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FINAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION APPROACHES IN PRIORITY ECOSYSTEMS PROGRAM

February 2015

Camels on the Ustyurt Plateau journey to a water source in Kazakhstan. *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

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Front Cover Photo: A community scout surveys the landscape from Kittenden Outpost, Kenya. *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

Back Cover Photo: Sunrise over Lake Chukh, Mongolia, an important wildlife area. *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

OVERVIEW

This final evaluation of the Sustainable Conservation Approaches in Priority Ecosystems (SCAPES) program assesses conservation strategies used by four implementing partners to address priority threats and strengthen local capacity to conserve biodiversity. The assessment examines seven strategies based on four key principles, gender considerations, and learning opportunities to identify enabling conditions and limiting factors that affected project activity outcomes.

SCAPES has the widest geographic range of all active USAID conservation initiatives. It covers nine transboundary landscape-scale projects in parts of 19 countries, listed in Table 1. The project activities were implemented by four partners: African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and World Wildlife Fund (WWF), plus the Pact Consortium, which is headed by Pact and includes Fauna and Flora International (FFI), BirdLife International, and ACDI/VOCA.

Table 1: SCAPES implementing partners, landscapes, and countries

Implementing Partner	Landscape	Landscape Area Countries
AWF	1. Kilimanjaro Heartland	Kenya, Tanzania
	2. Kazungula Heartland	Botswana, Namibia, Zambia
Pact Consortium	3. Ustyurt Plateau	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan
WCS	4. Madidi-Tambopata Landscape	Bolivia, Peru
	5. Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier, Beyond Fences	Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe
	6. Daurian Steppe	China, Mongolia, Russia
WWF	7. Eastern Cordillera Real Landscape	Colombia, Ecuador, Peru
	8. Ruvuma Landscape	Mozambique, Tanzania
	9. Sacred Himalayan Landscape	India, Nepal

Maasai women with seeds used in an improved rangeland management project. *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

The Office of Forestry and Biodiversity (FAB) in the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Economic Growth, Education, and Environment (E3) managed SCAPES. The SCAPES Program, launched in 2009, followed 20 years of global programs managed by USAID, each designed to improve the design and implementation of conservation programs in the context of international development.

The report is organized by two main evaluation objectives, addressed through four evaluation questions. The full report and a companion document, SCAPES Evaluation Annexes, which provides project documentation and details on findings and conclusions, can be found in late March 2015 at **www.rmportal.net** and at **www.usaid.gov/biodiversity**.

The SCAPES program, a Leader with Associates (LWA) mechanism, was managed by USAID E3/FAB in Washington, DC. It had a life-of-project (October 2009 to September 2014) funding level of approximately $15 million. As an LWA mechanism, numerous Associate Awards granted under SCAPES facilitated the development of additional conservation work funded and managed by USAID Missions and Regional offices; however, these additional activities are not included in this evaluation.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

According to the Evaluation Scope of Work, "the Key Principles of the program and the specific conservation strategies implemented by the partners are found throughout USAID's biodiversity portfolio and are commonly employed by SCAPES implementing partners and the broader conservation community." This evaluation is designed to assess "the use and effectiveness of the Key Principles and conservation strategies […] to inform future management decisions of USAID, its implementing partners, and the conservation community as a whole."

This evaluation has two key objectives:

Objective 1: Assess how partners applied the SCAPES key principles and gender considerations in the design and implementation of conservation strategies.

Objective 1 sought insight into the relative merit of the key principles themselves and their influence on partners in the design and implementation of the most relevant strategies:

- Take a **threats-based approach** to address conservation issues.
- Aim to achieve financial, social, and ecological **sustainability** for interventions.
- Apply **adaptive management** and be responsive to changing situations, information, and enabling conditions.
- **Scale-up** knowledge and impact to increase conservation success at sites, across the partnership, and among the global conservation community.

Objective 2: Assess the outcomes of the most relevant strategies that partners implemented compared to intended results and identify key enabling conditions and limiting factors that affected outcomes.

To address the objectives of this final evaluation, Measuring Impact, with USAID approval, selected seven conservation strategies used in SCAPES landscape portfolio implementations, and then assessed evidence for conservation strategy effectiveness and the conditions where they were likely to achieve conservation outcomes. Using this evidence, Measuring Impact derived theories-of-change models that could be compared across multiple projects to identify key enabling conditions, barriers to achieving outcomes, and lessons learned in the SCAPES program.

Following is a list of seven key strategies USAID, Measuring Impact, and SCAPES implementing partners selected for deeper examination:

- Land protection
- Community-based natural resource management
- Law enforcement to reduce poaching
- Human-wildlife conflict mitigation
- Transboundary coordination
- Climate change adaptation
- Sustainable enterprises

In addition to the two evaluation objectives, this report also includes an assessment of gender considerations in program design and implementation and the outcomes associated with a limiting factors analysis (LFA). The report is organized by four evaluation questions to capture the essence of the two objectives, gender considerations, and LFA.

Evaluation Question #1: To what extent were the SCAPES key principles applied in the design and implementation of SCAPES, and what evidence exists that they contributed to conservation successes?

Evaluation Question #2: To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in the design and implementation of SCAPES activities, and how did they affect outcomes?

Evaluation Question #3: To what extent has SCAPES achieved success in overcoming the limiting factors identified through the limiting factors analysis?

WCS SCAPES Director David Wilkie talks with program staff on the Daurian Steppe in Mongolia. *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

Has the LFA been a useful tool for understanding project progress and improving project management?

Evaluation Question #4: What evidence exists that the implementation of key SCAPES strategies has led to successful conservation outcomes?

This evaluation report contains one additional component, the learning program assessment. SCAPES provided funding for a series of learning activities that the implementing partners carried out, and this assessment evaluates the outcomes and lessons learned from SCAPES learning investments and activities over the life of the projects. It also aids in understanding the success of a criterion in SCAPES Core Objective I to "scale-up knowledge and impact to increase conservation success at sites, across the partnership, and among the global conservation community." Although a separate evaluator, an adult learning specialist, conducted this learning program assessment, it is included in this report to add an understanding of SCAPES impacts, which will be particularly relevant in planning future USAID and partners' programs and strategies.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The two-person evaluation team, which comprised a Senior Evaluation Specialist and a Technical Specialist, used the following methodology. Descriptions of methods specific to individual sections appear in the relevant report sections.

- **Performed desk studies.** Reviewed available project documentation.

- **Prepared questionnaire and interview guides** An online questionnaire (also called "survey" in the report) was prepared using Google Forms. The questionnaire was emailed to 20 USAID and 35 implementing partner key informants. Responses were received from 27 implementing partner key informants, but none from USAID. Interview guides were tailored to key audiences, such as USAID headquarters staff, field staff, beneficiaries, and USAID Mission staff. Subsequently, 99 interviews and focus groups were used to gather information from 232 informants, which added depth and breadth to the questionnaire responses.

- **Conducted site visits in four landscapes.** The Technical Specialist conducted field visits of approximately two weeks to four landscapes (Sacred Himalayas, Kilimanjaro, Daurian Steppe, and Ustyurt Plateau). During these trips, the Technical Specialist visited field sites, some very remote, and conducted interviews with individuals and focus groups.

- **Conducted phone and Skype interviews in five landscapes.** The Senior Evaluation Specialist conducted one- to two-hour interviews with key informants from the remaining five landscapes (Eastern Cordillera, KAZA, Kazungula, Madidi-Tambopata, and Ruvuma) by phone or Skype.

- **Collated, summarized, and analyzed information.** Information gathered from questionnaire responses and interviews was collated, summarized, and analyzed by landscape, key principle, gender considerations, and theory of change (ToC).

- **Analyzed limiting factors.** The Technical Specialist distributed the fourth annual LFA survey to the implementing partners' Chiefs of Party and analyzed the results.

- **Presented conclusions.** During the fourth SCAPES annual meeting on June 25, 2014, implementing partner representatives and USAID officers heard a presentation of 22 sets of conclusions (four key principles, one gender, seven ToCs, nine landscapes, plus results of the LFA) in a day-long, interactive session.

- **Provided feedback and prepared draft evaluation report.** The draft evaluation report submitted to USAID on August 8 included comments provided during the annual meeting and later by email.

- **Used feedback to provide final evaluation report.** Preparation of the final evaluation report incorporated comments from implementing partners and USAID (12 sets) on the draft evaluation report.

Acacia tree in Kenya. *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

METHODOLOGY LIMITATIONS

This evaluation is not a traditional performance evaluation; evaluators were not asked to evaluate the overall impact of SCAPES or individual landscapes. Evaluation limitations stem from the original SCAPES design. As stated in the Evaluation Scope of Work, "The SCAPES program was not originally designed to facilitate an impact evaluation in accordance with the definition in the subsequently released USAID Evaluation Policy. Even a strict performance evaluation of SCAPES would be limited by the fact that the original design of SCAPES did not identify performance indicators based on an explicit program-wide results framework and underlying theory of change.

This evaluation, therefore, combines a theory-based approach with elements of a traditional performance evaluation to examine overall SCAPES outcomes and progress toward specific landscape conservation goals. In the process of applying a theory-based approach, the evaluation tests a framework for learning across a portfolio of activities undertaken by different partners in different geographic areas." The scope of work also notes that many findings in the evaluation report are self-reported and, therefore, may be subject to various biases. The four sections of the full Evaluation Report discuss any additional applicable limitations associated with the methods used.

Nepalese porters haul Chiraita, *a valuable non-timber forest product that reduces human-wildlife conflict.* *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

SCAPES EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Program

Overall program conclusions indicate the landscape sites were well chosen for their conservation value, often based on previous implementing partner experience. Although this report is not a traditional performance evaluation, a broad-brush review of the nine SCAPES landscapes indicates that a majority of the projects performed well in meeting the stated objectives and were successful in moving toward achieving stated conservation goals. A major concern was the lack of progress in achieving financial sustainability and that, at the end of SCAPES, continuation of conservation activities in all of these landscapes remains heavily dependent on donor funding.

The SCAPES program activity Request for Applications (RFA) indicated a preference for proposals that included a transboundary conservation component, but without an indication of a model or hypothesis for testing transboundary conservation activities, which focused implementing partners' attention on issues that most donors and partners had not addressed, such as law enforcement and reduced poaching across borders. In some landscapes, transboundary conservation efforts ran into historical enmities and political roadblocks that might have been foreseen by a political-economic analysis during project design. The SCAPES RFA did not require proposals to include a specific conceptual model (logical framework, results framework), and most proposals lacked hard quantitative targets that limited USAID Acquisition Officer Representatives' and evaluators' ability to measure progress and change. The five-year SCAPES timeframe, as in many USAID conservation projects, is generally insufficient to show measurable landscape-level conservation changes unless the project is part of a consistent longer-term implementing partner program of 15-20 years duration.

With only two exceptions, implementing partners used SCAPES funds to continue some activities in specific regions of a larger landscape that they had supported for years, with USAID funds complementing funding from other donors. Unfortunately, USAID has not found a way to encourage expanded project reporting to include these broader landscape efforts, which would provide a landscape-wide view of threats abatement (especially for mega-threats) and landscape-wide successes or failures.

Almost without exception, E3/FAB project managers were described positively, and implementing partners appreciated and supported the project focus on learning. Most complaints related to perceived slowness in USAID approval of workplans and annual funding. USAID country Missions were not involved in SCAPES project design, and Missions where SCAPES projects were located were not invited to annual meetings, unlike implementing partner field directors. During project implementation, Mission personnel were helpful in commenting on annual workplans and resolving partner implementation issues, when requested, and during evaluation field visits; however, they seem to have been overlooked as targets for the learning that SCAPES hoped to achieve. The learning generated by SCAPES within USAID appears to have been limited mostly to E3/FAB staff.

Evaluation Question 1, Key Principles

The evaluators were asked to respond to the following question: To what extent were the SCAPES key principles applied in the design and implementation of SCAPES, and what evidence exists that they contributed to conservation successes?

The four key principles were already well integrated into the standard procedures of almost all major conservation-based implementing partners, but SCAPES annual meetings and other learning activities have helped develop and refine these concepts.

The use of a threats-based approach (TBA) as a major component in implementing partner project design helped focus SCAPES; however, TBA has been cumbersome and costly to use as a monitoring and reporting tool, with questions about the frequency of carrying out time-consuming analyses of threats and the usefulness of threat ranking. The Major Contributions

section discusses SCAPES effectiveness in reducing threats.

The evaluation shows that the key principle on sustainability, and especially financial sustainability, is the area where implementing partners and USAID have demonstrated the least progress, and conservation programs as a whole need to catch up with other development sectors such as agriculture and health that are moving toward local management and financing. None of the SCAPES landscapes was financially sustainable at the close of the program, although some progress was made in securing modest funding from host governments, conservation-related revenue transfers from fees and licenses, and profit-making community-run enterprises. While some implementing partner conservation managers stated that host governments will never be able to finance conservation of regions that have global importance, USAID and the implementing partners should move beyond this shibboleth and, according to one partner leader, "carefully discuss and consider what sustainability reasonably looks like for various types of conversation activities, given the host of conditions under which implementing partners, communities, and governments are operating." USAID should also require new environment officers to attend courses that teach recurrent cost analysis, cost-benefit analysis, and financial analyses for conservation projects.

The evaluation found that adaptive management, in practice, is hard for field personnel to distinguish from standard project monitoring and periodic course corrections, and one of the recommendations is that salient features of adaptive management to support systematic, evidence-based learning be differentiated from present USAID monitoring and evaluation practices. Many staff considered any program change as being adaptive management, even if it did not stem from testing assumptions, evaluating results, and learning from them. Often the examples cited were reactions to changing circumstances rather than to adaptations from initial plans to improve project results.

The evaluation found that the key principle of scaling-up is only marginally valuable in a relatively short five-year program, and it is more appropriate for longer-term programs. Another recommendation is that USAID should require, in addition to consideration of all key principles in project design, annual progress reports on meeting key principle objectives.

Evaluation Question 2, Gender

The SCAPES program was designed during a period in USAID management when gender considerations did not have the prominence that they have today. The SCAPES RFA does request that applicants include a discussion of gender issues in addressing how the program design and implementation will support marginalized people, but the required USAID gender analysis was only two pages long, and implementing partner reports only needed to address gender in sex-disaggregated targets in their Performance Management Plans. Nevertheless, most partners, especially WWF, went beyond these minimal requirements, and their projects provide numerous examples of gender-related success. For example, the Eastern Cordillera workplan includes gender analyses, and WWF developed training modules on climate change vulnerability, with adaptation needs identified by men and women. A notable gender-related outcome is the representation of women in farm development plans (20 percent of the first 15 farm development plans were owned and managed by women; by the next year, 2012, 28 percent of the 116 plan beneficiaries were women).

To their credit, when projects reported gender activities, USAID managers aggressively helped address issues and encouraged greater attention. While positive actions were taken in various landscapes, overall the gender work lacked a coherent or deliberate strategy. An evaluation recommendation is that E3/FAB develop gender guidance specific to the biodiversity context, drawing on the guidance and tools recently developed by USAID's Feed the Future program.

Evaluation Question 3, Limiting Factors Analysis

Evaluators conducted and analyzed the fourth LFA carried out during SCAPES. The LFA asked implementing partner managers to assess the importance of eight limiting factors in achieving project outcomes. The report discusses the LFA's significant methodological issues, which evoked surprise from the implementing partners during the SCAPES annual meeting. The results indicate that the majority of limiting factors have become more limiting over the project course instead of less limiting. Compliance and enforcement and conservation finance remain the two most serious barriers to implementing conservation activities in SCAPES project sites, similar to the LFA findings of global conservation programs. It is hard to draw insights from this analysis due to the inconsistent response rate to the request for detailed descriptions of trends.

The evaluation report details several significant LFA methodological weaknesses, including its bluntness and subjectivity. A baseline comparison of clear, measurable metrics relevant to the original project goals taken across project sites might serve as a better monitoring tool to allow USAID to gauge progress. The evaluation report recommends that USAID survey other approaches used by nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, and donors to gather and analyze information across a portfolio of landscape projects, and then, working with USAID Missions, determine which tools would be most appropriate for future use.

Evaluation Question 4, Evidence of Successful Conservation Outcomes

Each ToC identified common actions, intermediate results, threats, and biodiversity targets across SCAPES and provided a framework evaluators used to assess outcomes of seven major conservation strategies, such as land protection, law enforcement, and climate change. Although these theories of change were developed retrospectively in SCAPES Year Four to support learning in this evaluation, they did not precisely mirror the individual project strategies. The ToC approach helped evaluators compare project approaches and results and promoted better understanding of political, social, and economic contexts and the enabling conditions and barriers to success for the common strategies. The objective was to identify these factors, along with the relevant project design considerations, to provide useful insight into better design and implementation of new landscape projects that address one or more of the conservation strategies examined.

The elephant: icon of the Kilimanjaro landscape and severely imperiled by illegal trade.
Photo: Matthew Erdman

Although this evaluation, unlike a performance evaluation, did not rigorously evaluate individual landscape results in comparison to planned targets, it did find that, in general, the implementation of key SCAPES strategies has led to the achievement of outcomes, although with wide variation among the landscapes and with some projects clearly achieving more than others with particular strategies.

The evaluation found that two of the most effective strategies were (1) land protection, where at least 9.5 million hectares (larger than the state of Indiana) of biologically significant land and natural resources were placed under improved management, and (2) community-based natural resource management, with at least 9,000 people trained in natural resource management or biodiversity conservation and strong community management models operating in four of the landscapes. The evaluation conclusion is probably not surprising because these two strategies have been the bedrock of nongovernmental organizations' work in international conservation over several decades.

All of the SCAPES landscapes were encouraged to include transboundary coordination in their programs, and this relatively unusual program addition generated mixed results. Transboundary coordination approaches were very successful along the India-Nepal and Kenya-Tanzania borders where community-led cooperation among similar ethnic groups on both sides of the border encouraged cooperation between national government law enforcement and aerial wildlife monitoring programs. Suspicions and historic disputes that were not adequately assessed during project design, however, seriously hampered implementing partners' efforts at the sites on the Bolivia-Peru, Tanzania-Mozambique, and Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan borders. Overall, transboundary coordination successes have come slowly. The greatest progress was made where implementing partners have been working for years and are trusted on both sides of a border. While USAID should be lauded for encouraging the transboundary coordination, and much has been learned, partners have found it particularly difficult to locate national government and donor funds to sustain these initiatives.

Climate change adaptation, a relatively new landscape strategy, was addressed in five landscapes. WWF took the most rigorous approach, especially in its Eastern Cordillera Real landscape. Overall, the climate change adaptation strategy results included numerous vulnerability assessments conducted and local adaptation plans developed and piloted, increased adaptation capacity in more than 1,300 people, identification of climate refugia in one landscape using an innovative InVEST tool, introduction of climate-smart agriculture, and adaptation of plans in two countries that were influenced by SCAPES initiatives.

Wildlife poaching, especially by heavily armed, professional international poachers in East and Southern Africa, has increased rapidly during the SCAPES lifetime. While activities to build capacity for law enforcement to reduce poaching were included, in some measure, in six landscape designs, they proved largely inadequate in Africa, and implementing partners turned to other donors or used their own non-USAID funds to augment anti-poaching efforts. Nevertheless, SCAPES has been successful in strengthening the community's role in law enforcement efforts, improving ranger capacity, and, especially in Asian landscapes, working with national government programs. One highlight is the establishment of the world's first dog unit that specializes in saiga horn detection at Kazakhstan border-crossing points.

SCAPES activities on sustainable enterprises have led to AWF establishment of community-based tourism operations, which, in one case, is beginning to share profits to finance community conservation activities. Although some failures occurred in pilot activities, SCAPES landscapes have led to positive results from livestock initiatives, cardamom cooperatives, and caiman harvesting associations, with at least 2,200 people now having increased economic benefits derived from sustainable natural resource use.

A strategy for mitigation of human-wildlife conflict activities was used to establish successful programs to compensate for loss of livestock and minimize retaliatory killings of predators and encourage use of a variety of crop-loss prevention methods. WCS's Beyond Fences innovative initiative in Southern Africa, which was SCAPES' only policy-focused project, has made impressive strides in gaining regional and international agreement on non-fencing approaches to protect livestock from wildlife-borne diseases. Unfortunately, funds to sustain this lengthy process post-SCAPES have not been found.

A Nepalese woman tends a cabbage field started from a loan set up through SCAPES. *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

Learning Component Assessment

One of the SCAPES core objectives was to scale-up knowledge and impact to increase conservation success at sites, throughout the partnership, and among the global conservation community. A SCAPES hallmark was the intentional focus on partner-driven learning throughout the life of the program. From the beginning, SCAPES set aside dedicated time and resources for learning activities, such as four annual meetings, two partner-driven learning programs (governance and climate change adaptation), and implementation of a LFA applied across the life of the project. Three learning documents were written, pilot tested, and released publically:

A man carries plastic tubing for an irrigation project to support climate change adaptation in Nepal. *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

- *Guidelines for Assessing the Strengths and Weaknesses of Natural Resource Governance in Landscapes and Seascapes, June 2013*
- *SCAPES Partners: A Review of Field-Based Common Ground on Adaptation, October 2012*
- *Climate Change Adaptation Tool*

The Environmental Communication, Learning and Outreach project evaluation survey for the learning component included three sets of key questions:

1. Learning Experience: *Overall, what was the partners' experience in SCAPES learning activities? (a) What worked well? (b) What could have been improved? (c) Was it worth it? Why or why not?*

The evaluation showed that the SCAPES learning annual meeting and partner-driven learning activities were seen as very useful across SCAPES audiences. Partner organizations expressed a strong desire to apply and continue to build on the learning done through SCAPES and cross-institutionally beyond the life of the project. The opportunity to learn about other landscapes and discuss experiences and activities with a variety of partners was most often cited as the greatest benefit by all audiences. For partner members that were involved in predecessor programs, the Global Conservation Program, USAID, and NGO partners indicated that lessons learned about the Global Conservation Program learning experience were applied in the implementation of SCAPES learning activities. In addition, interviewees and focus group participants cited a number of ways the learning process could have been enhanced, including follow-up after events, connecting regional partners and field staff, and dedicating more resources to learning overall.

2. Impacts and Fostering Ongoing Learning: *What impacts did the SCAPES learning component have on partner organizations' practices?*

Throughout the learning assessment process, respondents expressed a strong desire for cross-

institutional learning. Specifically, in the 2014 meeting discussion on the learning assessment, multiple groups highlighted an interest in site-based annual meetings and other site exchange-visit opportunities to support field-to-field cross-institutional learning. Throughout SCAPES, the only cross-site visit that was mentioned took place at the field level; most cross-institutional learning happened among the IPs' and USAID's headquarters representatives during quarterly SCAPES meetings and the implementation of the partner-driven learning initiatives. Partner organization headquarters representatives noted that cross-institutional learning opportunities and platforms beyond annual meetings were not supported in SCAPES design or implementation. One participant noted, *"In the future, it would be better to work cross-institutional learning into the design so it is structurally supported and does not have to include [headquarters]."* Following is a list of implementing partners' suggestions for post-SCAPES cross-institutional learning:

- Support communication, knowledge management, and learning across SCAPES organizations.
- Gather, distill, and disseminate lessons learned, reports, and tools to USAID Missions, government agencies, and the broader development community.
- Continue to connect through meetings, such as at International Union for Conservation of Nature-sponsored or other global conservation conventions and meetings.
- Develop and share strong close-out reports.
- Link to other initiatives for continued program support.
- Support learning in the field.

3. Embodiment of Learning Network Best Practices: *To what extent did SCAPES learning embody the characteristics and use the practices of successful USAID Learning Networks?*

In 2013, USAID's Office of Policy, Planning and Learning published a set of best practices for learning networks, "Practices of Successful Learning Networks: Documenting Learning from the GROOVE Learning Network," for Agency-wide use. This document was reviewed and compared to data and background documents on SCAPES learning to assess the extent that SCAPES used these best practices. While the review found that SCAPES had indeed used many of the recommended best practices, the learning assessment noted some important exceptions:

- **Apply an integrated approach to the knowledge cycle:** Attention was paid to knowledge generation and sharing from the beginning of the learning topic identification, but to a lesser extent to knowledge dissemination and application.
- **Focus intentionally on specifying desired outcomes:** To a certain extent, SCAPES defined learning expectations, explained how they would work together, shared previous experiences, created an inventory of learning issues and questions, and developed flexible workplans. Some elements that SCAPES did not put into practice or that were undocumented include helping members understand what a learning network is, defining goals and approaches, and being intentional about reviewing the learning process. SCAPES also did not use adaptive management of learning activities.
- **Be attentive to the evolution of the network over time:** SCAPES learning activities and participants evolved and helped refocus efforts. Some topics such as gender did arise toward the end of the agreements, but they were not addressed because of limited time and resources. Overall, SCAPES paid attention to the flow and energy of partner organizations and USAID to continue learning over the life of the project.
- **Make conscious choices about use of collective time:** SCAPES was intentional in the development of regular meeting structures like quarterly and annual meetings. Collaboration on annual meeting agendas among USAID and partner headquarter organizations was high; however, communication and meeting planning on field staff needs appears to have been a missed opportunity.

MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SCAPES PROGRAM

Transboundary Cooperation

The SCAPES program preference for all landscapes to include a transboundary cooperation component has led to extensive experience in how this cooperation can be successful or not. In the border areas of India-Nepal and Kenya-Tanzania, transboundary cooperation began at the village level with the same ethnic group living on both sides of the border and gradually, with national government support, expanding along those borders. The India-Nepal cooperation now extends along most of the border.

In Kenya-Tanzania, AWF has facilitated expanded transboundary cooperation to ease bureaucratic impediments to cross-border aerial surveillance, wildlife herd tracking, and wildlife census. The two governments also have allowed rangers to pursue across borders under certain circumstances.

The Beyond Fences and AHEAD initiative by WCS in Southern Africa, while not completed, has greatly increased the likelihood that non-fence alternatives to protecting cattle from wildlife diseases will be accepted soon by key international organizations. The approach may be tested in Southern Africa and perhaps Mongolia, reopening traditional transhumance and migration routes to wildlife.

Less successful transboundary cooperation activities have shown that historical border disputes and political issues between governments can block or delay implementing partner efforts to encourage joint planning among rangers and conservation officials across borders. A political-economic review of these issues should be part of project design. SCAPES transboundary cooperation also has worked best where an implementing partner is already present, experienced, and trusted on both sides of the border. Unfortunately, SCAPES experience has shown that most donors still find it difficult to finance these transborder activities; funding to continue transboundary conservation activities has not been secured for several landscapes.

Threats

All of the SCAPES implementing partners took a threats-based approach in designing their landscape projects. Little evidence exists, however, to demonstrate that during the relatively short five-year life of SCAPES, these threats were substantially alleviated, in part due to the insensitivity of the measurement tools available. The difficulty in addressing and measuring threats under SCAPES is compounded by the relatively small size and limited duration of the SCAPES-funded activities. Also implementing partners' reporting to USAID under SCAPES does not take into account partner landscape activities funded by other donors or implementing partners-financed activities, which was particularly evident when partners used other donor funding to address international poaching in East and Southern Africa.

SCAPES did a reasonable job of addressing some threats in the landscapes, such as unsustainable use of soils, water, and forests; misuse of fire protection, industrial or plantation agriculture, and resource extraction; and illegal activities such as local poaching, logging, and polluting water sources. Little evidence of success emerged to indicate emerging mega-threats were addressed, such as international poaching in East and Southern Africa, gold mining in Peru, oil and gas extraction, and new infrastructure and commercial investments that threatened landscape biodiversity and conservation goals. (USAID managers noted that SCAPES had some successes in addressing international poaching in Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Nepal, and Kilimanjaro; no elephants were poached in Enduimet.) Little effort was made to address the international demand side of these threats, especially for saiga and rhino horn, elephant tusks, and wolf pelts. Experience in SCAPES projects also demonstrated how quickly these threats can arise. For example, large-scale international poaching and wildcat mining were not significant threats when SCAPES projects were being designed.

Climate Change Adaptation

The SCAPES RFA encouraged, but did not require, implementing partners to include a climate change adaptation component in their proposals. Among the five landscapes that did include this relatively new component, the three WWF landscapes and particularly Eastern Cordillera Real, addressed the issue with substantial attention and funding. The major climate change adaptation activities in Eastern Cordillera Real, which provide an excellent model for future projects, are summarized in the next paragraph.

Climate change adaptation for biodiversity conservation was the primary lens for WWF's objectives in Eastern Cordillera Real, including reducing vulnerability through land protection and managing ecosystem services, building local knowledge and capacity, developing policies to address drivers of environmental change, and orienting economic development for climate resilience. To reduce vulnerability, WWF conducted climate change vulnerability analyses (CCVAs) and valuation and modeling using the Integrated Valuation of Ecosystem Services and Tradeoffs (InVEST) tool. This tool helped identify areas vulnerable to landslides, and thus guided reforestation and restoration efforts and helped identify and delimit new conservation areas that could serve as refugia where species threatened by climate variation could move or find safe corridors in their search for suitable habitats. Matching funds were used to model climate niches for 54 bird species and 27 mammals. The project encouraged protected areas and the national protected area systems to include CCVAs and adaptation plans in their management planning process. To increase local knowledge and capacity, the project disseminated CCVA results to communities; conducted workshops to build capacity to develop adaptation measures, such as climate-friendly agriculture and climate-tolerant coffee; and developed awareness-raising materials. WWF also worked to integrate adaptation and conservation strategies in national policy agendas, including the Colombia Decade Environmental Plan, the Ecuadorian climate change strategy, and national Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change communications.

An endangered grey crowned crane, Amboseli National Park, Kenya.
Photo: Matthew Erdman

Theory of Change Framework Applied to Support Learning

The E3/FAB office decided in SCAPES Year Four to include an evidence and learning approach to the final program evaluation. USAID requested that its Measuring Impact mechanism work with implementing partners to retroactively develop theories of change to describe seven key conservation interventions that were taking place in numerous SCAPES landscapes as a basis for learning across multiple sites, countries, and implementing partners. While this approach raised concerns with one implementing partner, other partners said they had faith in the approach and felt that using this scenario as part of the end-of-project evaluation could bring useful insight into which interventions were working best and why.

With implementing partners' input during the annual and quarterly meetings, theory-of-change models were developed for seven commonly used interventions to provide an activity-by-activity results model. With the results model, assumptions can be clarified about the intermediate results that will be achieved in reducing threats and reaching major conservation targets. The seven results models were then used to derive the comparative framework for the evidence-based learning section of the evaluation.

Evaluators gave implementing partners a questionnaire to assess project outcomes and assumptions using the framework, and then later asked follow-up questions during field visits and telephone interviews. In each case, evaluators found that the realities of field implementation were much more complex and nuanced than the original theory-of-change models, and they recommended modifications. Evaluators also identified key issues to be addressed in future program designs based on the theory of change. The theory-of-change model, best used as a project design tool similar to a logical or results framework, can be expanded by adding an expected timeline to achieve outcomes, such as six months. Adding activity budget projections based on implementing partners' experiences, which were unavailable for this SCAPES evaluation, could help support evidence-based adaptive management. Although it was difficult to compare project objectives, implementation activities, and results across a nine-landscape portfolio, it became clear that some strategies were more effective than others at achieving desired outcomes. These are, not surprisingly, land protection and community-based natural resource management interventions where partners have worked for decades and honed successful practices applied in SCAPES activities. The least effective strategy, with several AWF exceptions, was sustainable enterprises; the strategy with the least implementing partner attention and effectiveness was climate change adaptation, with WWF exceptions. The enabling conditions for effective strategies were often previous implementing partner experience, community buy-in and participation, trust developed between the implementing partners and communities, the presence of a legal framework to support the intervention, and government capacity and willingness to support partner efforts. The most common barriers to success included lack of financial and trained human resources, unstable community networks, legal frameworks not in place, inadequate government support, security issues, and unresolved resource conflicts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE USAID LANDSCAPE PROGRAMS

This SCAPES evaluation reviews only a small percentage of the growing number of USAID-funded landscape programs funded with biodiversity funds and, more recently, global climate change funds. Nevertheless, this evaluation reveals design considerations for future landscape programs by USAID Missions and Regional offices:

- In light of threats and opportunities, establish a reasonably sized landscape for support. Landscape boundaries—physical, governmental, biodiversity, ethnic—should be defined by funding limitations.
- Ascertain if a transboundary cooperation component is needed to address some threats.
- Set a reasonable duration for USAID support. Despite typical USAID procurement limits of five years or less, several USAID projects have been authorized for longer periods, such as the 20-year four-phase Initiative for Conservation of the Andean Amazon and the Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment projects.
- Prioritize a few problems to address, considering USAID and partners' comparative advantages.
- Discuss how best to partner with non-USAID funded organizations working in the landscape and reduce duplicate reporting requirements by multiple donors.
- Determine if legal and other prerequisites are in place or if a landscape project should be preceded by a policy or human-capacity development project.
- Consider the value of non-conservation interventions. Several SCAPES projects reported gaining community trust and participation by using fast-acting non-conservation activities, such as building schools, providing health care, constructing small bridges, or improving paths to markets to build community trust and support while waiting for results from longer-term conservation and livelihood activities.
- Study how to partner to address mega-threats.
- Determine the steps needed to localize project management and financial sustainability.
- Include a learning component in USAID, implementing partners', and host country activities and their conservation communities.

Cardamom, a sustainable cash crop, grows on hillsides in Nepal. *Photo: Matthew Erdman*

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