

Enhancing Our Heritage

Monitoring and managing for success in natural World Heritage sites

Abstract

This paper describes the *Enhancing our Heritage* (EOH) project, which aims to develop a framework for assessing the management effectiveness of natural World Heritage (WH) sites in pilot sites across three continents. It describes the project, discusses lessons learned to date and includes a case study on the implementation of the project at Aldabra Atoll in the Seychelles.

Introduction to the project

Monitoring and evaluation are increasingly viewed as critical components of protected area management. The assessment of management effectiveness has three major applications: adaptive management - to improve performance within protected areas; accountability - to assist reporting by site and system managers, and improved project planning - to review approaches and apply lessons learned.

The four-year UNESCO/IUCN *Enhancing our Heritage* (EoH) project, funded by the United Nations Foundation, is testing and approach to improving monitoring and evaluation in natural World Heritage sites. The project team is working with staff at ten pilot World Heritage sites in Africa, Asia and Latin America¹ to develop and test assessment methods looking at management systems and processes along with social and ecological impacts. The project has been operating for two years.

Natural World Heritage sites protect areas of 'outstanding universal value' for science, conservation or natural beauty. Given their significance, it is critical that managers have the information and support systems needed to manage sites effectively, and that the global community has confidence that their values are being maintained. World Heritage signatory States have already implemented a 'World Heritage in Danger' list, reactive monitoring missions by IUCN and requirements for periodic reporting by State Parties. But these 'external' mechanisms, however valuable, cannot replace the need for regular monitoring and assessment by managers themselves.

EoH is working with managers to use the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas *Framework for Assessment of Protected Area Management Effectiveness* (the WCPA Framework)² to develop and test assessment systems suitable for World Heritage sites. The WCPA Framework is based on the idea that management follows a process, or cycle, with six distinct elements, which are used to develop monitoring and evaluation systems:

¹ The sites are in **Africa**: Greater St Lucia Wetlands Park, South Africa; Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda; Serengeti National Park, Tanzania and Aldabra Atoll, Seychelles. **South Asia**: Keoladeo National Park, India; Kaziranga National Park, India and Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal. **Latin America**: Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve, Honduras; Sangay National Park, Ecuador and Canaima National Park, Venezuela.

² Hockings, Marc with Sue Stolton and Nigel Dudley (2000); *Assessing Effectiveness - A Framework for Assessing Management Effectiveness of Protected Areas*, University of Cardiff and IUCN, Switzerland.

- ↳ it starts with establishing the **context** of existing values and threats;
- ↳ progresses through **planning**; and
- ↳ allocation of resources (**inputs**); and
- ↳ as a result of management actions (**process**);
- ↳ eventually produces goods and services (**outputs**);
- ↳ that result in impacts or **outcomes**.

World Heritage sites vary enormously in their management, objectives, resources and capacity. Rather than impose one top-down system on the whole network, the project is developing and testing a toolkit of methodologies, which will help managers and stakeholders assess current activities, identify gaps and discuss how problems might be addressed. The *Toolkit for Assessing Management Effectiveness* consists of a Manual, Workbook and CD (containing both publications and explanatory PowerPoint presentations). Following an initial assessment of management effectiveness, team members and managers are using the results to improve management and develop monitoring and assessment systems. We intend that the experiences gained from the ten sites taking part in the EoH project will be used to improve monitoring and evaluation, and thus management, in all natural World Heritage sites.

The project should also result in improved management of the ten pilot WH sites, by providing:

- training for site managers and others in the application of assessment and monitoring techniques;
- established assessment, monitoring and reporting programmes for evaluating management effectiveness and the state of conservation of World Heritage values;
- established or improved communication and co-operation between site managers, local communities and NGOs, regional training institutions and other key experts and stakeholders to ensure continuation of assessment and monitoring beyond the life of the project;
- improved management in areas of identified deficiency resulting from training programmes and small-scale support provided through the project;
- integration of assessment and monitoring practices into management; and
- preparation of project proposals and funding sought for large-scale projects required to address any identified deficiencies.

The results of the EoH project will also be used by IUCN to develop recommendations to the World Heritage Committee on a consistent approach to monitoring and reporting on the state of conservation and management effectiveness of all natural World Heritage sites and on improving the effectiveness of site management.

Figure 1 describes the main project steps for each site in diagrammatic form.

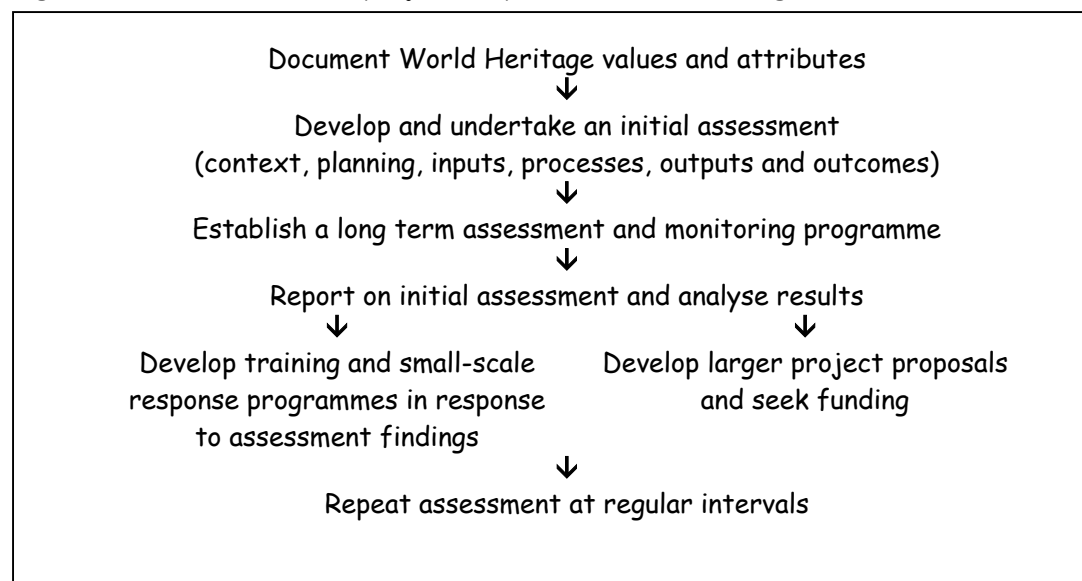


Figure 1: Enhancing our Heritage project steps at each pilot site

Lessons learnt

The challenge facing the EoH project is to develop methodologies suitable for assessing management effectiveness in all natural World Heritage sites, and ensure that monitoring and evaluation is implemented and sustained through on-going management processes. From the experiences of implementing the project to date four clear lessons can be drawn on developing monitoring and evaluation systems.

- **Relevance and applicability:** assessments have to provide insights easily translated into realistic and achievable management actions
- **Adaptability:** sites need assessment systems developed from a range of methodologies ('toolkits') to suit realities and needs
- **Partnerships:** self-assessment needs to be strengthened by stakeholder involvement - achieved through open and transparent processes
- **Reporting:** assessments have to produce results suitable for various reporting purposes - from local and national to international requirements

Experiences from the field

Although only half way through the project timeframe, the project results from the 10 sites involved have shown some clear trends and lessons, in particular the project team have identified four key areas where activities are helping to improve the long term sustainability of the site:

- Working in partnership with stakeholders on the assessment of management effectiveness can lead to positive conservation results;
- Effective management strategies and systems can greatly aid management;
- Clarity of conservation targets can lead to better directed conservation management; and

- The continuous development of the knowledge base and associated targeted research should be guided towards informing management decisions.

Sangay National Park, Ecuador protects a spectrum of ecosystems, from tropical rainforests to glaciers, in the Eastern Cordillera region of the Andes. Its isolation provides protection to indigenous species, such as the mountain tapir, spectacled bear and the Andean condor. Management of the site has tended to be species orientated despite the size and variety of the site. The EoH project is working with managers of the park and stakeholders to utilise the results of assessments to identify park values and management targets, which can then provide the focus for assessment, planning and management of the park in the future. Over the next few years EoH will help to develop monitoring (to determine baseline data) and management strategies for this broader vision of site values.

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is managed by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) primarily to conserve its rare afro-montane vegetation, and associated wildlife including mountain gorillas. Gorilla-based tourism provides a major source of income for Bwindi, UWA and the local population. However, the park management and Bwindi-based Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation recognise the need for knowledge and assessment of a far wider range of species and interactions. The EoH project is thus helping update vegetation maps; assess endemic species, especially lesser known plants and animals; research the sustainability of local non-timber forest product harvesting and assess systems that monitor such harvesting; and evaluate methods for minimising crop raiding by wild animals, including the research and testing of new methods and deterrents.

In Bwindi, UWA has developed good relationships with the local stakeholders around the park. In particular, 20 per cent of the park's revenue from entrance fee is directed towards meeting the basic social and economic needs of the local people. Asking local people to take an active part in the assessment of management was however a new and challenging step for the park managers. The results have however been positive and have led to an increased awareness of management issues and conservation objectives. One tangible result of this has been handing over of 4.2 km² of land for gorilla conservation.

A former duck-hunting reserve, wetlands, forest and scrub of the **Keoladeo National Park** in India were protected to provide wintering habitat for aquatic birds, including the very rare Siberian crane. As such it needs water – but so does the local population. Although legislation gives the park priority over other water users, local villages have an increasing dependence on the park's water resources.

The EoH project is working with Keoladeo to develop both ecological knowledge and improved relationships with local people. By supporting research aimed at understanding wetland dynamics, long-term monitoring regimes can be developed and water balances assessed. Unlike other sites, where stakeholder workshops have been held, the EoH project in Keoladeo is consulting directly with local villages. It is hoped that this will add to the growing success of participatory approaches in the area.

Aldabra Atoll, Seychelles

Aldabra is an unusual World Heritage site in many ways. The nature of use of the site is profoundly affected by its location and management regime. Seychelles has 115 islands. The coral atoll of Aldabra is one of the largest (34km x 14.5km with a total area of 365km² and a land area 155km²) sited some 400 km north-west from the tip of Madagascar (see figure 2). Seychelles has a population of 80,000, most of whom live on three northerly islands, including Mahé, the main island which is 1,250km distant from Aldabra.

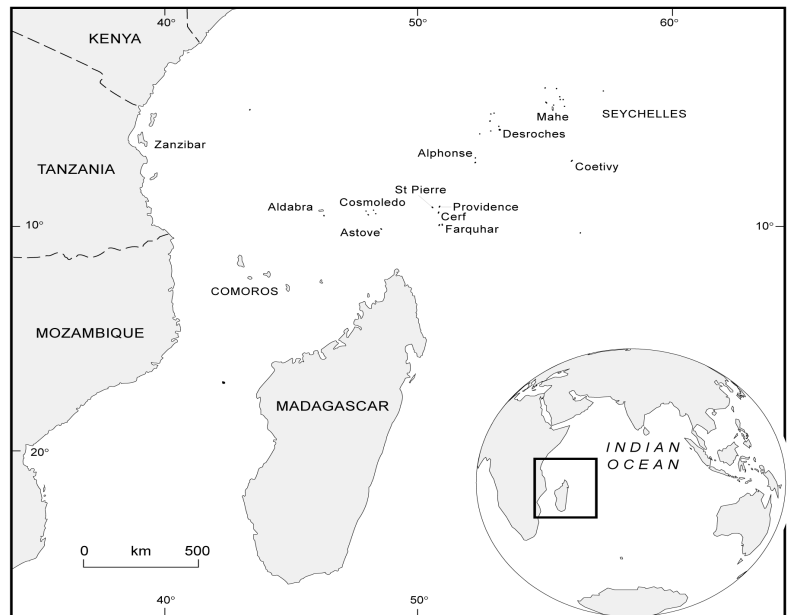


Figure 2: Location of Aldabra Atoll World Heritage Site

Aldabra became a Special Reserve in 1981 and a World Heritage Site in 1982 and is the largest raised limestone atoll in the world. It is famed for:

- giant tortoises (about 100,000 - the largest population in the world);
- relatively rich terrestrial biodiversity for an atoll, with a high proportion of endemics;
- diversity of marine habitats and rich marine biodiversity, especially fish;
- huge seabird colonies and large numbers of shore birds;
- nesting green turtles and juvenile hawksbill turtles;
- "mushroom" islets of eroded limestone; and
- relative lack of human disturbance (no indigenous population).

Aldabra is managed by the Seychelles Island Foundation (SIF) which is a "quasi-NGO" managed by a government-appointed board. SIF's work in relation to Aldabra concentrates on caring for and protecting the atoll, conducting research and monitoring, providing protection from threats, and restoring natural ecosystems by removing alien species. SIF is funded by a small government grant and funds raised by the SIF itself. There is an SIF research station on Aldabra with around 10 staff, mostly Seychellois. SIF headquarters are on Mahé Island, with a staff of four (plus a local management board).

Given the atoll's position and distance from SIF headquarters the main challenges associated with the management of Aldabra are:

- Remoteness: in terms of logistics (the island is physically hard to get to); staffing (as staff have to stay on the island for long periods with little outside contact) and

supervision (as clearly it is hard to supervise staff from a distance on over 1,000 km);

- The challenge of developing sustainable financing; and
- The need to meet the responsibilities that come with World Heritage status.

Developing a more strategic and planned management structure has been identified as an important step forward for SIF and Aldabra. Following the initial assessment, the EoH project is contributing to developing these systems through a number of small projects, including:

- The development of an annual works programme and three-year rolling programme, which aim to establish processes which will guide the implementation of the management plan and work programmes for Aldabra Atoll. These programmes will put the forward planning of work for management of Aldabra on a sound footing using international best practice approaches to work planning. The annual and three-year rolling programmes also provide a sound basis for budget planning and management.
- Investigating options for sustainable financing. At present the annual expenditure for management of Aldabra is between 1,858,119 to 2,186,308 Seychellois Rupees (SR) (approx US\$357,330 to US\$420,440). Income from Aldabra is approximately 348,000 SR (US\$174,000) and the remainder comes from income from Vallée de Mai, the other protected area managed by SIF, and other SIF income. It is estimated that an annual budget of approximately 2,600,000 SR (US\$500,000) is desirable for management of Aldabra based on current management approaches.
- Development of organisational systems development, including: financial management and expenditure control; emergency response planning; communications and information management; personnel management; maintenance planning and management and business planning.
- An options paper is being prepared for the SIF Board and Government on the possible development of an integrated management system for the Aldabra Group of islands. This would possibly involve SIF in partnership with the Islands Development Company, Island Conservation Society, Marine Conservation Society Seychelles and other Seychellois organisations. The options paper will explore possible mechanisms for developing an integrated ecosystem management approach for the Aldabra Group as a whole. The objectives of developing such an approach to management would be to:
 - enhance conservation management and protection across the island group; and
 - develop an integrated management system for the group, possibly including some form of multiple use protected area that assigned a variety of land/sea uses to the most appropriate sites within the group. This could, for example, provide the best option for developing the group as a specialist ecotourism destination.

Conclusion

It is hoped that that the experiences gained from the ten sites taking part in the EoH project can be used to improve monitoring and evaluation, and thus management, in all natural World Heritage sites.

The results of the EoH project will be used by IUCN to develop recommendations to the World Heritage Centre on a consistent approach to monitoring and reporting on the state of conservation and management effectiveness of all natural World Heritage sites and on improving the effectiveness of site management. The project team is also working with organisations involved in managing cultural World Heritage sites, to pass on lessons learned and the approaches to assessment and monitoring being developed.

Acknowledgments

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For more information on the project please see: www.enhancingheritage.net