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Information Paper: Management effectiveness assessments for Ramsar Sites

Background

1. For Ramsar Sites to be effectively managed, Site managers must be able to anticipate new issues and respond to them rapidly. To inform this process, they are urged to conduct regular and open evaluations of the effectiveness of the Sites' management, in order to learn from both successes and failures. A range of Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) assessment tools is available to support such evaluations.

Applying PAME to Ramsar Sites

2. Assessing the management effectiveness of protected areas has become important to both site managers and funding agencies, to enable them to demonstrate that the values in protected areas really are being conserved, and that there are benefits for local communities (Leverington et al., 2010a; Geldmann et al., 2013).
3. PAME evaluation primarily assesses the extent to which a protected area is protecting values and achieving goals and objectives. The term management effectiveness reflects three main themes:
 - (i) design issues relating to both individual sites and protected area systems;
 - (ii) adequacy and appropriateness of management systems and processes; and
 - (iii) delivery of protected area objectives including conservation of values (IUCN-WCPA Framework for management effectiveness, Hockings et al., 2006).
4. PAME is now a key element of progress towards achieving Decision X/31, paragraph 19(a) of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), which invites Contracting Parties to: "Continue to expand and institutionalize management effectiveness assessments to work towards assessing 60 per cent of the total area of protected areas by 2015 using various national and regional tools and report the results into the global database on management effectiveness maintained by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP WCMC)";
5. The Ramsar Convention's 2009-2015 Strategic Plan also requires management effectiveness assessments:

"STRATEGY 2.5 Ramsar Site management effectiveness:

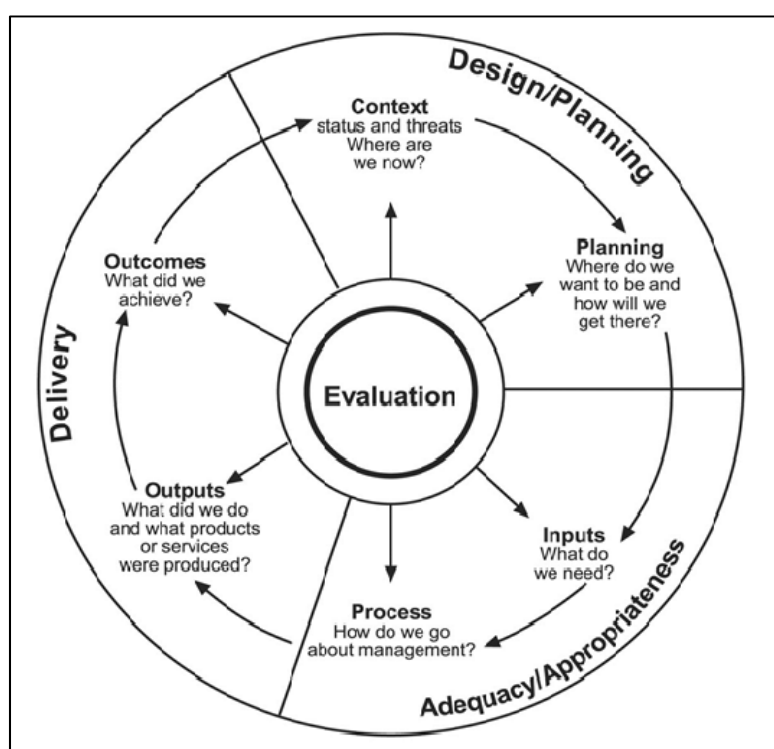
Review all existing Ramsar Sites to determine the effectiveness of management arrangements, in line with the Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance (CPs, STRP).

Key Result Area

By 2015 all Parties, using the Strategic Framework, to have reviewed all existing Ramsar Sites and confirmed that all Ramsar Sites fulfil the provisions of the Strategic Framework or to have identified those sites that do not do so for remedial actions (National: CPs; Sub-national: wetland).”

- Over 90 different PAME methodologies have been recorded across the world, but many of these are specific to one country or agency and only a few have been broadly applied internationally. Most of these are based on the IUCN-WCPA Framework for management effectiveness, which outlines the importance of measuring all six different elements of management (see Figure 1 below) to understand what management is achieving, its strengths and weaknesses, and how it can be improved. This cycle is based on the idea that management begins with an understanding of the site’s context (values, threats, and socio-political influences); proceeds with site design and planning; and requires adequate inputs (funds, staff, facilities and information) and appropriate management processes (policies, procedures and actions) to produce outputs of goods and services, leading to ecological and social outcomes.

Figure 1: The management effectiveness cycle, from the IUCN-WCPA Framework for management effectiveness



- Of the six elements, it is clear that outcomes are the most important; good resources, planning and processes are of little use if the ecological character and ecosystem benefits are lost. There is now a focus among conservationists on ensuring that outcomes of management are measured objectively, for example through satellite imaging and quantitative surveys.
- The IUCN-WCPA approach supports a focus on outcome measurement, but is based on the premise that information about the management context, planning, inputs, processes and outputs is also vitally important. These not only clarify the extent to which objectives are being achieved, but also give guidance as to how and where management can be improved. This insight is critical to improving management in the future.

Which PAME methodology is suitable for Ramsar Sites?

9. A workshop entitled 'Developing Management Criteria and a Management Effectiveness Evaluation Process for Ramsar Sites' was held in Bangkok in June 2014 to discuss how to introduce PAME across the Ramsar Site network, and make recommendations on the best approach.
10. The workshop participants considered four options :
 - a. **Common reporting (multiple methods):** Compile whatever is being done at site level via a 'common reporting format' approach, where indicators from every methodology are allocated to broad headline indicators which apply across all methodologies. This approach has been used to analyse and report on over 4,000 management effectiveness assessments from 50 different methodologies (Leverington et al., 2010a). It has the advantage of using any work already completed or being undertaken by site managers but results in an uneven data set, and the ability to analyse the information is relatively limited. As Ramsar Sites are just embarking on the management effectiveness project, there is an opportunity to compile a more complete and useful set of information, so this does not appear to be the best option.
 - b. **Apply existing method:** Directly adopt an existing methodology such as the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT, Stolton et al., 2007), Rapid Assessment and Prioritization of Protected Areas Management (RAPPAM, Ervin 2003), or World Heritage Assessment (WHA) Outlook Assessment (Anonymous, 2012), or modify those methodologies slightly so that they are suitable for use for Ramsar Sites.
 - c. **Modify existing methods:** Combine two or more existing methodologies with slight modifications or additional modules. For example, a combination of METT and RAPPAM can use the best of both methodologies.
 - d. **New method:** Develop a new methodology if an evaluation of existing methods determines that no existing ones are suitable for the Ramsar Site network.
11. Option (c) was recommended as the best approach, so that well documented and trialled methodologies can be used, while the specific requirements of Ramsar Sites are fully addressed. This will yield over time a consistent data set which can show patterns shared by Sites and long-term trends.
12. METT and RAPPAM were identified as the two most promising methodologies to adapt and combine; both have been applied across many countries and thousands of protected areas over more than a decade. Both of these methodologies meet most of the criteria set for successful and robust evaluations as shown in Table 1 below. However, both lack detail in the assessment of outcomes, and in the clear linking of values to assessment of their management.
13. The workshop participants recommended the adoption of METT in preference to RAPPAM, with some additional questions or modules and adaptations to directly address the needs of Ramsar Sites (such as the cooperation of different agencies working to manage the Site). METT was preferred over RAPPAM as it is designed for site-by-site assessment, is a shorter survey, and is being very widely applied across the world, including in all protected areas where GEF and the

World Bank are working. Note that if particularly desired by the Secretariat, some RAPPAM questions could be added to the additional Ramsar module.

14. Participants recommended minor wording amendments to make the meaning of survey questions very clear (for example, to specify whether a question applies to the Ramsar Site as a whole or to protected areas or other jurisdictions within it). Note that this wording difference is very minor and for clarification only. Results of evaluations using the amended tool will still be comparable with other METT evaluations.
15. They also recommended complementing METT with adapted versions of Workbook One (listing of key values) and Workbook Four (status and trend of key values) from the IUCN World Heritage Outlook at www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org. While METT does not include a detailed analysis of outcomes, the recently designed Outlook Assessment uses an accepted and well-referenced approach (Parrish et al., 2003) to report on the status and trend of key values.
16. The resulting Ramsar Management Effectiveness Evaluation Tool (R-METT) may thus consist of:
 - a) The existing METT with minor wording amendments to make all questions very clear in the Ramsar context.
 - b) An additional METT module as necessary to address specific Ramsar issues; and
 - c) A module adapted from the IUCN World Heritage Outlook's values and outcome module.

Table 1: Criteria for successful evaluations with comparison of three methodologies and requirements of Ramsar (Leverington et al., 2010b)

Criteria	METT	RAPPAM	IUCN World Heritage Outlook	Ramsar requirements
<i>Level of assessment (site or system)</i>	Based at site level with site-level workshops: site level results can be combined to give results on a wider scale.	Includes both site and system-level data: usually country or system-level workshops	Based at site level but rolled-up and summarised results are presented.	Best done at site level with roll-up for countries and regions
<i>Useful and relevant in improving protected area management; yielding explanations and showing patterns; and in improving communication, relationships and awareness.</i>	Has proven to be useful and relevant and shows patterns over time. Reports not often compiled but can be very useful (e.g. South Africa)	Very good for understanding major issues across a country and for comparison between sites. Has been applied on multiple occasions in Brazil to reveal trends. Reports useful for stakeholders.	As it is a new tool, usefulness in improving management has not yet been shown. However, both the process and the website showing Outlook appear to be useful.	Important to be able to understand overall management picture and to recommend improvements needed. Good communication of results is possible through Ramsar Secretariat resources and media including website and facebook.

Criteria	METT	RAPPAM	IUCN World Heritage Outlook	Ramsar requirements
<i>Logical and systematic: working in a logical and accepted framework with balanced approach</i>	Yes, relates to IUCN-WCPA Framework but outcome data is under-emphasised.	Yes, based on IUCN-WCPA Framework but outcome data is under-emphasised.	Yes, based on IUCN-WCPA Framework with strong emphasis on values, threats and outcomes.	Either METT or RAPPAM would work as a balanced framework if combined with the Outlook Assessment.
<i>Based on good indicators, which are holistic, balanced, and useful</i>	Yes, but very brief with usually only one question per topic	Yes: uses more questions per topic so may give a more complete picture	Planning, inputs, processes and outputs are not covered in depth. Indicators for threats and outcomes are clear and useful in any situation	As above
<i>Accurate: providing true, objective, consistent and up-to-date information</i>	Depends on process: better if completed in workshop with good stakeholder representation and using good underlying data	Depends on process and underlying data but always peer-checked in multi-PA workshops.	Depends on process and underlying data.	Important to triangulate data (i.e. use multiple information sources) and add objective measures where possible
<i>Practical to implement within available resources, giving a good balance between measuring, reporting and managing</i>	Yes	Yes	May be more time-consuming	Must be practical and not too time-consuming as this may overlap with other reporting requirements where a site has other designations as well (e.g. national protected area)
<i>Part of an effective management cycle: linked to defined values, objectives and policies and part of strategic planning, park planning and business and financial cycles</i>	Can be, but minimal link between values and assessment in the questionnaire	Can be, but minimal link between values and assessment in the questionnaire	Yes, if combined with more detailed assessment of the processes etc.	Opportunity to create an evaluation which does inform the whole management cycle and integrate with planning and monitoring requirements
<i>Focussed on addressing key management issues that if unresolved affect conservation objectives</i>	To some extent, but a standard tool	To some extent, but a standard tool	Not a focus	Ramsar specific needs include: catchment management, cross-border issues, cooperation among key stakeholders.

Criteria	METT	RAPPAM	IUCN World Heritage Outlook	Ramsar requirements
<i>Cooperative: with good communication, teamwork and participation of protected area managers and stakeholders throughout all stages of the project wherever possible</i>	Can be – depends on application	As only one workshop is usually held for multiple sites, tends to be less inclusive overall	Can be – depends on application	Vital especially for site with multiple layers and actors in management
<i>Focused on positive and timely communication and application of results</i>	Yes, especially if repeated and used in project cycle e.g. by GEF.	Can be, but often a 'one-off'; study where results are ignored.	Yes – driven by Outlook requirements	Yes, to be driven by Ramsar requirements

Implementation of the Ramsar tool (R-METT)

17. The Ramsar Management Effectiveness Evaluation Tool (R-METT) should be completed in a well-facilitated small workshop including site managers, management partners and key stakeholders including representatives of local and indigenous communities where appropriate. While this approach takes more time and resources than a desk-top survey, the results are more reliable and the process itself will deliver benefits including improved communication among managers and a shared understanding of issues.
18. Attention should be paid at the start to the processes of checking and validating data, so that accuracy is encouraged but altering or vetting of scores to force a desired outcome is minimised. Filling in 'justification', 'sources' and 'comments' boxes on questions should be encouraged so that reasons behind scores are clearly documented and management actions can be properly directed.
19. The reports should include graphs and tables of scores, interpretation of results, and recommendations for future management actions. Reports for each site or for groups of sites within a country or region could be produced where this helps managers and planners to be more accountable, improve stakeholder communication, improve management, and feed back into the 'Context' part of the management effectiveness cycle (Figure 1).
20. Online and printed guidance similar to the WHA Outlook Assessment guidelines is recommended, as is some training of R-METT 'coaches' attending the workshops.
21. The R-METT should be applied regularly, for example every three years, according to a consistent time-frame (i.e. all assessments conducted within a three-month to six-month period).
22. The eventual development of an online R-METT survey tool which can automatically generate analyses and graphs is strongly recommended. This would allow time spent in data entry and verification to be minimised, and feedback to site managers and national coordinators to be

quickly generated. Such a tool should also be able to generate printed surveys and word and excel survey versions for site managers or workshop facilitators who prefer to work offline.

Reporting in Section 4 of the Ramsar National Report to COP

23. Currently, Contracting Parties report on the status of their Ramsar Sites in the optional Section 4 of the National Report template which is presented to each COP. It is proposed that from COP13, this section is included as an integral part of the National Report template.
24. It is also proposed that an additional column is added to the table in Section 4, to enable Parties to report on an evaluation of the management effectiveness of their Ramsar Site(s).

References

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