Resources for Implementing the CMP Open Standards

Planning for Sustainability and Responsible Exits.

March 2017

Planning for Sustainability and Responsible Exits

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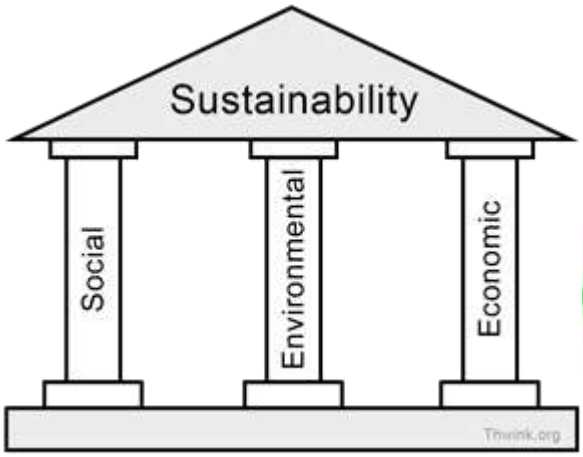
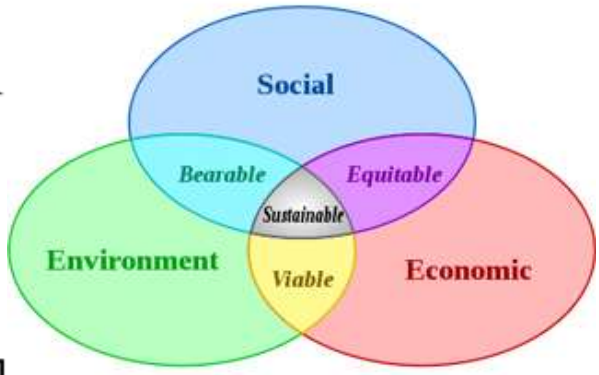
1. Scope of this Guidance

This guidance is focused on how conservation organisations can become more intentional about building sustainability into projects[1] and programmes. It is meant to be used in tandem with the CMP Open Standards, or with the WWF PPMS (2017 version) which integrates sustainability considerations throughout the project cycle.

Sustainability has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs[2]. For conservation organisations this definition is slightly flawed in that it speaks to sustainable development (not just "sustainability") in a purely social context. For *complete* sustainability all three pillars of sustainability must be in place. The three pillars are social, environmental, and economic sustainability[3].





However for this context of this guidance document, we need to consider sustainability as the ability of something (ecosystem services, behaviours, species) to continue without ongoing input by a conservation project.

The term Responsible Exits can frighten people. It often means the end of their current work, and it may mean the end of their job. "Responsible exits" is a positive concept. It can and should be the route to new work areas, new jobs and new organisations. Words like "transition", "transformation" and "spin-off" are genuine routes to different, positive outcomes. "Responsible exit" is useful shorthand encompassing all these ideas.

2. What is Planning for Sustainability and Responsible Exits?

The ultimate aim of most projects is that they should deliver significant conservation results that can be sustained i.e. results are maintained and / or improved upon beyond involvement of the conservation organisation. In principle this means sustainability in perpetuity, but for practical purposes it can be helpful to project out 10 years after exit (completion of the project); this timeframe is short enough to be able to make some predictions about lasting change and long enough to show whether the project appears sustainable.

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[1] Projects are the basic units of conservation work. A programme (as distinct from a portfolio of projects) is a group of jointly-managed, interdependent projects which together aim to achieve a common vision. In the interest of simplicity, this document uses the term "project" to represent both projects and programmes since these standards of practice are designed to apply equally well to both.

[2] Brundtland Commission htt:p//www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm

[3] http://thwink.org/sustain/glossary/ThreePillarsOfSustainability.htm#F1

With limited resources and numerous conservation needs requiring attention, there is increasing recognition within many conservation organisations that they cannot fund and support any one project indefinitely. Once we have achieved our goals, we should be able to exit responsibly and be confident that our conservation results will not be undermined. Achieving this requires that we intentionally plan for sustainability as we design and implement projects.

Experience has shown[4] that planning for sustainability (and when and how we will exit a project) is most effective if sustainability thinking begins at the start of a project. Having said this, if a project is already up and running, it is still important to consider building in sustainability; annual reviews and external evaluations provide a good starting point.

Sometimes conservation organisations may need to exit from a project before all its intended results have been achieved e.g. when organisational strategic priorities and/ or those of donors change, or when it is determined that results are unlikely to be achieved due to factors outside of the project's control. In such situations, developing and implementing a Responsible Exit strategy that sets out how results achieved so far can be maintained and improved is crucial - to ensure that our resources have been effectively used and to maintain credibility.

3. Why it is Important to Consider and Plan for Sustainability and Exiting.

Planning with partners from the beginning for how your project's results will be sustained and how you will responsibly exit strengthens your conservation efforts through:

- The development of more effective conservation strategies in which sustainability of project results is a key objective.
- Allowing you and your partners to think about each other's roles and how these might transition through a project, e.g. from implementer, to facilitator, to grant maker, and to plan for this transition.
- If discussed at an early stage with partners, it can help build the foundation for strong partnerships through:
  - promoting transparency
  - understanding if partners are able and willing to sustain projects results and what is needed to enable them to do so
  - jointly agreeing when and how you will exit.
- Better understanding of when your funding / support can be removed and results will be sustained.
- In the long term allows you to free up resources and move onto supporting new emerging areas of work

4. When to Consider Sustainability and Exiting in Relation to the Project Cycle.

Many projects already practise elements of planning for sustainability e.g. identifying and addressing policy and partner's capacity constraints. However, all too often, planning for sustainability, and when and how we will exit a project, is only considered at the last moment. This guidance notes aims to provide advice on how you can consider sustainability more consistently throughout the lifetime of your project.

[4] Delivering responsible exits. Part 1. Recommendations, Tools and Processes. WWF UK 2014. Learnings from WWF staff in Nepal and East Africa.

Experience has shown that sustainability thinking should begin at the ***Conceptualize (Define[5])*** stage. The *stakeholder analysis* (Step 1A/ 1.4) provides an opportunity to begin to identify which stakeholders will be key to ensuring sustainability of results. The situational analysis (Step 1A/ 1.4) provides an opportunity to explicitly and more comprehensively consider sustainability and develop an understanding of the sustainability factors (Section 5) that need to be in place.

During the ***Plan*** (***Design***) stage your project should develop *objectives* and *strategies* that address your understanding of what is needed to sustain the projects results. Correspondingly, indicators that will track progress towards this should be included in the *monitoring plan* (Step 2B/ 2.2). At the end of the *design* stage all of this information can be pulled together into a sustainability plan and a tentative exit strategy developed (described in more detail in next section).

During the ***Implement*** stage, enhancing the capacity of key partners and building and maintaining strong partnerships are not only central to achieving conservation results but are also key to delivering results that are sustained. At the implement stage you should also consider the finance needs beyond the project's involvement and how these can be met e.g. through mobilising local and national funds, promoting strategies in which natural resources produce a revenue stream, etc.

In the ***Share*** stage, project evaluations provide an opportunity for you, your partners, and representatives from the community and stakeholders to check progress against the sustainability plan and objective indicators, consider when exit is likely and adjust your sustainability plan and exit strategy if needed. When your project is within at least 2 years of achieving its goals and sustainability objectives, you should begin to finalise and implement the exit plan with partners. And of course any lessons you learn in planning for sustainability can be shared with others.

If your project is beyond the design stage, it is still possible to plan for sustainability. Annual reviews and external evaluations provide a good starting point to begin such thinking and adjusting your strategies where needed.

5. How to Plan for Sustainability and Responsible Exits.

5.1 Plan for sustainability from the beginning

Planning for sustainability begins at the *define* stage when you identify the stakeholders who are key for ensuring that results are sustained. It is good practice to involve these stakeholders (some of whom will become implementing partners) in setting the projects scope, vision and targets and in regular reviews of progress towards the vision.

This involves working with key partners to:

- Identify the **key sustainability factors** e.g. engaging strategic partners and developing their capacity (where needed), securing societal benefits and political commitment, developing sources of sustainable financing and creating an enabling policy environment. These are described in more detail in Section 5.
- Assess whether it is **feasible** (in the light of external pressures, value for money etc.) to achieve results that can be sustained.

[5] WWF terms and step numbers are provided in brackets where these differ from CMP terminology

- Determining the estimated **project life span** – the period of time over which your team expects to carry out all activities and achieve the project's intended results. Some projects may be planned in phases so it is important to be clear about the timing of any future phases.
- Develop a tentative (and responsible) **exit strategy** that describes what criteria need to be met to enable the project and / or partners to systematically and responsibly exit a project, how this will be managed, and a realistic time scale for doing so.
- Regularly **reassess and adapt** the sustainability plan against the changing external environment.

During this process you should clarify expectations by:

- Openly discussing who might be responsible for sustaining project results, whether they want to and what are the implications of this for them?
- Where possible, agreeing on a shared vision and how long it will take to achieve.
- Identifying what will be needed to sustain and where appropriate magnify the project's results. Section 5.3 will give you ideas of the factors that you should begin to consider.
- Agreeing how these stakeholders will be involved in the design, implementation and continuation of project activities.
- Clarifying what your organisation's role will be in the process.

At this stage you should also recognise that stakeholders are not a homogenous group and there may be differences in perspectives and roles that need to be considered (e.g. young, old, ethnic groups, socio-economic status, class and religion, etc.).

Although it can take time to involve stakeholders in this process, it is worth remembering that conservation strategies that reflect the aspirations of and have built ownership amongst key stakeholders are more likely to be sustained.

For programmes whose central goal is mass public behavioural change, it may not be possible to engage those responsible for sustaining results in setting the vision and objectives. However, it is good practice as part of the Situation Analysis to understand how this target group might respond to the proposed behavioural change e.g. through focus groups, surveys, etc.

5.2 Link Sustainability and Situation Analysis

Projects that have understood and responded to the context in which they are operating, and regularly review and respond to changes in this context are more likely to deliver results that will be sustained. You should ensure that a thorough *Situation Analysis* has been carried out and that factors that will enable / limit sustainability have been considered as part of this (Section 5.3). For example, you might want to commission studies to explore factors such as the policy and legislative environment, institutional, community and individual capacity of implementing partners, economic forces and the potential for sustainable financing, in more detail. If this is not possible during the *define* stage then you should consider whether you need to include activities in your action plan to further this understanding. For example, studies to explore areas such as sustainable financing options (e.g. payment for environment services, environmental trust funds, etc.) and / or a more in depth understanding of capacity needs down to the individual level, etc.

5.3 Key factors that affect sustainability

Key factors (not necessarily definitive) are listed below, along with issues or questions for consideration and the related steps in Open Standards (and WWF PPMS) for your reference.

5.3.1 Ownership by key stakeholders / partners

Ownership by key stakeholders and partners is essential for project activities to be continued. Building ownership requires involving key partners through all stages of the project. You should consider the following:

- Have all the stakeholders who are key for ensuring the project results been identified? (Step 1D/ 1.4).
- Has the project initiated or is it planning discussions with these groups to share expectations and assess their interests in carrying on activities?
- Has the project thought about how it will engage hard to reach groups?
- Have their priorities been identified and are they suitably addressed by the project's strategies and accommodated in its objectives, goals and vision? (Step 2A/ 2.1).
- Is it clear how they will be involved in implementation and what will be their role on exiting?

When identifying partners, consider whether there are any strategic (influential) partners, typically from the public or private sector, who can support (or obstruct) bigger changes, especially where they derive significant benefit (or 'cost') from being involved. They may also be willing to continue the project.

Further resources: WWF Standards Guidance on Stakeholder Analysis, Beneficiary Accountability and Partnerships.

5.3.2 Societal benefits/ costs and Equity

Projects that deliver wider socioeconomic value and bring benefits that are equitably distributed amongst local stakeholders are more likely to be supported and in the long term sustained. This requires:

- Understanding the relationship between the biodiversity the project is seeking to conserve and people's livelihoods.
- Providing opportunities for people to be involved in project planning and express their interests, needs, priorities and potential contributions in relation to the scope of the project.
- Identifying strategies that create benefits both to people and the environment.
- Promoting equitable access and/or benefit sharing.
- Understanding and improving the societal costs or distributing costs more equitably.

Equitable distribution of benefits does not mean that everyone gets an equal amount. There needs to be a system in place, agreed with stakeholders, that sets out how benefits will be fairly accrued amongst different stakeholders. You should consider, has the project:

- Identified the different stakeholders on which the project will have an impact and understood the nature of the impact (positive and negative)?
- Discussed the costs and benefits from the project with these stakeholders?
- Agreed on a transparent and fair process for how costs will be compensated for (if appropriate) and who will receive benefits?
- Ensured that during such discussions the voices of women and marginalised groups have been included?

5.3.3 Organisational, Community and Individual Capacity

The capacity of the partners (organisations, community groups or individuals) to carry on some or all of the project's activities is a key factor that needs to be addressed. The level of resources and time needed for this is often overlooked in our plans. Where partners will take on responsibility for the project, it is essential that your assessment of human capacity in Step 3 should be extended to include the partners. If there are significant capacity needs amongst partners, addressing this should become a specific objective of the project.

Capacity needs range from leadership and managerial abilities, financial management and accounting skills to technical skills. In some cases, conservation organisations facilitate multi-stakeholder processes. Within these processes, an area of capacity building that can be overlooked is the ability of organisations to work together once the facilitator has moved on.

Further resources: WWF Standards Guidance – Programme Capacity Assessment Template.
PPA CSO Capacity Assessment Tool.

5.3.4 Ecologically Sustainable

Ecosystems that are resilient to change are more likely to thrive for several generations to come[6]. You should consider:

- Is the geographic area sufficiently large and well protected to maintain biodiversity?
- Whether the system as a whole provides corridors for long-ranging species and is able to counter external threats such as poaching and invasive species?
- The impact of climate change on the ecosystem and put in place a climate adaptation strategy.
- Whether your scientific understanding is sufficient e.g. is bycatch the main threat for turtles?

Further resources: Applying Resilience Thinking. Stockholm Resilience Centre http://www.stockholmresilience.org/download/18.10119fc11455d3c557d6928/1398150799790/SRC+Applying+Resilience+final.pdf
Ecosystem Based Adpatation Guidance, UNDP, 2012. http://www.unep.org/climatechange/adaptation/Portals/133/documents/Ecosystem-Based%20Adaptation/Decision%20Support%20Framework/EBA%20Guidance_WORKING%20DOCUMENT%2030032012.pdf

5.3.5 Financially Feasible

Projects should not be designed so that they are eternally reliant on external funding. You should consider:

- Are the project's approaches / activities financially viable for the partners who will take over responsibility for them?
- What level of funding will be required beyond the lifetime of the project to sustain results and is this affordable for partners?
- Can sustainable management of natural resources generate funds?
- Can community /local / national funds be mobilised?
- If not, have other funding mechanisms been/ or will be explored (e.g. trust funds, debt swaps, payment for environmental services etc)?

Further resources: WWF Standards Guidance on Conservation Finance, WWF US, 2009 available at http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_guide_to_conservation_finance.pdf

5.3.6 Replication / Scaling up

Some projects are intended to pilot approaches and/or support practical implementation of policies, with an aim that they are scaled up or replicated regionally or nationally. For this to happen, you should ensure that:

- Institutional stakeholders that are key for scaling up are identified and involved in project design.
- A scaling mechanism is part of the projects design.
- The project has a specific objective and budget for documenting processes and lessons learned and sharing them with peers and decision makers.

[6] A Big Deal for Conservation, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Summer 2012.

If the project is to become a show case for others to learn from, ensure that resources have been made available to enable this.

5.3.6 Policy and Legislative Environment

Policies and legislation can both enable or constrain the achievement and sustainability of conservation results. During the context analysis (Step 1D/ 1.4) you should:

- Determine the key policies and laws relevant to projects scope and vision.
- Identify the opportunities, conflicts and constraints within these and the projects response.

Note it is not only important to consider whether policies exist but also whether there is commitment to them and they are being implemented. If the policy and/or legislative environment is weak, then addressing this may need to be a specific objective and/or strategy within your project.

5.3.7 Political Commitment

Closely linked to the above point, political commitment both at the national and local level is important to ensure that protected areas remain in place and policies continue to be implemented and resourced. When carrying out the stakeholder analysis (Step 1D/ 1.4), you should consider the political sphere and develop an understanding of those who are committed and those who are unsupportive of what you are trying to achieve. If political commitment is weak, then the project should consider developing a strategy to address this.

5.3.8 Economic Forces

Changes in domestic and global economic conditions can affect the short and long term viability of conservation results e.g. when oil prices are low, there is less pressure to extract known oil reserves from within a protected area and vice versa. During the context analysis, where relevant you should aim to understand the impact of economic forces on the project (local, national, regional , global) (Step 1D/ 1.4). This may need to be reviewed throughout the project as external conditions change.

5.3.9 Appropriate Technology and Methodologies

The technologies and approaches used in your project need to respond to a particular need and be relevant to context e.g. skills, knowledge, finances etc. You should consider.

- Has the project worked with stakeholders to identify appropriate technologies and methodologies?
- Will local staff and communities be able to use the methods, equipment and infra-structure and maintain them after the end of the project? (Step 2.1).
- If not, what skills / knowledge gaps need to be addressed during the project to enable them to do so.

5.3.10 Socio-cultural Issues, Ethnicity and Gender

Sustainability requires that the needs of the diverse sections of communities in which the project is operating have been considered.

- Has the project employed community engagement processes that recognises the diversity and differing opinions, needs and capacities of community members?
- Has the project drawn on these different sections of the community to shape the design of the intervention and inform the project's strategies?
- Do the project strategies, including any proposed changes to people's behaviour, take into account cultural traditions, religious beliefs and social practices?
- Are there feedback mechanisms accessible for all sections of the community to give feedback and be responded to?

5.4 Build your Sustainability Plan (*if it is feasible*)

As you develop your objectives and strategies you should draw upon what you have learnt about sustainability during the situation analysis and consider again the relevant sustainability factors from section 5.3 above to:

- Identify the key sustainability factors that need to be addressed.
- Develop objectives and strategies that address these factors.
- Determine how long will be required to achieve sustainability and whether the project needs to be planned in phases.
- Assess whether it is feasible (i.e. can all the factors above be met) to achieve results that can be sustained. If not, consider whether:
    - Project should not go ahead since investment is not likely to be sustained and is not good value for money
    - Conservation priority is so great, project goes ahead but requires on-going funding and support from your organisation.
- Develop indicators for monitoring progress on those sustainability strategies and assess the baseline. Indicators are important since they can be used as the criteria by which you decide when you are able to exit a project without undermining the projects results.

For example, if a key sustainability objective is to build the capacity of a resource user groups to manage natural resources by themselves, you should define indicators that show the level to which that capacity needs to have been developed for your project to be able to exit e.g. Community forest user groups have systems and knowledge in place to develop and implement forest management plan.

5.5 Include sustainability objectives, strategies, and indicators within your Action and Monitoring Plan

At the *Design* stage, the process of developing your Action Plan (Step 2A/ 2.1) should be done with key stakeholders (especially those who will be involved in sustaining the projects results) to further build ownership and commitment.

Box 1 presents how the Sustainable Water Access, Use & Management (SWAUM) Programme, Tanzania has addressed sustainability factors within its Action Plan.

Box 1. Planning for Sustainability in Tanzania

The SWAUM project is piloting an approach – multi-stakeholder catchment learning – to enable stakeholders from the local to national level to work more effectively together to deliver equitable and sustainable water access, use and management in the Great Ruaha River catchment of the Ruaha. For this to be a sustainable process, the programme recognises that the following sustainability factors are key to address:

- Ownership of the process – by facilitating stakeholders to resolve conflicts and differences and jointly develop collaborative ways of working.
- Capacity – taking explicit account of organisational (including that of WWF), community and individual capacity constraints.
- Policy and Legislative Environment – facilitating and promoting the integration of cross-sectoral working.
- Socio-cultural issues and Gender – by valuing and promoting local expertise and knowledge, and recognising local women's strategic as well as practical needs through ensuring their voices are heard and acted upon.
- Equity – recognition of the differential stakeholder impacts of the upstream-downstream dynamics and promotion of an inclusive multi-stakeholder approach (in accord with the principles of national water legislation).

SWAUM includes the following objectives to address each of these factors.

By 2016, effective working relationships for equitable and sustainable water access, use & management established between the diverse stakeholders of the two focal sub-catchments by means of a multi-stakeholder process (MSP) focused on catchment learning.

By 2016, competence & integrity of key formal and informal GRRC water governance institutions at local, district and basin levels strengthened.

By 2016, water resource needs of poor and marginalised groups identified and addressed through their increased participation in decision-making for integrated water management.

By 2016, water and land management practices by key stakeholders improved, with the establishment of a fairer and sustainable allocation system (to ensure the delivery of improved e-flows in the two focal sub-catchments).

5.6 Review your approach to sustainability and develop an exit strategy

It is also at the *Design* stage that you should develop and share a tentative exit strategy with your partners. This should set out the type of exit planned and criteria that will need to have been achieved before exit can begin, along with a tentative time frame. Such criteria are often linked to your sustainability indicators. There are many different ways in which you might exit a project. Sometimes an exit will be planned into a second/ further project phase in which your organisation plays a different role, or it may be that you no longer play a role.

An exit strategy should include:

- What sustainability factors need to be addressed.
- The objectives that specifically contribute towards achieving this.
- Indicators for monitoring progress.
- An indicative time scale of when exit will happen.
- The type of exit (see section 6).
- Who will continue activities.
- The criteria that will need to have been met to allow you to exit.

- You should also include evidence that the exit strategy has been developed in consultation, and shared, with key partners

It is recognised that during the initial design phase of a project there can be a lot of uncertainty, and it can seem very early to be discussing an exit. Clearly there is a need to update the exit strategy as the project progresses.

5.7 Monitor and Evaluate Progress

If you have included sustainability objectives within your action plan and corresponding indicators in your monitoring plan, then you will be regularly collecting data that can be used to show progress. In addition to this you should also make time during regular meetings with key partners, e.g. annual workshops, informal discussions etc., to review progress towards sustainability and adjust your plans where needed.

Evaluations provide a further opportunity to monitor progress. Reviewing progress towards sustainability should be included in the terms of reference for all evaluations. In conducting such evaluations it is important that progress is not only seen from the point of view of your project team but that key partners and stakeholders also have the opportunity to share and express their perceptions of progress. The guidance note on beneficiary accountability provides approaches for gathering stakeholders' views. The evaluation report should include recommendations regarding programme design, to either enhance achievement of objectives or to begin the process of exit if the project is close to achieving its goals and objectives.

To truly understand whether sustainability has been achieved and for WWF as an organisation to strengthen its project planning, a post project evaluation (2-5 years after exit) should be considered. This should seek to explore the following:

- What activities/ outcomes were sustained and why?
- What activities / outcomes were not sustained and why?
- What unexpected outcomes emerged after the project finished among communities and partners?

Where WWF still remains involved and the project moves into a second phase it is easy to build in such an evaluation. Where WWF is not involved in a second phase, such an evaluation will require securing funds from either a WWF national office or from WWF International.

6. Exit Responsibly

Box 2: Types of exits common to WWF

- Transition into a second phase where WWF takes on a new role, often with less direct responsibility for implementation.
- "External spin-offs" – projects that become independent entities in their own right e.g. WWF UK exited its Toxics Programme by establishing an independent charity that has carried on and built upon the work.
- Handover to partners – e.g. the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP), Nepal.
- "Full stops" – where a project or programme comes to an end.
- A WWF national office exits from a WWF Network project/programme but the project continues to be supported and delivered by others in the Network.

Adapted from: WWF UK 2014, Delivering responsible exits. Part1. Recommendations, Tools and Processes

There will come a time when you and your partners feel that it is possible to achieve the projects sustainability objectives; this should be at least 18 months from the anticipated end of the project. At this point you should finalise with partners how you will responsibly exit / transition from the project and communicate that in an updated exit strategy.

Throughout an exit process it is important to maintain positive relationships with partners and key stakeholders. In particular it is important to:

- Signal intentions in advance, stakeholders should be aware that exit is planned and be actively involved in planning for it.
- Formally communicate decisions when they are known.
- Discuss implications of an exit, including expectations for each main activity.
- Allow time for scale down of activities, as appropriate.

In addition to supporting key partners throughout the process, you should also consider how you will support project staff. For example, where member(s) of staff are likely to leave as a direct result of an exit, the organisations involved should, as far as possible, provide relevant support in training and skills development to enable them to find new employment. This may include additional costs associated with the transfer of staff within or between organisations in accordance with relevant national legislation[7].

Sometimes, you may be in the position that you have to exit a project before its goals have been achieved, e.g. due to a change in WWF's or one of your project donors' strategic direction. A negotiated exit strategy with your partners is key to help consolidate what the project has achieved so far. This should consider the key implications of the early exit and how these can be mitigated. It should also ensure that sufficient funding and capacity is made available to deliver the exit. In this situation, you should encourage your donors to give you sufficient time (measured in years, not months) to be able to exit effectively.

Ideally, an exit should be implemented in a gradual, phased manner; this allows groups or individuals to take increasing responsibility and gain experience operating independently prior to exit. It also allows sufficient time for adjustments and improvements to be made as the exit progresses. Considering when and how you will exit from the start of a project allows you time to do this.

At the end of the exit process, it is helpful to carry out an evaluation of how the exit process went. A simple exit questionnaire can be used for this, an example of which can be found in Annex 5 of WWF UK 2014. Delivering Responsible Exits. Part 1. Recommendations, Tools and Processes.

It is also good practice to build in a post project evaluation (see previous section) a couple of years after the project has ended to understand what has/ hasn't been sustained and why.

[7] WWF UK 2014. Delivering Responsible Exits. Part 1. Recommendations, Tools and Processes.

Box 3 presents how WWF Nepal has phased hand over of management of the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area to local communities.

Box 3: Sustainability in action – empowering local communities in Nepal
Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP), Nepal, shows how strong local ownership, empowered partners, a phased approach to capacity building, a supportive policy environment and the delivery of societal benefits can lead to sustained conservation.

Established in 1998, as a partnership between WWF Nepal, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and local communities, KCAP's ultimate goal is the conservation of biodiversity in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA). Central to achieving and sustaining this goal has been empowering the local community to manage KCA and advocating to the Government to hand responsibility for KCA over to the community. To facilitate this, KCAP supported the establishment of natural resource user groups and helped establish the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Management Council (KCAMC), an apex body representing all communities within the KCA, that would ultimately lead the conservation efforts within the KCA. Initially, support was provided to the KCAMC to develop its capacity to plan and manage the KCA. This required not only developing technical skills (e.g. environmental planning, community based snow leopard and prey base monitoring through developing citizen scientists) but also skills and knowledge in good governance, keeping records, managing and accounting for finances and developing systems for compensation to address human – wildlife conflict issues. In 2006 the Government of Nepal handed over the management responsibility of KCA to the local community, through KCAMC, for five years. To ensure that KCAMC could continue to manage after the 5 year period, KCAP:

- Advocated to the Government to put in place a regulation that delegated authority to manage KCA to local communities.
- Further built the capacity of KCAMC with the aim of them becoming institutionally and financial sustainable.

In 2008 the Government of Nepal approved a regulation that gave KCAMC the legal mandate to manage KCA. At the same time, WWF Nepal began giving direct grants to KCAMC. These were small at first, but have been gradually increased as the capacity of KCAMC to manage and be accountable for funds has developed. Today, all the WWF grants for managing the KCA are provided directly to KCAMC. In 2011, an external evaluation highlighted that KCAMC was a sufficiently strong institution that WWF Nepal could begin a phased exit and close its project office. An exit strategy was developed with partners to facilitate this. WWF's involvement was reduced to providing grants directly to KCAP and providing technical support and capacity building on new emerging issues such as climate change and trans-boundary. From 2017, WWF will only provide support to KCAMC for a few interventions such as research, policy, fund raising capacity building, transboundary relations and sustainable financing measures. Day to day works of KCAMC will not be supported by WWF, since they are fully capable. Thus with WWF's support, KCAMC has transitioned to financial independence.

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