

# **Navigating and Adapting to Political Risk and Uncertainty in Conservation**

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## **Background**

Political risk and uncertainty or an increasing reality in countries around the world. As a result, conservation organizations need to find ways to operate in an uncertain context - and to manage both the risks and opportunities due to political uncertainty – if they are to be resilient and their programs are to be effective. There are ‘adaptive management’ tools and approaches to support organizations in this, both within and outside the conservation sector. However there is currently no overview of current approaches, where they are applied, and whether they are useful. This brief piece of research is therefore an opportunity to review and learn from current practice, identify existing knowledge as well as gaps and provide some early guidance as the field begins to develop and grow.

Along with several other learning activities, this topic was identified as a key area for research amongst for CMP and its members. Funding for this study was provided by the Moore Foundation.

## **Key Messages**

- Given how closely conservation efforts are to government initiatives increasingly political risk and uncertainty analysis and planning is critical to achieving conservation goals.
- Effective analysis, continual learning, and iterative planning are an important foundation for adapting to political risk. This requires a fundamental belief in the added value of doing so, reinforced by having the right team members to support deliberate efforts.
- It is particularly important for conservation organizations to reflect on their structures and modes of operating to understand exposure to political risk nationally and internationally as well as the enabling and hindering factors for responding and adapting.
- One of the most effective ways that conservation organizations can continue to work towards achieving their goals in the face of political uncertainty is establishing a diverse network of strong relationships at the government level, across sectors as well as ensuring lasting relationships with local communities, particularly indigenous people.
- Political uncertainty can offer opportunities for advancing conservation goals through policy engagement and projects, reassessing conservation strategies, providing stability during crisis, and deepening partnerships, among other things.
- Rather than reinvent the wheel, conservation organizations should build streamlined and easily accessible political risk considerations and tools into existing resources like the Open Standards.
- CMP should begin integrating a few of the trends and tools revealed in this guidance note. By beginning to test what works on a smaller scale and engaging in dialogue among a wider network the coalition and its members can create an iterative process that creates lasting an impactful tools for creating resilience and delivering on conservation goals in the face of political uncertainty.

## **Recommendations**

Political risk and uncertainty are an increasing part of daily realities for conservation organizations at varying levels from national politics to addressing local level power structures and dynamics. Some of these risks may be chronic while others may be acute. Both require planning while acute political risks may require more adaptability and responding at the most basic levels to ensure the safety of staff and partners and ensure the basics of conservation organizations' operations.

Given how closely conservation efforts are to government initiatives increasingly political risk and uncertainty analysis and planning are critical to achieving conservation goals. Each organization will have to adapt what this means to their context, piloting efforts, collaborating and sharing knowledge with others, and refining those efforts over time. As organizations do so they should take into consideration the following:

### ***Reflect on Organizational Structures and Modes of Operating***

- Reflect on the size, structure, and modes of operating of your organization to understand your exposure to political risk nationally and internationally as well as the enabling and hindering factors for responding and adapting. This provides insight into your preparedness to make decisions appropriate for your organization in the face of political uncertainty.

### ***Think about How Integrated You Are Politically***

- Think about how closely engaged and how integrated you are politically and the breadth of your understanding of the political and policy landscapes. By ensuring to encompass a slightly broader view you can have a better understanding of the political risks and opportunities you face as well as considering if there may be knock on or secondary effects to your actions.

### ***Invest in Foundations for Adapting to Political Risk***

- Invest in effective analysis, continual learning, and iterative planning to create foundations for adapting to political risk. This requires a fundamental belief in the added value of doing so, reinforced by having the right team members to support deliberate efforts.

### ***Assess Team Capacity***

- Assess the make-up of your team and knowledge of as well as access to political decision-makers. If you do not have the right team make-up to influence political decision-making consider undertaking capacity-building and relationship building. This takes time and resources so it may also be helpful to think about partnering with others as a means of strengthening your capabilities.

### ***Cultivate Networks of Allies and Partners***

- Develop a breadth of critical friends across organizations, government, and communities to prepare for and adapt to political risk. This is most useful if undertaken pre-emptively rather than during uncertainty and crisis.

### ***Identify Opportunities***

- Look for how the political uncertainty or changes in the status quo that are taking place may create opportunities that did not exist before. This can be critical in effectively adapting and finding alternative options for advancing conservation goals through policy engagement and projects, reassessing conservation strategies, providing stability during crisis, and deepening partnerships, among other things.

### ***Build Upon Existing Efforts***

- Rather than reinvent the wheel, conservation organizations should build streamlined and easily accessible political risk consideration and tools into existing resources like the Open Standards. This can take place by integrating simple political risk tools such as mapping risk, assessing risk readiness, and undertaking scenario planning at the planning, implementation, and learning stages. This may take time and a process of iteration to figure out what is most appropriate.

### ***Pause and Reflect***

- Celebrate successes while also ensuring your organization looks at the factors underpinning those successes and evaluates the depth of learning that comes from failure.

### **Next Steps:**

#### ***Begin Piloting***

A couple of existing tools that have built upon the Open Standards have proven too cumbersome and technical to use after being developed by academics and conservation experts. Rather than undertaking an extensive design process, CMP should begin integrating a few of the trends and tools revealed in this guidance note to begin testing what works on a smaller scale.

#### ***Share Knowledge***

Many of the CMP members and conservation experts appear to be unaware of the knowledge, experience, and tools used by others much of which could go a long way in benefitting the learning and expanded practice of the broader community. On one hand those working in conservation are already often stretched thin and are in high demand. However, by finding ways to share knowledge within existing forums and collaborations about what's working and what still needs to be built upon with respect to political uncertainty and adaptation some of this burden may be lessened over time. If tools can be created that deliver greater effectiveness and streamlined practices ultimately this creates more effective and less cumbersome ways of working for everyone.

### ***Expand the Conversation***

Given the short time frame for this initial investigation a limited number of organizations were interviewed or able to input. To get an even more nuanced understanding of the need for work on political risk it would be useful to expand the conversation in the future to include private sector partners that support or influence conservation efforts. These companies may have risk analysis insights or practices that can be adapted to enrich the CMP's work. Additionally, multiple CMP members pointed out how important it is to bring smaller, local conservation organizations on the ground in to the conversation. This is particularly important for Africa, but also Latin America and Asia, to ensure any tools reflect their local knowledge, concerns, and needs while encouraging stronger partnerships.

### ***Invest Further***

This project represents an important first step in forging a conversation and collaborative effort among conservation organizations and funders related to political risk and uncertainty, adapting to them, and identifying new opportunity within them. This process has garnered growing interest and enthusiasm from various partner organizations and stakeholders to carry this conversation forward along with the need to invest in a longer conversation and iterative process of collaboration.

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## Political Risk- Why It's Relevant

Political risk and uncertainty are ubiquitous and are something that sectors across society around the world are increasingly having to factor into the way they think and operate. A review of literature by the private sector has identified the lack of cohesive definitions or even a cohesive body of research on political risk despite the fact that the sector has invested in this work for some years.<sup>1</sup> And yet experts have begun to acknowledge the changing nature of political risk, reaching beyond governments as the main actors and seeing a wide range of actors as sources of uncertainty.<sup>2</sup>

That said, for the sake of this initial investigation we will focus on government as the main contributor to political risk given the extent to which that has been the highlight of discussions with CMP members and conservation experts. Many organizations are particularly dependent upon a government's willingness to pass conservation-friendly policy, ensure enforcement of law or regulatory frameworks, and provide associated budgets. This ties conservation to governments and therefore creates a unique relationship to political risk and uncertainty that might not be as integral for other segments of the charity sector or other sectors altogether.

### Defining Political Risk

While there is no global definition, existing work in some of the CMP members suggests that political risk is an event or act by government and affiliated entities that creates uncertainty for the achievement of objectives. This risk can have both negative and positive outcomes. If conservation organizations are not paying attention to political landscape and uncertainty they can miss major effects in the wider world that can derail project and policy efforts in the short and medium term as well as curtailing the ability to deliver on conservation goals. At the same time, disruption of the status quo can create opportunity to propose new projects, form new alliances, and influence policy.

That said, there are a number of trends that emerge across countries, illustrating a range of the type of risks that arise and factor into uncertainty. While not an exhaustive list, this includes:

- Government turn over
- Political flip-flopping: pet projects, rapid policy change or reversal
- Unstable government
- Lack of rule of law
- Corruption
- Short-term thinking of government

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<sup>1</sup> Cline, Mary and Lawless, Kyle. "Why you need a strategic approach to political risk" EY. August 15, 2019. [https://www.ey.com/en\\_gl/geostrategy/why-you-need-a-strategic-approach-to-political-risk](https://www.ey.com/en_gl/geostrategy/why-you-need-a-strategic-approach-to-political-risk)

<sup>2</sup> Rice, Condoleezza and Zegart, Amy. Managing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Political Risk. Harvard Business Review. May-June, 2018

- Lack of or change in financial commitment or resources
- Internal conflict
- Political uncertainty leading to fragmentation within partner orgs (e.g. uprisings lead to mass migration or change of leadership in government or organizations)
- Being too closely aligned with one political party
- Youth movements- contributing to political change/ raising questions of legitimacy

### **Political Risk at Varying Levels- Big P or Little P?**

Political risk and uncertainty may encompass a number of scenarios at varying levels. As pointed out by one CMP member this means looking at ‘big P’ and “little p” in politics and political risk. The big ‘P’ refers to party politics. The little ‘p’ is more about power relations and corruption, which have to be understood especially at the local level. Little P looks at who the local power brokers are like local mayors to police, village chiefs, etc. The extent to which each of these is most important to conservation efforts will vary from country context to country context. For instance, in Western Democracies or more advanced Democracies political risk often centers around party politics and political affiliations. In rural areas of developing countries conservation organizations often encounter issues of how power is used by local authorities irrespective of political parties and affiliations. They also have to think about things like local authority structures such as indigenous lands, which are often nations within nations.

Finally, while the current discussion within CMP and its members is largely one focused on national political risks, these risks are often affected by larger global trends. While a geopolitical focus falls outside of this current scope of work, it is important to take into account trends that may reach across countries.

### **Chronic Risk -vs- Acute Risk**

In the words of one CMP member who has worked in some of the world’s most conflict-ridden countries, we must distinguish between chronic and acute risks given the different challenges and opportunities they present. In places where government is dysfunctional there are chronic risks, which are predictable given their ongoing nature (e.g. revolving doors at ministries and chronic turnover.) This allows you to put certain mechanisms in place to address them.

Acute risks are more difficult because they are hard to foresee and they flare up. For instance, it would have been hard to predict current US leadership withholding Congress approved funds for conservation given the stable and predictable workings of the US Executive Branch throughout much of US history.

While it is important to try and foresee and plan for both kinds of risks to the best of an organization’s abilities they are of a different nature and plans will have to be adapted as these risks become impacts or real events. As one CMP member who has worked in a number of volatile contexts pointed out, you have to plan for both chronic and acute shocks. With chronic shocks you can try and avoid or minimize them. With acute shocks

you have other more immediate concerns such as trying to respond effectively to ensure that your staff, partners and facilities are safe in the immediate future before being able to think or plan longer term.

### **Beginning to Think About Political Risk and Uncertainty**

Taking these factors into account an organization might begin to think about political uncertainty through the lens of the following questions:

- **Domain:** Is the risk we are facing related to international uncertainty, national political parties and governance, or local power structures and dynamics?
- **Chronic vs acute:** Is it a chronic or acute risk?
- **Likelihood:** What is the likelihood this will occur? And in what time frame?
- **Impact:** What is the anticipated impact to conservation?
- **Preparedness:** Are we prepared to respond and adapt to the uncertainty or risk if/when it becomes a reality?
- **Opportunity:** Is there a new opportunity presented by changing or uncertain circumstances?
- **Response:** What action will we take?

Additionally those working in the private sector offer a number of questions that may also help conservation organizations in their initial efforts to begin incorporating political risk and uncertainty considerations into their existing efforts whether they are working on programs or policy. Important questions that may be most relevant include<sup>3</sup>:

- How can we get good analysis about the political risks we face?
- Do we have a good team in place for warning, response, and adaptation?
- Are we developing mechanisms for continual learning?

### **Key Trends and Considerations for Ways of Working**

Systematic analysis of political uncertainty and risk is new to environmental and conservation organizations. Repeatedly throughout conversations with conservation groups and those that fund them, the message repeatedly reinforces the current lack of this analysis. And yet many strongly believe that there is great benefit to further discussion in the sector and development of methodologies tailored to their needs. Like the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation these considerations reach across organization and project size, diverse regions, and also encompass policy work. Given this breadth it behooves each organization to apply these broad trends and tools later presented in the ways that are most relevant for their context.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

## **Organizational Structure and Modes of Operating**

Conservation organizations cover a broad umbrella of groups that operate in a number of different ways across countries that range from stable democracies to countries with newly emerging governance systems. Additionally, they work across a spectrum of models with respect to their theories of change, the level of local presence and investment, not to mention those that work in partnerships with governments and those that may work in more of an advocacy role. This makes it difficult to generalize in terms of tools for addressing political uncertainty. And at the same time it has raised key questions about factors of exposure to political risk that each organization must take into account.

For instance, organizations with a federated model where they support smaller local conservation organizations or partners from afar may benefit from those relationships in multiple ways. At the same time, it may create exposure to risk in that they may not have the same amount of influence over the ability of the organization to plan or respond to political risk and they may not have intimate knowledge of the local organization's capacity for doing so.

Not all organizations will be able to make significant local investments over decades, particularly in some of the countries with the least infrastructure and the greatest political risk. Yet those that do argue that their decades of local knowledge and deep-seated relationships allow them to navigate, adapt to, and ride out political risk in a different way. One CMP member says:

*“Not leaving during periods of stress in a country is one of the best risk management approaches. Maintain essential connections in legislative and executive branches. It's also important for local partners and indigenous communities to see that you are not leaving.”*

An organization may need to undertake different risk management strategies with staff during political uncertainty. However, these organizations argue that their immediate relationship with the staff they employ in each country may also give them more knowledge of their strengths and vulnerabilities when it comes to political risk.

### ***Take Away:***

Reflect on the size, structure, and modes of operating of your organization to understand your exposure to political risk nationally and internationally as well as the enabling and hindering factors for responding and adapting. This provides insight into your preparedness to make decisions appropriate for your organization in the face of political uncertainty. This is true whether in respect to remaining in a country during crisis on one end of the spectrum of conservation work or evaluating how your organization's works with partners or how you engage with government and policy influencing during disruptive change on the other end of the spectrum.

## **Thinking and Working Politically**

When understanding some of the underlying factors driving political uncertainty one of the key steps is understanding which policies are being leveraged for conservation program implementation. In part this requires working knowledge of whose political domain they fall under at the national and local levels as well as if there are regional/international contexts that are relevant.

Many organizations are engaged either directly or indirectly with policies that impact conservation protections, budgeting, laws, and enforcement. The more integrated an organization is in terms of understanding these domains the more responsive it will be. Additionally, the more informed decisions it can make and it may be able to find more opportunities for influence in those domains.

It will not be possible for all organizations to become deeply involved in political and policy domains given resources, size and existing priorities. However, partnerships may be a way to compliment one another and garner additional strengths in this domain

Some of the most impactful ways in which CMP members are working include working collaboratively on policy in the face of change, often combining expertise across organizations. For instance, a scientific organization may work on the ground flagging conservation issues that need addressing and technical solutions, while other partners may lead government engagement and still others may increase public dialogue and pressure. This however could be strengthened and systematized as part of political uncertainty analysis and response mapping.

### ***Take Away:***

Think about how closely engaged and how integrated you are politically and the breadth of your understanding of the landscape. Identify the system within which you are working so that you are responding to and tracking the right policies. Have you thought about primary policies impacting your work as well as secondary issues linked to them? By ensuring to encompass a slightly broader view you can have a better understanding of the risks and opportunities you face as well as considering if there may be knock-on effects to your actions. For example, could a focus on addressing corruption then lead to a tightening of civil society spaces in response?

## **Sphere of Influence**

Multiple CMP members have referred to the need to look at the composition and capacity of teams from the beginning of a project to see if and how they are equipped for assessing and adapting to political uncertainty and risk.

Part of this means understanding that organizations of varying size and positioning may have a differing amount of political capital or influence with governments. That said, funders who support smaller or more local conservation organizations emphasize the need to assess an organization's track record of influencing government and if they have any agreements with the government. What reach do leaders of organizations have with

government? Do they have access to getting meetings with ministers on short notice? And do they have anyone on their team with connections and capacity to navigate relationships with changing governments?

***Take Away:***

Assess the make-up of your team and knowledge of/ and access to political decision-makers. If you do not have the right team make-up for gaining access to political decision-making is there a way that you can begin to develop the skills in your team and incrementally begin to build relationships (See section below)? Additionally, begin to think about if your organization is able to partner with another organization that has these abilities and relationships as another or an additional means of strengthening your capabilities. Given the extent to which achieving conservation goals is often tied to government, identifying capacity and relationship gaps and working to address them is a critical part of being prepared for uncertainty and a continuously changing political landscape.

**Relationship Building**

Having a diverse base of relationships across actors and sectors can be a key contributor to an organization's resilience in times of disruption. If one relationship is compromised, an ally is hindered in their ability to offer support or doesn't have influence in a particular domain, another ally may be in a stronger position to be called upon.

One expert who has worked in the field for decades in some of the most difficult country contexts spoke about establishing relationships long before they need to call upon them. In that respect in the face of political uncertainty they may be approaching an existing ally as an organization looks to adapt rather than approaching them and establishing a new relationship in a time of uncertainty or crisis.

With this in mind, planning ahead for political uncertainty may be a matter of establishing strong relationships at the government level, across sectors as well as ensuring strong relationships with local communities, particularly indigenous people.

***Government Relationships***

Given the extent to which conservation programs and policies are tied to government, building healthy relationships with officials is particularly important yet also delicate.

There are differing views within differing CMP country contexts as to where to place ones energy when developing government relationships. One CMP member in Western Europe emphasizes the extent to which special interests of incoming ministers can lead to "pet projects" being quickly adopted irrespective of conservation organization input and years of engaging on related issues at the civil servant level. This has led this particular member to question where they place their government relationship efforts. Alternately, another CMP member has argued for greater investment or at least diversity of government relationships given that civil servants remain across parties and may offer stability despite comings and goings of administrations.

That said, given the frequency with which governments turn over, it can pose a risk for an organization to too closely align itself with one particular political party. In the experience of one CMP member organization if they are seen as too favorable to one party, when government changes the opposition or next administration can be unwilling to work with them. Additionally, NGOs can be inclined to hire former government officials because of their political knowledge and connections. However, they may end up with staff members that have a political affiliation, which can be problematic. This is an issue that has also been flagged by development NGOs focused on working in political arenas.<sup>4</sup>

To avoid such a risk, one CMP member has found that it is especially important to invest in cultivating relationships across parties. For instance, they have undertaken initiatives such as supporting and training the next generation of leaders across the political spectrum so that they are neutral and politically beneficial. This also provides young emerging leaders who will go on to take roles of increasing importance within their countries, exposure to, alignment with, and training in conservation issues from an early stage. (*See example I*)

### ***Diverse Stakeholder Relationships***

Stakeholder engagement is a critical element of delivering effective and lasting conservation projects. Stakeholders include diverse individuals and groups that have an interest in the outcome of an activity, or are likely to be affected by it from local communities, to farmers, and research institutions or relevant ministries. Broadly speaking stakeholders can either be sources of disruptive change linked to political uncertainty or they can be partners in adapting to and positively responding to uncertainty. By ensuring that a conservation organization undertakes thorough social/political analysis they can identify which groups and individuals are likely to be stakeholders in the landscape and therefore who may be potential partners for developing mutually beneficial relationships.

As CMP members and conservation organizations develop further tools for effective stakeholder engagement practice it is important to investigate how this dovetails with political uncertainty analysis, planning, and adaptive practices.

### ***Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples***

Given the extent to which the world's most intact environments and biodiversity are on their lands numerous CMP members have pointed out how critical relationships are with local people. This is particularly true of indigenous communities, given the extent to which remaining areas of biodiversity are on their lands. Strong relationships with

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<sup>4</sup> Green, Duncan and Faciolince, Maria. "What does the evidence tell us about 'thinking and working politically' in development assistance?" From Power to Poverty Blog. Oxfam. July 2, 2019. <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-does-the-evidence-tell-us-about-thinking-and-working-politically-in-development-assistance/>

indigenous communities can either create or abate political uncertainty and reputational risks, along with other types of risks.

One CMP member for instance spoke about the history of conservation organizations assuming that their objectives are the same as indigenous peoples'. Instead there is a need to acknowledge that indigenous people have their own cultures, governance structures, and natural resource management practices as well as their own values and community or development goals, which may also lead to conservation outcomes. This often means having social scientists or anthropologists working in or with conservation organizations to help bridge cultural gaps in the process of building trusting relationships and partnerships with indigenous people.

***Take Away:***

The health of your networks in many ways reflects the extent to which an organization is prepared to respond and effectively adapt to political risk and uncertainty. Map and evaluate your partnerships and the strength of those relationships. Are you building them in advanced of crisis or scrambling to find partners during disruptive periods? Do you have a diverse network of relationships to call upon that enables you to navigate political and local arenas as well as other domains of society? These relationships may become your greatest resource during times of challenges, helping you navigate change, access arenas you may not otherwise, as well as amplifying and complimenting your work.

**Reframing Political Risk to Identify Opportunities**

Biodiversity areas are often in areas with conflict and lack of good governance. In the opinion of one CMP member the response to this is to focus narrowly on risk and to overlook the opportunity posed by political uncertainty.

*Many organizations say 'let's get out. It's too risky'. That's when you need conservation organizations to provide triage, stability, and protection until the conflict ends or the community heals or reforms itself.*

Seen through the lens of opportunity, these organizations can provide stability in a lack of other governance. And, they can also provide continuity and help changing government get up to speed or fill knowledge gaps.

As an example, one CMP member in particular has a high-level of comfort maintaining a presence during high levels of conflict. One of the upsides of this is that in multiple countries incoming administrations have relied upon them and their extensive records, which provide historical and technical knowledge of policies and projects that may not otherwise exist in fragmented political scenarios.

Disruptive turn over of administrations may also provide other opportunities. This can range from establishing new relationships within government, using campaigning cycles to bring conservation legislation or projects to the fore, and being spurred to collaborate

with partners in new ways across sectors if/when government turn over poses changes in approach to conservation and related issues.

***Take Away:***

Political uncertainty and risk are very disruptive when they become reality. At the same time, ask if the changes taking place open up space or shift the status quo and therefore create opportunities that did not exist before. This can be critical in effectively adapting and finding alternative options for advancing conservation goals through policy engagement and projects, reassessing conservation strategies, providing stability during crisis, and deepening partnerships, among other things.

**Climate Change and A Global Move Away from Science**

With rapid change in political landscapes in a number of countries around the world, political processes are moving away from science. This is particularly concerning. Many conservation organizations rely upon science and are interested in utilizing it to even greater extents to support evidence-based conservation and understand what works and what doesn't.

Additionally, climate change is making it evident that political systems are stretched to their limits and that periodic political turnover is preventing or slowing the efforts needed to address the crisis. This is a trend to watch given the extent to which it impacts and/or overshadows conservation efforts and anything not deemed immediately critical or at the scale of urgency of climate action.

***Take Away:***

There is a shifting political landscape globally that poses new challenges for science-based work. That said, there is still a strong move in the conservation and academic spheres towards the use of evidence in local, national, and global environmental and political issues. Conservation organizations will therefore need to consider the levels of evidence needed or appropriate for a particular audience in a given situation and be able to adapt.

**TOOLS**

With the previously mentioned trends in mind conservation organizations can begin to put political risk considerations into practice and start to integrate them into project and policy cycles. Given that the conservation sector has particular concerns and contexts within which it works this is likely to mean developing and refining appropriate tools over time. There may already be good practice within the sector, which has not been formalized into tools. And at the same time, a large number of conversations with conservation organizations reveal that many are not yet aware of or using tools related to political risk. Where most see the value in doing so, they emphasize the need for these

tools to be easily accessible. Though not exhaustive, following are a few tools and considerations to begin to apply.

### **Building Upon Existing Tools- Open Standards**

The Open Standards have been developed and refined over many years with the input of a broad range of organizations to create accessible tools that guide effective project design, management, and monitoring. Rather than reinvent the wheel any political risk analysis efforts should compliment these tools working within a framework of theory of change, result chains, and ongoing evaluation and integrating learning into strategies and actions.<sup>5</sup>

This includes integrating elements of political risk analysis in theories of change and project conceptualization. However, it requires broadening the process of ‘critical threat’ identification beyond the human-driven activities that impact conservation to include a specific political risk element and scenarios. The tools recommended to date include looking at the scope or extent of the threat and its severity on the conservation targets as well as rating and ranking those threats and whether they are direct or indirect threats. They do not however include political uncertainty. Building further upon this, it may therefore be useful for deeper analysis of driving political risk factors.

Strategies can then be created with these threats in mind as well as thinking through alternative strategies should they be needed under shifting scenarios (*See example II*).

This can be integrated into assumptions about what results you will achieve and how, allowing for periodic adjustments in results chains by integrating political uncertainty and risk analysis prior to a project and during periodic reviews. As suggested by one conservation expert, developing a set of ‘learning questions’ related to early assessment about political uncertainty developed in design stages can then be used to reflect annually with a diverse group of people who can help bring a multi-dimensional view to the table.

### **Risk Scorecard—Review of Political Risk Related Indices**

One CMP member organization carries out scoring process each year across the countries in which it works to understand the risk landscape and integrate it into their planning. Given the volatile nature of the countries in which they operate the scorecard largely is a compilation of various governance and corruption indices compiled by large international organizations such as the World Bank and charities such as Transparency International. This particular organization has found that looking at these indices each year combined with their on-the-ground expertise provides a birds eye view of the landscape. It therefore gives them the ability to assess to what extent they will be able to make progress towards their conservation goals should they undertake new programs and plan accordingly.

This includes:

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<sup>5</sup> Conservation Measures Partnership. Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation: Version 3.0. April, 2013.

- Ratings for corruption perceptions (*Transparency International*)
- Rankings of the control of corruption (*World Bank*)
- Rating of rule of law within a country (*World Bank*)
- Measures of judicial independence (*World Economic Forum*)
- Voice and accountability (citizen participation in elections) (*World Bank*)
- Press freedom (*Reporters Without Borders*)

**Scenarios Planning**

Understanding the range of scenarios in the political arena that could potentially impact a conservation organizations’ or project’s theory of change is an important element of assessing political risk and uncertainty as well as opportunity and adapting their planning accordingly. By looking at various scenarios that may unfold organizations and teams can begin to think about whether and how they are able to influence scenarios that come to be and how they may adapt. And, it may allow them to positively reframe those scenarios to turn them into opportunities. This may differ for those working on conservation programs and those working on policy.

One of the CMP members has begun using a simple framework for scanning the horizon and looking ahead in order to be able to adapt as needed to risk and uncertainty in the future as it relates to their policy work. In each area where change is possible, map: (a) the conservation change that would happen under best case and worst case scenarios; (b) the potential policy revisions we would seek under each scenario (c) stakeholders – and engagement strategies; (d) decide what needs to/could happen now and what is preparedness; e) Budget for scenarios. Adapting this slightly to incorporate an alternate scenario as well as risks and opportunities this might be envisioned as such:

|                            | <b>Political Change- Best Case</b> | <b>Political Change- Worst Case</b> | <b>Political Change- Alternate Scenario</b> | <b>Time Frame</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Conservation Risks         |                                    |                                     |   |                   |
| Conservation Opportunities |                                    |                                     |   |                   |
| Stakeholder strategies     |                                    |                                     |   |                   |
| What needs to happen now?  |                                    |                                     |   |                   |
| Preparedness               |                                    |                                     |   |                   |
| Budget needed              |                                    |                                     |   |                   |

### **Pause and Reflect Sessions**

Reflection is one of the greatest tools we have for assessing current realities, what has and hasn't worked previously, and therefore what may be appropriate action for the future. It can therefore aid in multiple stages of project cycles such as analyzing, adapting approaches/ programs, and sharing outcomes.

That said, leadership experts at Harvard point out that focusing on success can lead us to be overly confident in our own insights and managerial skills and ignore or downplay random events or external factors outside our control. That is not to say successes shouldn't be acknowledged or celebrated and discussed, but failures often compel us to look at causality more so unless we explicitly look at the factors leading to achievement of our goals.<sup>6</sup>

The army, navy, and airforce all conduct After-Action-Reviews as a structured debriefing process by the participants and those responsible for the project or action. During this process they discuss and analyze what happened, why it happened, and what didn't work or how it can be done better. One CMP member has begun adapting this approach to conservation projects. Through a simple set of questions teams can explicitly unpack the factors behind success and failure that will then allow them to adapt to changing realities, political risk, and uncertainty. Among the key questions asked of each team member are:

- a. What did the team want to achieve since our last Pause-and-Reflect session?
- b. What worked and why?
- c. What did not work or was unexpected and why?
- d. What will we do differently?
- e. Is this process useful?

The team can then have a facilitated dialogue about their differing views and draw meaning and lessons from them together. At the end of the meeting the team leader undertakes a review of what was discussed, what changes were agreed upon and why.

### **Searchframes and Adaptive Tools**

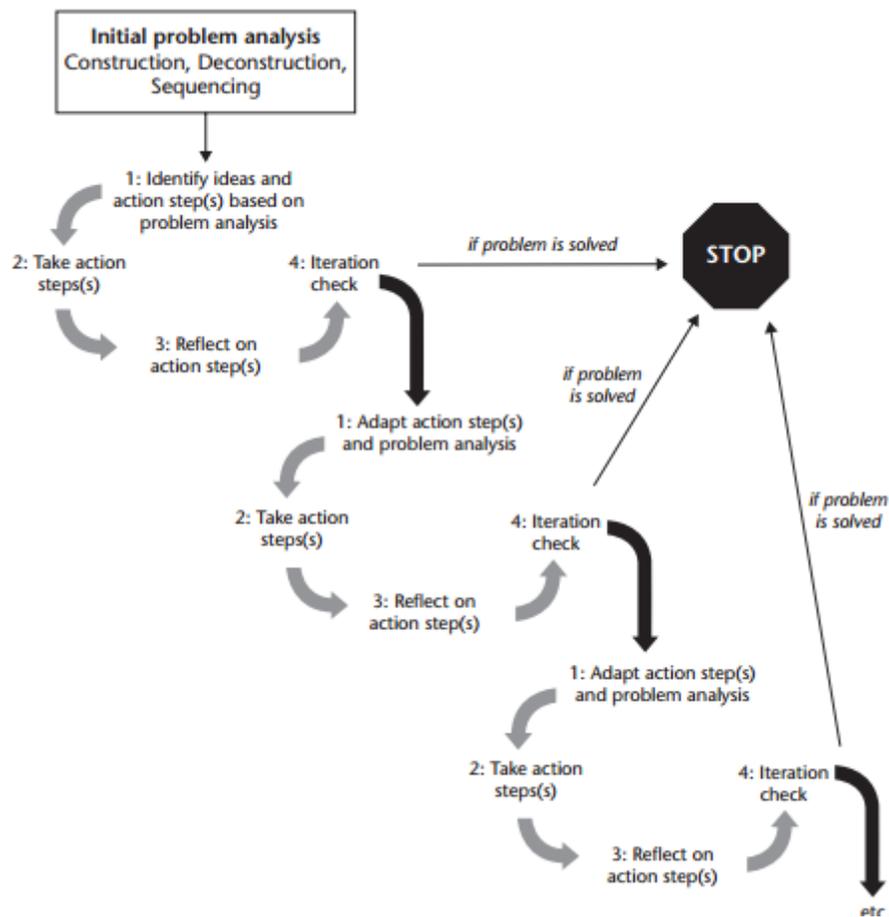
Uncertainty and the complexity of political risk may require an iterative process while taking incremental steps towards change. As international development practitioners have found when facing complex challenges, this is not always linear. Each step builds upon what was learned in the previous step, which may require significant adaptation, depending on the circumstances. From this understanding some practitioners have developed adaptive tools such as the 'searchframe', which establishes a timetable of 'iteration check-ins' where progress is assessed and new learning and adjustments to the existing ones are integrated. This is similar to the "try, learn, adapt" method used in business management. In essence targeted actions are rapidly tried, lessons are quickly gathered to inform what happened and why, and a next action step is designed and

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<sup>6</sup> Gino, Francesca and Pisano, Gary P. "Why Leaders Don't Learn from Success" Harvard Business Review. April 2011 <https://hbr.org/2011/04/why-leaders-dont-learn-from-success>.

undertaken based on what was learned in prior steps. (*See chart below to understand the process*)<sup>7</sup>

This may have some overlap with some of the steps currently employed by the Open Standards. Rather than creating multiple tools, some of these concepts may be integrated into the Open Standards in their next iteration with respect to iterative loops that may take place overlaid on top of what is currently envisioned as a somewhat unidirectional cycle.



<sup>7</sup> Andrews, Matt, et al. Building State Capability: Evidence, analysis, action. Oxford University Press. 2017.  
<http://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/academic/pdf/openaccess/9780198747482.pdf>

## Examples of Adapting to Political Risk and Uncertainty

### ***Example 1: Training the Next Generation of Political Leaders (Global)***

Part of adapting to political uncertainty is shaping the landscape in advance. To this end one CMP member has undertaken capacity building with the next generation of political leaders in the environmental, forestry, and fisheries sectors. With the aim of minimizing the risk of future political leaders taking the role without sufficient experience or global exposure to key issues the organization created an exchange program wherein next-generation political and academic leaders. These leaders were sent to countries with policies that would fit the needs of their home country, and connected them directly to government staff in those host countries. Over the past 15 years over forty government staff that have been identified as future decision-makers and potential politic ‘high-risers’ have been trained. These trainings and exchanges have allowed the CMP member organization to adapt to, or pre-empt, government-related risks and uncertainties on a range of occasions, for example by preventing uninformed government decisions on key topics such as Payments for Ecosystem Services or REDD+. They have found it far easier and more cost-effective to ensure future government decisions are properly informed beforehand, rather than attempting to change government perspectives and approaches after policy decisions have been made. This is particularly true in parts of the world where cultural norms would lead to a reversal of policy being perceived as ‘losing face’.

### ***Example 2: Adapting Strategies and Using Scenarios Planning (US)***

A consortium of charities working together to map where renewable energy should be placed faced a significant set back after 2016 US elections. Under the former administration they believed that they would be able to work with the Federal Government to determine where wind and solar energy projects would be placed to avoid unwanted impacts on conservation. When the administration changed to one that is not conservation friendly, diminishing possibilities for Federal Government collaboration, the consortium had to reassess their strategies in order to make progress in other ways.

They undertook an extensive planning process and identified different scenarios and with it different strategies for moving forward their goals of influencing the expansion of wind and solar power in a way that is compatible with conservation. They had a “reflect and adapt” workshop during which they identified multiple different strategies and alternatives to the former strategy, which was mainly reliant on Federal Government collaboration. This included looking at different power brokers and partners with which they could work. Among alternative strategies were: 1) Influencing private sector power purchase agreements to ensure demand for low-impact renewable energy. 2) Working on research for the development of technologies to reduce impact of renewables on wildlife and ensure that other organizations and companies make decisions based on this research 3) State level collaborations with government for placement of renewables on non-federal lands and ensure robust public discussion.

In a recent result chains review looking at activities and impacts achieved they found that they have made significant progress with the new strategies by shifting their energy to areas where they could make progress. The results have included progress across all the new strategic areas. The consortium of organizations has concluded that the process of doing strategic planning in the face of a new political landscape and new risks/ opportunities was hugely helpful for them.

And yet with another US election a year away they are again assessing their work and looking at different scenarios for the outcome of the elections and how that might require them to pivot and adapt to the political risk and/or opportunity posed by either a new administration or a continuation of the current administration.

### **Methodology**

This report was compiled based upon a literature review and close to two-dozen interviews with experts working across conservation, international development, philanthropy, risk, monitoring and evaluation, along with a small handful of those working in the private sector. Those interviewed represent a diverse group of people working in Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia and Africa. This was however a rapid review process carried out within 6 weeks to begin dialogue within the conservation sector and its partners. Future work should reflect an even greater diversity of views and perspectives.