can help assess social, governance and equity issues. This brief is a summary of the longer review.

The review is being used to frame the emerging partnership between the WWF Protected Area Group and its counterpart within IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature. The review is also informing the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas. One of the WWF-IUCN partnership goals is to expand the number of protected areas assessed for inclusion in the IUCN Green List to at least 20 in 50 countries.

Table 1 presents a list of the most commonly used management tools. Table 2 provides a summary of the most widely employed legislation and policy tools.

Table 1: Summary of relevant information for appropriate tool selection

Tool	**What information is collected?**	**Who can use it?**	**How long does the assessment take?**
Simple: Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) METT Handbook: a guide to using the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool	Emphasis on planning, inputs and processes. Collects information on budget, staffing, principal protected area values, objectives and threats	Managers and project staff	Less than one day – filling out a questionnaire

Simple: Rapid Assessment and Prioritisation of Protected Area Management (RAPPAM)	Broad-level assessment that compares protected areas that together make a network or system. Collects information on context, planning, inputs, processes and outputs	Managers, agency/NGO staff, scientists	1-3 days in a workshop format
Complex: IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessments IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessments – Guidelines for their application to natural World Heritage Sites	Assess the values, threats and effectiveness of protection and management of identified values	Assessment coordinator, site assessors, consultants and experts	Sufficient time to collect current knowledge, compile assessments and review externally

Table 2: A selection of tools available to evaluate legislation and law enforcement, develop effective conservation strategies, implement best practices in protected areas and establish baselines to monitor biodiversity for conservation outcomes.

Tool	**What does it do?**	**What is the basic methodology?**	**Who conducts the assessment?**	**Who uses the method?**
Protection Audit for Conservation Sites (PACS)	Assesses legislation, law enforcement measures, prosecutorial and judicial capacities, preventative interventions and drivers of wildlife crime	Consultation workshops followed by data interpretation and report	Government officials, protected area managers, NGO (WWF focal point)	WWF-Asia
Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART)	Assesses effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement patrols and site-based conservation activities	Suite of best practices that help users adapt the tool for their purposes	Site-based staff	WWF-DRC, WWF-Asia, WWF-Madagascar

Conservation Action Planning (CAP)	Helps conservation teams develop focused strategies and measures of success	Define conservation targets, identify and rate threats, allocate conservation status, apply finding to adaptive management	Project team	WWF-Ecuador
Valued Conservation Area (VCA)	A collection of best practice guidelines for conservation area managers	Providing information and guidelines for conservation area managers		WWF-Australia
WWF Standards of Conservation Project and Programme Management (PPMS)	Describes the standards of practice for designing, implementing and monitoring conservation projects and programmes in the WWF network. Helps projects to practice adaptive management	A five-step programme cycle or the WWF software tool Miradi	WWF project planners	WWF
WWF Protected Areas Benefits Assessment Tool (PA-BAT)	Builds and gathers baseline information on the overall benefits of protected areas based on the best available knowledge	Uses two datasheets to provide background information and an overview of the basic benefits	Protected area managers and authorities	Field tested in Malaysia and Turkey, used by WWF-International

Benefits of assessment

Assessing protected areas through these tools can help build capacity and raise awareness of the importance of protected areas. In turn, it may promote a sense of local ownership and pride, which enhances sustainability. Since these tools can help highlight the extent to which protected areas are meeting their goals and where they are falling short, the assessments can be used to inform funders by increasing accountability, sound business and transparency in reporting.

Planning and implementation

Common to all tools is the importance of carefully planning the assessment process. This includes considering training and capacity-building needs, budget, timing and scope. It also involves connecting with all relevant stakeholders: protected area managers, field staff, scientists and NGO staff, and most importantly, local communities and indigenous peoples. This will increase the potential of completing a holistic, realistic and unbiased assessment from which management plans can be adapted and implemented.

Many of the tools described are designed to apply to all protected areas around the world. But to improve the accuracy of the assessments and applicability of improved management

plans, the tools need to be adapted according to local conditions. This might involve adding site-specific questions or developing worksheets or survey questions.

It may be useful to establish a core working group that plans and executes the assessment process. This group needs to ensure that the assessment process is repeated in order to monitor how changes to management affect the protected area. Results and reports should be disseminated to potential funders and other stakeholders to raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges facing protected areas.

Next steps

Evaluating management effectiveness, social impact, governance and equity of protected areas need to be a central component of protected area planning. Assessing equity and governance is particularly challenging due to ambiguous and subjective definitions of 'equitable' management and 'good' governance. Few straightforward numerical measures that facilitate tracking of these aspects over time exist. Efforts are needed to understand all dimensions of equity and governance relating to protected area.

Full report

Assessment tools for protected areas: recommended management effectiveness, social, governance and equity tools for WWF in the Miombo ecoregion.