IUCN Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Analysis
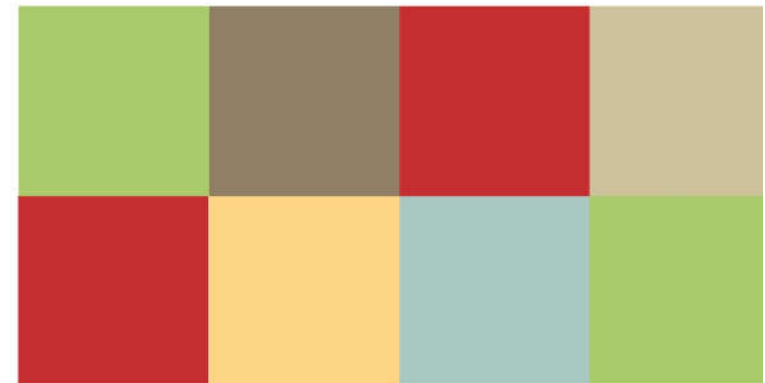
Final Report

Client:

IUCN Programme Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit

Date: 31st of May 2021

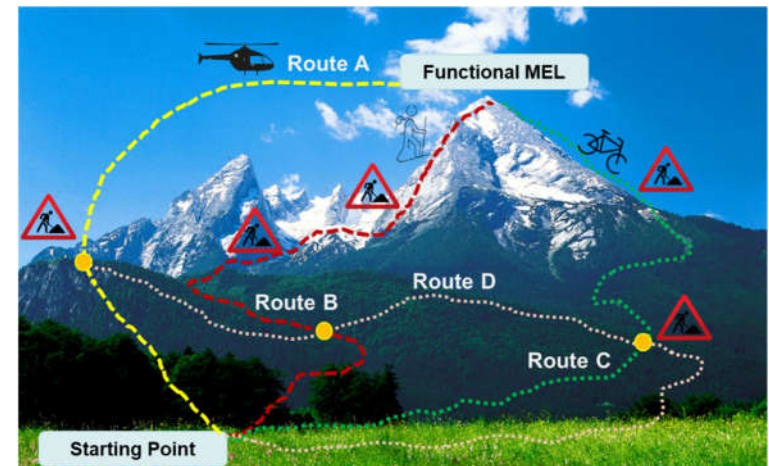|	
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IUCN MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING ANALYSIS – FINAL REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As one of the world's leading knowledge-based and project-implementing organisations driving conservation efforts across the globe in diverse social, political, cultural and environmental contexts, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning is a core function of the IUCN Secretariat. Previous reviews identified the further development of the organisation's MEL system as a key priority. In order to the build a stronger learning culture across the Secretariat and consolidate the existing MEL system, the Secretariat decided to carry out an in-depth MEL analysis.

This analysis shall provide elements for developing a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan to be used by all IUCN programme and portfolio managers during the IUCN Quadrennial Programme 2021–2024. Overall, the analysis shall determine the status of implementation of IUCN's Monitoring & Evaluation Policy, Version 2.1 released in April 2015 during the IUCN Quadrennial Programme 2017–2020 and with respect to the current Quadrennial Programme. Expected results of the analysis are:

- Gaps and areas for further development of the implementation of IUCN's Monitoring & Evaluation Policy across the Secretariat are identified.
- Monitoring and Evaluation best practices which may be elevated as corporate solutions are identified.
- New tools and improvements to existing ones are proposed.
- Elements for a Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Plan are provided.

In the course of the assignment, two reports were submitted (Inception Note submitted on 15.01.2021 and the final analysis report on 31.05.2021 (at hand)). Additionally, the consultant provided two detailed reports of the two interactive workshops (16./17.03.2021 and 14./16.04.2021).

The final report at hand is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 (The Assignment) provides background information about the assignment and the context of the analysis. Chapter 2 (Assessment of current MEL Performance) includes the main findings and provides a detailed documentation of the questions and sub-questions as outlined in the analysis matrix (Annex 4_9). Chapter 3 (Recommendations) includes a very condensed summary of the assessment findings, detailed recommendations for elements of a future MEL plan and potential short- and medium-term actions.

Context

IUCN is a globally unique and member driven organisation. IUCN's objective (ref. IUCN Statutes, p. 2) is: '*to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.*' The clients (i.e. beneficiaries) of IUCN are its members. They approve the Quadrennial Programme of IUCN containing its policy goals. In the last and in the current Quadrennial Programme, the policy goals are aligned with all SDGs. The Secretariat, in charge to execute IUCN's Global Programme, ensures sustainable financing of the organisation's structures and activities. Membership based financing is far from sufficient to cover the organisation's cost. More than 70 % of the Secretariat's income is derived through project-based funding from development organisations.

The global recognition that nature is essential to achieve SDGs gave new momentum to IUCN's objective.

The IUCN project portfolio shows an increasing trend of projects with substantial budgets (i.e. > CHF 5 million) financed by a limited number of donors (e.g., GCF, GEF, EU, KfW). IUCN's current restricted funding is enshrined in a portfolio of 400+ projects representing a contracted amount of more than CHF 400 million. Substantial further growth in the number of large, global programmes (> CHF 5 million) is expected over the next five years. The Secretariat's leadership team is aware that this represents an enormous potential and challenge. According to the Risk Policy, IUCN has a low-risk appetite for reputational risks. With the expected evolvement of the portfolio, the higher number of programmes with double-digit million budgets and global visibility, expected accreditations and the growing responsibility of programme and project managers, the need for reassurance clearly has been increased.

During the assessment, the Secretariat's leadership team demonstrated an awareness that potentials and risks of the portfolio growth are intimately linked to its ability to observe what is happening in the projects at an

aggregated level. Leaders at global and regional levels want to be able to cluster project-based information by, for example: Geographical areas, thematic groups of projects and categories of business outputs (results). They want to be able to present a results-chain and intervention logic demonstrating how projects have contributed to an aspired change. This is particularly important to demonstrate to members what can be achieved through joint efforts. Therefore, managers want to generate evidence-based policy messages, that are backed up by impact stories from the ground.

Expected impact of an improved MEL

The current M&E Policy defines a three-fold purpose of M&E: Learning and improvement, accountability and evidence-based management for Programme Monitoring, Project Portfolio Monitoring and Project Monitoring. Statements in personal MEL vision stories elaborated during one of the workshops went one big step further. Many interviewees and workshop participants attributed a cultural importance to MEL because they believe it can help reducing fragmentation. The interviews revealed a very coherent picture from regional, portfolio and project management levels: representatives from all levels pointed out that they would like to see system improvements to be better able to provide evidence of results, accountability and learning from successful and unsuccessful project implementation.

Achieving the expected impact would directly contribute to securing IUCN's reputation and financial sustainability.

Enabling conditions: Planning system

Currently, the Secretariat is in a somewhat delicate situation: the members set the agenda but do not have the finances to implement it – the Secretariat acquires the finance through projects that follow an agenda as agreed with the funding organisations. This paradox at the highest strategic level of the organisation leads to a fragmented and complex planning system.

At the Secretariat's global, regional and thematic portfolio levels, there are no approved strategies with objectives, intervention logics, priorities and expected achievements for the next four years. The aspirations of how the project portfolio shall contribute to the targets of the Global Programme are not described. The Secretariat does not state which intermittent milestones it can achieve with its current portfolio and structures as a contribution to the Global Programme. Consequently, regional, project and thematic managers base their operational decisions on the broad, long-term policy goals of the Global Programme.

This results in a broad variety of themes, a highly complex multi-project environment and a multitude of countries of intervention. There are thousands of narratives about successful project interventions, but the big storyline is missing. Secretariat managers get lost in individual interpretations of how to match a successfully implemented project intervention with a high-level policy objective. Without a shared theory of change and intervention logic, the significance of a single project story can neither be assessed nor demonstrated.

Enabling conditions: Governance system

The Secretariat works in a multi-project environment through regional and local offices as well as thematic portfolios. The regional offices implement Regional Programmes, which are also financed through project-based funding, either acquired externally or through internal agreements. Project managers often oversee several global projects in one thematic area, sometimes called a portfolio and sometimes a programme. The execution of global projects follows a matrix arrangement through internal agreements, with the responsibilities of the project manager delegated to a multitude of stakeholders through internal agreements. Roles and responsibilities of business entities and sub-entities in managing the project cycle, mandatory workflows and sanctions if not followed are not defined by the central level.

The Secretariat is currently undergoing an organisational transition with the aim of better harmonising and coordinating decentralised project management and implementation processes. This is a phase in the evolution of organisations that usually follows an expansion of business scope and volume. For all organisations, however, such a change is always a difficult period of several years. At the Secretariat, it has been reflected, among other things, in several years of interim solutions in leadership positions and a lack of orientation on important strategic issues. Since the beginning of 2021, the headquarters' leadership team is 'back to normal', all positions have been filled, and major structural changes are

currently taking place. In this context, priority strategic questions have been identified and an outline for their solution has been drafted (the Draft Operational Plan). The PPME Unit, which has been understaffed and managed by interim heads for the last 12 months, has a new head since March 2021 and it is expected that the full staff contingent will be reached by the summer.

Currently existing MEL at the Secretariat

The M&E Policy (dated 2015) provides general guidance on purpose and principles of monitoring and evaluation. It is mainly written with a perspective on the statutory monitoring requirements, i.e., on the monitoring needs to comply with reporting on progress achieved to implement the Global Programme. Based on the strategic guidance of the *'One Programme Charter'*, the PPME Unit has developed a centrally managed set of compulsory instructions and templates: The *Project Standards and Guidelines* with the purpose to ensure the alignment of all projects at the Secretariat with the targets of the Global Programme. The corresponding management processes for reviewing and approving project proposals have eroded in recent years due to the interim situation, but still exist. All projects approved by the Secretariat are registered in the *Project Portal* and are assessed against the targets of the Global Programme, which is a widely acknowledged huge improvement over previous years. The recently launched *Transparency Portal* (Open Project Portal) reports on projects implemented by the Secretariat and key data on each project per target, region, country and donor. This alignment of the Secretariat's portfolio with the targets of the Global Programme and the visualised, publicly accessible reporting on the composition of the portfolio is a major achievement. This is especially true against the backdrop of the challenging framework of the Secretariat's planning and governance systems.

In addition, there are a multitude of individualised solutions for monitoring at the project management level, the regional programme level and the portfolio level. Depending on the size of the respective portfolio and the perceived pressure to provide reliable monitoring information, several managers have developed good practices for monitoring solutions. Each good practice approaches monitoring from a slightly different perspective and responds to the data needs of an individual project or programme.

If there were a guided change process with support from strategic leadership in the Secretariat, these good practices could be further developed and merged into a commonly shared MEL system.

A commonly shared MEL system would be urgently needed as existing solutions are not sufficient to provide a line of sight to project group intervention logics and accountability for the results chain and assumptions about the Secretariat's contribution to expected change. In this context, 'commonly shared', as understood by the consultant, refers in the short term to binding standards, workflows, and data processing methods rather than to a uniform database.

Strengths of the current MEL systems

IUCN's Global Programme clearly sets the values and political guidance for the organisation and managers at the Secretariat identify with it. All projects of the Secretariat are aligned with these values and policy goals and the existing MEL System can demonstrate this. The PPME Unit has succeeded in establishing reliable workflows that ensure alignment of the project portfolio with the targets of the IUCN Global Programme. The database and tools used allow for the extraction of data by different categories (e.g. donor, budget, thematic area, geographic intervention area). The data are linked to the Transparency Portal so that data can be displayed according to these categories.

All existing MEL systems, fragmented as they are, have been developed by their users, adhering to the principle of subsidiarity. All solutions have evolved in highly adaptive management styles, based on the continuous integration of personal experience and learning. All solutions are used, data is collected, and conclusions are drawn at project level. Our participatory assessment has shown that managers of representative regions and thematic areas generate key monitoring information for 50 % –100 % of the projects in their portfolio.

Weaknesses
There is an enormous amount of data and information at project level, but few standards, guidelines and framework to compile data and generate information from it.

There is a tradition from the past of not setting any guidelines for a planning logic, as it was common practice to follow the planning logic of the respective donor organisation funding a project. However, this has created

a high level of uncertainty among project management staff about the meaning of outputs, outcomes, and objectives of projects. This currently leads to an incoherence of intervention logics. Key development organisations have harmonised their intervention logics and provide standards. Managers at IUCN at all levels require guidance and capacity development to apply a harmonised logic.

Indicators used in logical frameworks of projects do not usually have baselines and target lines. However, this is important to measure the progress of projects. In addition, projects should demonstrate that they meet the needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders in the regions/countries in which they are implemented. The regional programmes state that they identify these needs. However, there is no regular integration of these needs into the project concepts and no evaluation of whether projects have succeeded in meeting these needs.

Opportunities
There is an overwhelming readiness at global, regional and portfolio management level to jointly address the issues of the MEL systems at the Secretariat. This readiness is driven by authentic personal need and high cultural identity with the organisation's values. This a tremendous opportunity with catalytic potential.

As for the global level, managers at regional and thematic levels require a portfolio overview. They currently do not have access to the system or the extraction of data is not self-explanatory. A good practice example for a regional portfolio overview with a very nice visualisation was developed by the ORMACC Region (SmartSheet). There is a possibility to evaluate the solution and roll it out to other regions. In the long run, this would enable a portfolio overview at regional and global level. Understanding their share of the 'global pie' would enhance managers' motivation to participate in the MEL system for portfolio overview. This in turn would enhance learning about business performance (contract values) of regions or themes or donors.

For most of the observed risks, managers at the Secretariat have already started to develop solutions and some of them are already good practice (e.g. ORMACC SmartSheet, BEST Programme database, Integrated Tiger Habitat indicator monitoring system). There is an opportunity to jointly assess these solutions in detail to see if and how they are useful for other units.

The Secretariat operates some of the globally most trusted impact data bases for nature conservation. Only a few programme managers use these to set priorities and track the impact of their portfolios. If all programmes were to integrate these databases and use these databases at the global level to prioritise interventions, identify baselines and targets, a coherent and powerful pattern of the project portfolio would emerge in the coming years.

Threats
Currently, the Secretariat is not able to report on the progress of the project portfolio against the policy targets. There is no joint planning system for the Secretariat, no joint understanding of intervention logic and no shared set of indicators to demonstrate outputs and outcomes of projects, although a Programme Indicator Matrix provides some guidance. With an increasing size of the portfolio of high visibility global projects, this is increasingly becoming a reputational risk.

Currently, there is no operationalisation of the risk policy. Managers have devised their own approaches to ascertain the healthiness of portfolios. However, it is unclear whether these approaches are sufficient.

There are a variety of initiatives working independently to improve MEL systems at all levels of the Secretariat. Most of these initiatives rely on database solutions. To date, it is not known how the flow of data and information between these databases can be organised. Also, there are no indicator definitions, instructions for data collection and measurements. There is a risk that a lot of data is collected that cannot be analysed and turned into visual information. From a cost perspective, this is inefficient. Even worse, from a learning perspective, this is a major barrier to learning and improving teams, programmes, and portfolios.

Managers at all levels of the Secretariat have asked for improvement of the MEL systems and understand that this will be a great support for them. There is a tremendous willingness to engage as a community of practice in a MEL improvement process. The frameworks needed for this are: Timely decisions and clear guidance from the Leadership Team, adequate MEL resources and capacity beyond the project level, a facilitated change process and guidelines to harmonise approaches and to coordinate data flow and communication.

Summary results of assessment criteria

Efficiency: The existing MEL systems meet the M&E minimum requirements to the best of their ability under the current organisational framework. The minimum requirements of the M&E policy are met to a limited extent. There are several good practice MEL tools at different levels of the Secretariat. Scaling up of such good practices e.g., to facilitate MEL implementation, is currently hampered by weaknesses in the organisation's planning system and governance framework. This particularly concerns MEL application at programme and portfolio level.

Effectiveness: Decision makers at all levels find it difficult to obtain evidence of progress on results (project, portfolio, programme and global). To address this challenge, the Secretariat has developed a Results Framework. Therefore, evidence is rarely used to make adjustments to the IUCN project portfolio and associated management processes (i.e., risk and performance management, decisions on changing programmes). Several interview partners emphasised that 'impact stories' are lacking at IUCN. There is a lot going on in projects, thematic areas and regions and a lot of information available. However, fragmented information makes it difficult to find evidence to tell a story about how interventions have had an impact.

Relevance: In the current system, there is little evidence of the relevance of monitoring information to management decisions. However, a lot of monitoring data is collected at project implementation level. The data is captured in formats that are not conducive for aggregation. Outstanding managers have developed their own systems to generate portfolio overviews as a relevant input for management decisions. These good practices are an invaluable source to find solutions to the existing gaps in the M&E system.

Impact of MEL System: Interestingly, managers from all levels of the Secretariat expressed very similar hopes and expectations:

- to be able to understand the contribution of their business unit to the bigger picture, i.e. the contribution of the Secretariat to the targets of the Global Programme

- to be able to track the progress of a group of projects for which a manager is responsible and to detect potential risks at an early stage

- to be able to understand and share the intervention logic of projects

- to be able to understand whether and how projects can contribute to change in societies of countries / regions

- to overcome fragmentation and work together towards change

- to avoid double entry of data and administrative work

Recommendations

Recommendations could be made from a variety of perspectives. One is certainly to review the existing M&E Policy. However, the consultant wanted to focus the recommendations on issues that are urgent and important to address the operational needs of managers and to take advantage of the window of opportunity for change.

In line with the findings of the performance assessment, the consultant proposes the following elements of a MEL System, which are also the components of a roadmap for MEL change:

- Create enabling conditions for MEL in a complex setting

- Define the purpose of the MEL System

- Identify boundaries and components

- Elaborate standards and guidelines

- Establish a continuous learning and improvement cycle

Based on the components of the roadmap for MEL change, the following recommendations should be implemented:

Prepare a roadmap for MEL change

Recommendation 0: **Prepare a roadmap for MEL change based on principles for managing complex challenges.**

Create enabling conditions

Recommendation 1: **Co-create planning systems for each level of the Secretariat with relevant stakeholders.**

Define the purpose

Recommendation 3: **The purpose of the MEL System should be to provide standards and processes for improving the use of existing data. For quick wins, converging points of data availability and information needs should be leveraged.**

Define scope and system components

Recommendation 4: **Define the scope of the MEL System by collating MEL questions, data providers, data users, standard givers, and external audience. Accordingly, define MEL System components and compulsory parts. Attribute corresponding MEL responsibilities to PPME Unit and other support units at the Secretariat.**

Establish relevant MEL standards

Recommendation 5: **Co-create thematic intervention logics with mandatory sets of objectives to which thematic groups of projects must contribute. Design projects along a commonly shared results-chain logic.**

Recommendation 6: **Design impact/outcome/results indicators in accordance with thematic intervention logics, available data quality and pragmatism.**

Establish a communication plan

Recommendation 7: **In line with the IUCN Secretariat's strategy, elaborate a communication plan for internal and external communication that focuses on performance and policy messages.**

Recommendation 8: **Integrate financial information into internal and external reporting on portfolios, regional and global programmes.**

Use evaluations to enhance institutional learning

Recommendation 9: **Evaluations should focus on understanding ability and key success factors of projects and intervention logics to contribute to social change.**

Recommendation 10: **Conceive evaluation tasks and data bases in**

such a way that they are useful for long-term observations and complement ongoing monitoring.

Aware that this process of co-creation and co-evolvement is a long, multi-year process, the consultant proposes some key short- and medium-term actions to get the process started (see Chapter 3_9).

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Acronyms

ANSI	American National Standards Institute
BEST	Voluntary Scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
DG	Director General (of IUCN)
EbA	Ecosystem-based Adaptation
ESMP	Environmental and Social Management Plan
ESMS	Environmental and Social Management System
EU	European Union
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GCU	Global Communications Unit
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HQ	Headquarter
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
IP	Intersessional Programme (=Quadrennial Programme; IUCN Programme)
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
NBS	Nature-based Solutions
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
ORMACC	IUCN Regional Office for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean
PACO	Programme Afrique centrale et occidentale de l'UICN (IUCN West and Central African Programme)
PGS	Project Guidelines and Standards
PMER	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Risk Management
PPME	Programme Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation
RBM	Results based Monitoring
RPC	Regional Programme Coordinator
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOS	Save Our Species
SPU	Strategic Partnerships Unit
TFCA FF	Transfrontier Conservation Areas Financing Facility
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
WANI	Water and Nature Initiative

1 THE ASSIGNMENT

IUCN assigned E.C.O. Institute of Ecology, Klagenfurt to carry out an analysis of IUCN's monitoring, evaluation and learning systems and capacities. The analysis shall provide elements for developing a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan to be used by all programme and portfolio managers during the upcoming IUCN Quadrennial Programme 2021 – 2024. Overall, the analysis aims to determine the status of implementation of the IUCN's Monitoring & Evaluation Policy, Version 2.1 released in April 2015, during the IUCN Quadrennial Programme 2017 – 2020.

1_1 *Analysis objectives and expected results*

The overarching goal of the Analysis for IUCN is twofold:

- to build a stronger learning culture across the organisation about success factors and effective approaches in conservation and sustainable development projects.

- to facilitate and consolidate Monitoring and Evaluation practices across the organisation.

This shall be achieved by:

- having the means to capture and systematise lessons learnt

- applying user-friendly and cost-effective systems

- sharing lessons learnt across the organisation, especially between regions and headquarters and with communities and partners

Expected results of the Analysis are:

- Gaps and areas for further development of the implementation of the IUCN Monitoring & Evaluation Policy across the Secretariat are identified.

- Monitoring and Evaluation best practices that could be elevated as corporate solutions are identified.

- New tools and improvements to existing ones are proposed.

- Elements for a Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Plan are provided.

1_2 *Expected outputs and timeline*

The consultancy delivered the following outputs:

- An inception note of maximum 10 pages describing the approach and methodology of the analysis, the case selection, the table of contents of the study report and the detailed work plan.

- A draft analysis report of maximum 30 pages excl. annexes

- A final analysis report

The contract was awarded on 8th December 2020. The agreed delivery date for the inception note was 15th January 2021. Due to the Christmas Break and the second scoping interview with ORMACC on 13th January, it was bilaterally agreed to submit the inception note by 21st of January. The deadline for submission of the draft analysis report was scheduled for 7th May 2021. The final analysis report was submitted by 31st May 2021.

1_3 *Methodology and approach*

The methodology and overall approach were presented in detail in the inception note and approved by the Steering Committee. The change- and future-oriented approach is based on an understanding of 'the MEL systems' as a pyramid with three levels, each with its own MEL systems but with linkages between the levels (Figure 1). The approach used for interviews and workshops comes from action research and appreciative inquiry, a validated strength-based method applicable to complex organisational systems. This approach was chosen because MEL processes across the different levels are closely interwoven with the management processes of planning, budgeting, and programming of projects and portfolios.

The main data sources for the analysis comprise the assessment of key documents (see also Annex 4_7), working group meetings and bilateral interviews (see also Annex 4_6) and two interactive workshops (see also Annex 4_12).
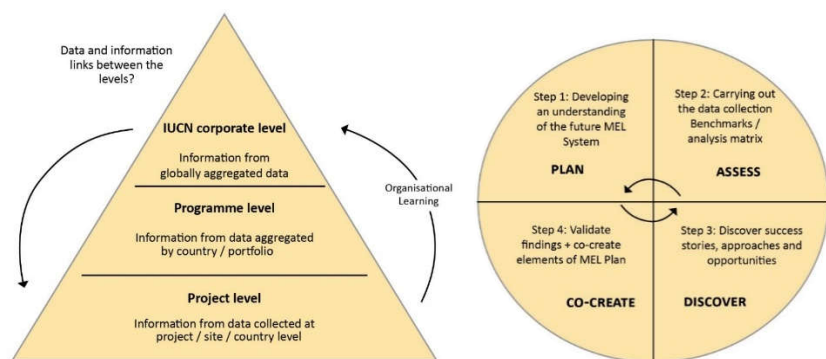
Figure 1: Simplified model for MEL Systems at different levels and schematic overview of the consultant's analysis and change approach
   (Author's draft)

In line with the criteria of the IUCN Guide for Conducting Strategic Reviews and the espoused purpose and elements of MEL as set out in the IUCN M&E Policy, the consultant developed an analysis matrix comprising two main sections: (1) The assessment of enabling organisational performance of IUCN and (2) the performance of the MEL system. The analysis matrix was presented and approved as part of the inception note (see Annex **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**00).

The team quickly realised that knowledge about structures, processes and implementation of MEL systems is mostly not institutionalised and documented but based on the individual experiences of experts. Therefore, it was decided – in consultation with the Steering Committee – to put special emphasis on interactive workshops and interviews as the main source of information. This had a decisive advantage, as a MEL change process and discussion was initiated in the two workshops.

1_4   Audience and Client of the Analysis

The Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Risk Management (PPME) Unit of the IUCN Secretariat oversees the assignment by managing access to interviewees, tools and documents, providing all requested information and organising working meetings and workshops.

The client established a Steering Committee to provide oversight by approving key milestones of the consultancy process and the outputs delivered by the consultant. Two Steering Committee meetings were held (3rd of March and 20th of May).

The assignment results shall provide guidance to the new Head of the Unit, who started in March 2021.

The Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Plan will be made available to all programme and portfolio managers to conduct periodic monitoring, evaluation and learning activities during the IUCN Quadrennial Programme 2021 – 2024.

1_5   Context of the Analysis

IUCN is a globally unique and member driven organisation. The objective of IUCN (ref. IUCN Statutes, p. 2) is: *'to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.'* (IUCN, 1996, updated 2020)

The clients (i.e., beneficiaries) of IUCN are its members. They approve IUCN's Quadrennial Programme which contains its policy goals. In the last and in the current Quadrennial Programme, the policy goals are aligned with all SDGs.

According to the statutes, the Secretariat of IUCN is mandated by the members to execute the Quadrennial Programme and to manage the business of the organisation. For this purpose, IUCN Secretariat staff are based in offices at Headquarters (Gland), in the regions and in the countries. The regional offices prepare regional programmes and implement measures to achieve the Quadrennial Programme. The regional offices maintain close contact with members through Regional and National Committees.

The IUCN Secretariat prepares the Financial Plan, a statutory document submitted by the Director General to the Council for approval. The Financial Plans for the past and the current Quadrennial Programme are aligned with the respective thematic areas. These thematic areas have changed between the past and the current Quadrennial Programme in accordance with their corresponding indicators.

The implementation of the Quadrennial Programme is funded through two main sources. The (unrestricted) core funding consists of membership fees, framework partner contributions and other sources (e.g., private sector, philanthropists, NGOs), which are mainly used for corporate functions and to support programme development at thematic and regional level. The second main element is the acquisition and implementation of donor-funded projects.

Regardless of the source of funding, the Council expects all project activities to be aligned with the objectives of the Quadrennial Programme. This means that the Secretariat must demonstrate the alignment of its project portfolio with the target indicators of the Quadrennial Programme. However, as the projects are funded by donor agencies, the Secretariat must also comply with their target indicators, particularly the indicators agreed in the funding contract. The Secretariat is obliged to report on progress in annual reports and in annual financial reports.

The tangible outputs of IUCN's work (i.e., what IUCN 'produces' as a business output) for its members are primarily knowledge-based (e.g., policy advice and recommendations at national and global levels, platforms (virtual and physical) for exchange and outreach to members, guidelines, technical information).

Unique selling points of IUCN with global policy impact are (1) its member organisations at national, regional, and global levels, (2) its expert commissions (3) the outreach of the Secretariat through its regional and country offices and (4) its globally trusted and legitimised flagship knowledge products and (5) its policy interventions at high-level international conservation and climate protection events.

IUCN flagship products include among others: Red List of Threatened Species, Red List of Ecosystems, Key Biodiversity Areas, World Database on Protected Areas and World Heritage Site Monitoring Outlook.

IUCN is a complex organisation working in a highly complex environment.

The governance system through which its various constituencies are linked is laid out in the statutes. Workflows as well as roles and responsibilities are characterised by highly localised interactions, many interdependencies and collaboration based on individual networks rather than systematised and institutionalised processes. Regional offices operate in very diverse governance and capacity environments. Regional offices therefore need flexibility to adapt their workflows according to the challenges and potentials of the environment in which they work and the stakeholders they engage with. On the other hand, these variations in operational approaches pose a major challenge to leadership of the IUCN Secretariat when it comes to standard setting, quality assurance, transparency, and accountability.

Table 1: IUCN in numbers (www.iucn.org)

IUCN	
	1,400+ organisational members from 170+ countries
	15,000+ experts in 6 Commissions
	7 officially recognised Regional Committees
	60+ officially recognised National Committees
	900+ staff of the Secretariat at HQ (Gland) and in 50+ countries organised in 9 regions, 2 outposts and 10 (global) thematic programmes

2 ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT MEL PERFORMANCE

2_1 Change processes influencing IUCN's performance

2_1_1 Development funding delivers more than 70 % of income

The IUCN project portfolio shows an increasing trend of projects with substantial budgets (i.e., > CHF 5 million) financed through a limited number of donors. Over the last 10 years, unrestricted income has steadily declined and restricted income (i.e., development funding of projects) has strongly increased reaching a plateau in 2018. The annual total income and expenditure forecast for 2020 is balanced and amounts to a total of CHF 122.6 million. Thereof, CHF 32.6 million are unrestricted and CHF 90 million are restricted. The plan is to slightly increase unrestricted income up to CHF 35.4 million in 2024 and to dramatically increase restricted income to CHF 131.8 million in 2024.

2_1_2 Global recognition that nature is essential to achieve SDGs

Since about two years and accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis, awareness for the contribution of biodiversity as such to climate protection, poverty reduction and health is rapidly growing in the mind of decision makers. Global policy increasingly recognizes nature's contribution to the SDGs. This has become commonly understood since the latest IPBES report. Global trends in the capacity of nature to sustain contributions to good quality of life from 1970 to the present, show a decline for 14 of the 18 categories of nature's contributions to people that were analysed by IPBES for the 2020 report on the status of nature (IPBES, 2021). Consequently, many governments are developing strategies to promote and value nature as a solution to deal with the consequences of climate change, to generate employment, to build back more sustainable after the COVID-19 crisis and to promote resilient, green economies allowing for socially inclusive development (e.g., European Green Deal, New Zealand Response and Recovery Fund, UK Green Recovery Challenge Fund). The post-Aichi era will be guided by the mantra *'Living in harmony with nature'*. For the next decade, policy and decision makers perceive nature and biodiversity as an essential foundation for climate protection, poverty reduction and sustainable livelihood of people.

With the above-described paradigm shift, IUCN's objective to *influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable* gains a new momentum. IUCN as a membership driven organisation with a local to global reach, its expert Commissions and its UN affiliation has a broad legitimization. IUCN with its core competences in protection of nature and more than 70 years of experience is well positioned to pursue its mission during the coming decade for all nature related SDGs (life on land, ocean, climate, water). The pursuance of these SDGs will be for the benefit of people.

2_1_3 Larger projects and grant making programmes

IUCN's current restricted funding is enshrined in a portfolio of 400+ projects representing a contracted amount of more than CHF 400 million, with multilateral agencies accounting for 43 % and bilateral agencies for 39 %. During the past Quadrennial Programme, the number of projects with budgets of CHF 5 million and larger has steadily increased.

Traditionally, IUCN typically has implemented projects designed around the delivery of knowledge products and the capacity development for conservation policy and governance. The implementation of grant making programmes is rather new at IUCN. Through most of the grant making programmes, IUCN provides funding, equipment and capacity development to organisations that implement conservation action at field level. Grant making programmes therefore do have the aspiration to achieve visible changes at field level.

IUCN's leadership aspires to amplify the trend of large-scale projects and grant making mechanisms underpinned by the slogan *'From Retail to Wholesale'*.

2_1_4 Key development agencies with high expectations

Key agencies contracting IUCN are the EU, GEF, GCF, the German Financial Cooperation through KfW, the French Financial Cooperation (AFD) and the Swiss Development Cooperation (IUCN, 2021). These

development agencies have high expectations in the competences of IUCN to drive social change in favour of a sustainable development based on nature's services. International donor organisations perceive IUCN as the global lead in quality, innovation, and standards for conservation of nature.[1]

The growth aspirations as per the Financial Plan 2021-2024 are therefore based on three pillars:

- 10 % growth in the GEF/GCF portfolio,

- more projects with regional and global reach and budgets of > CHF 5 million

- Maintaining and scaling up the reputation as a high-quality grant making / funding agency for GEF, GCF, KfW and others

2_1_5 *An emerging new perspective on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning*

Leaders at IUCN understand the power that evidence based narratives can unfold in the current global setting. They know about the strength that lies in the bottom-up approaches of IUCN as a membership driven organisation. Simultaneously, leaders demonstrate growing sensitivity to the risks associated with the combination of global visibility, large scale projects, a limited number of donors and the current organisational setting of the Secretariat.

There is emerging awareness that both – potential and risks – are intimately linked to the Secretariat's ability to observe what is going on in the projects at an aggregated level. Leaders at global and regional levels want to be able to cluster project-based information in accordance with for example: Geographical areas, thematic groups of projects and categories of business outputs (results). They want to be able to tell a narrative that demonstrate how IUCN results contributed to an aspired

change - not only at the level of an individual project, but also specially to demonstrate what can be achieved through joint efforts. They want to generate evidence-based policy messages, that are underpinned by impact stories from the ground.

It becomes clear that MEL is more than just one Unit and more than just tracking the Quadrennial Programme. There is emerging awareness that MEL and the information generated can become an asset and social capital for the organisation. There is the desire and experience that M&E can generate information that is useful for different purposes, such as: Impact stories to convince donors, evidence-based statements to send policy messages, communication on proven results across a group of projects that follow the same concept to set good practice standards, etc.

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[1]For example, see quote on IUCN website: "*Acknowledging that IUCN sets the international quality standards for nature conservation, it is only logical that one of the leading financing institutions for biodiversity protection deepens its ties with IUCN.*" – Roland Siller, KfW Management Committee (https://www.iucn.org/about)

2_2   *Enabling organisational performance*

2_2_1   *Strategic Leadership*

Leadership of the Organisation: To what extent does the organisation have: A clear Theory of Change, a corresponding implementation strategy and budget, and a hierarchy of goals, objectives, outcomes, outputs, and inputs with their indicators at project, programme, and portfolio level?

Presently, the Secretariat is in a somewhat delicate situation: Members set the agenda but do not have the financial means to implement it. The Secretariat acquires the finances through projects that follow an agenda agreed with the funding organisations. This paradox at the highest strategic level of the organisation leads to a fragmented and complex planning system with far-reaching implications for the MEL system.

In the context of its current *Global Programme* 2021–2024, IUCN has prepared the *Financial Plan* 2021–2024, the *Portfolio Results Framework* and a *Draft Operational Plan*. In the previous Programme (2017–2020), Regions prepared *Regional Actions Plans* to specify their contributions to the corporate targets and the Programme.

The existing planning tools do not comply with international standards. The Secretariat does not have an implementation strategy for the Global Programme (see Figure 10).

The *Global Programme* shall guide the contribution of all IUCN constituencies: (1) the Secretariat's several large, multi-country and multi-sectoral work programmes (2) the members' contributions and (3) the work of the Commissions. The last and current Global Programme target a broad and diverse range of 30+ policy goals. The most recent programme has a smaller number but equally broad range of global policy goals.

The Theory of Change is incorporated in the IUCN Global Programme 2021–2024 and its impact targets (p. 9, A Programme for the Union 2021–2024). The Theory of Change defines high-level long-term global policy goals for land, water, oceans, climate, and people. It does not specify IUCN's milestones for achieving these policy goals or the barriers that will be addressed. The Global Programme describes services and products that IUCN will provide. However, IUCN's intervention logic is not described: It remains unclear how beneficiaries will be able to use the services and products offered by IUCN and why this use will contribute to achieving the targets of the Global Programme.

The budget for the Global Programme 2021–2024 is anchored in the Financial Plan 2021–2024. The Financial Plan details income and expenditure at the global level per thematic area (i.e., land, water, oceans, climate, people). It also contains performance indicators for membership dues, framework income, GEF/GCF and other projects. It is unclear which projects will be allocated to each thematic area to achieve the planned income.

Leadership of the MEL Systems: To what extent is there a structured process for the strategic implementation of the M&E policy?

A complex multi-project environment in numerous countries, a broad range of impact targets as well as fragmented planning systems at global, regional, and thematic level maximise the complexity in which monitoring, evaluation and learning shall happen. The *M&E Policy 2015* and the current processes in place are inadequate to address this complexity.

As MEL is a function that follows the general strategic set-up of an organisation, it cannot be designed without the participation of the organisations' leaders. Also, key strategic elements of the organisation are unclear (see Figure 4). As a result, limited leadership of the MEL system took place without filling the gap left by the M&E Policy.

The *M&E 2015 Policy* document is the leading document that provides the framework for MEL at IUCN. The *One Programme Charter* aims to ensure coherent collaboration of all IUCN constituents towards the One Global IUCN Programme. The *Project Portal* and the *Project Guidelines and Standards* (PGS) are key tools.

The *M&E Policy* provides definitions, guiding criteria and roles and responsibilities. The policy outlines the levels and purpose of IUCN's organisation-wide monitoring, reporting and evaluation efforts (see Table 2; Table 4 and text box in Chapter 2_3_1). The M&E Policy focuses on the statutory reporting requirements that the Secretariat has to members and the Council. It does not provide guidance on the approach or overall

model that the Secretariat units should use to operationalise monitoring, evaluation and learning processes (e.g., a single MEL system with a data base or several decentralised but connected systems). It is also silent on how the MEL system will be operationalised for continuous improvement of projects and sound management of programmes and portfolios. This gap has been partially filled by the *One Programme Charter*, which provides the strategic grounds for the development of the **Project Portal** and *Project Guidelines and Standards*.

The unit responsible for coordinating MEL at IUCN, the PPME Unit, has been subject to internal changes and reduced capacity for several years.

Focus	Monitoring purpose
Programme Monitoring	Measures the contribution of an IUCN programme or region to the achievement of the IUCN's Global Programme through a set of results and impact indicators that can be aggregated
Project Portfolio Monitoring	Measures the health, performance and risks associated with a programme portfolio including growth, decline, reliance on unsecured income, cost recovery, risks associated with implementation
Project Monitoring	Measures the implementation progress of a project in line with donor requirements (Logframe, indicator, reporting schedule

Table 2: Type of monitoring and related purpose as defined in the IUCN M&E Policy (2015)

IUCN adopted a *Policy on Enterprise Risk Management* in 2018. The new focus through the risk policy requires an adjustment and amendment of the M&E Policy and a stronger standardisation of MEL processes. This has already been emphasised in previous reviews (Review of Governance 2019).

In terms of leadership functions, Table 3 provides a summary of the perceived decision-making structure across policy, strategy, execution and implementation levels, as well as for the coordination of cross-cutting functions (consolidated understanding of the consultant). In the interviews, it became clear that there is a mixed understanding of 'coordination' versus 'management'. Furthermore, the implementation level of projects and their stakeholders, including their challenges, is not documented as part of the management process. This leads to a gap at institutional level in documenting and sharing the framework conditions under which projects are implemented – a crucial information to understand the progress (or non-progress) of projects.

Level	Decision-making			Coordination
	Political decision makers	Strategic decision-makers	Operational decision makers	Coordinators
Responsibility	*Political directives, overall vision & mission, approval of policy objectives*	*Organisational strategy; strategic objectives, financial & HR responsibility and accountability*	*Operational objectives & portfolio/programme management (without budget and HR responsibility)*	*Coordination of thematic & regional programmes or groups of projects*
Global (IUCN)	Council, Congress	DG, Commission Chairs		
Global (Secretariat)	(DG)	DG, DDGs	Global Directors, Strategic Partnerships Unit	GEF-GCF Coordination Unit
Regional	Regional Fora and Committees	Regional Directors	Regional Directors	RPC, Country Directors, Thematic coord. at reg. level
Thematic Programmes		Global Directors	Programme Directors	Programme Directors & Coordinators
Projects		Regional and Global Directors?	Project manager	Project manager

Table 3: Relevant decision-making levels and responsibilities of the Secretariat (Understanding of the consultant based on interviews, workshops and document review)

Leadership of knowledge and learning: To what extent is there a structured process for the strategic development of knowledge and learning within and outside IUCN?

The M&E Policy explicitly states *'Learning and improvement'* as one of the purposes for monitoring and evaluation at IUCN. It defines what evaluations should take place at IUCN (see Table 4).

Beyond the project level, the organisation currently has no distinct functions and structures for generating knowledge. At project level, there is a standardised closure workflow (in accordance with the PGS), but it is not systematically applied. Learning processes seem to be limited to groups of people rather than institutionalised, systematically documented, and available for replication. For example, the IUCN Commissions represent a valuable source of expertise for structured

learning processes. However, their engagement is largely project-based and not strategic. Knowledge development (i.e., documenting and sharing experiences and insights gained across several projects) is triggered by projects and availability of external funding rather than by a management decision. Structured learning processes about good project or portfolio management and M&E practice are completely lacking and are also not systematically included in resource planning. Currently, such learning depends largely on the personal networks and initiatives of IUCN employees.

Focus	Evaluation purpose
Policy Evaluations	Assessment of IUCN's policy influence and implementation of IUCN resolutions and recommendations
Strategic reviews	Assessment of organisational performance of IUCN as a whole or of parts of it
Programme Evaluation	Assessment of regional and global thematic programmes to evaluate relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact
Meta-evaluation and synthesis of evaluation findings	Synthesis of evaluative evidence, findings, and recommendations on a specific topic

Table 4: Evaluation types and related purpose (IUCN M&E Policy; 2015)

The strong project orientation leads to very individualised and personalised knowledge. There are numerous initiatives to create knowledge (e.g., ORMACC at regional level, NBS, grant-making programmes). The information is recorded in the corresponding reports (e.g., closure reports, evaluation reports). However, no systematic and aggregated learnings are derived from them, as there are no workflows or resources for aggregating, categorising and consolidating information at regional or portfolio level.

2_2_2 *Organisational functions and structure including programme management*

To what extent does the existing allocation of responsibilities facilitate or hinder the integration of project, programme, and portfolio results with IUCN's corporate targets?

IUCN operates in a multi-project environment through regional and local offices as well as through thematic programmes. The roles and responsibilities of these business entities for income generation, expenditures, project management and monitoring are currently not fully defined by the leadership of the Secretariat. During the last Global Programme, the 2019–2020 Secretariat was led by an interim acting Director General, which led to some reform backlog. This is one of the main obstacles to the integration of project, programme, and portfolio results. The other main obstacle is that the IUCN Global Programme lacks a strategy for its implementation (see Chapter 2_2_1).

Governance System for MEL

The IUCN M&E Policy (2015) defines the IUCN Council (through the Programme and Policy Committee) as the main oversight body. The IUCN senior management (Director General, Deputy Director General, Regional and Global Directors) are explicitly mentioned as the primary users of MEL results, while project or portfolio managers are not mentioned as a user group at all.

According to the M&E Policy, the Programme Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Unit (PPME) is responsible for setting MEL standards, coordinating MEL activities, liaising with donors and working with senior management and the Council to prepare MEL workplans and reporting. Programme and project managers are responsible for data collection and reporting on results. The responsibilities of Regional Programme Coordinators (RPC) and the Programme Coordinators are not clearly defined.

In practice, the PPME prepares the annual reporting based on information from the Project Portal and combines it with the annual progress reports of the projects and programmes. This work is supported by five RPCs and accompanied by individual requests from PPME to projects and programmes. As the policy provides limited information on work processes, specific roles and responsibilities, users, actors within these processes and on data handling and information flows, an informal governance hierarchy of MEL systems emerged, leaving room for units and programmes to define individual processes (see Figure 2).

As a result, there are several MEL processes at global, regional/thematic and project levels, with different purposes and approaches (see also Annex 4_4; Table 10). There is no consistent description of functions,

tasks, or responsibilities for MEL at regional or global thematic programme level. Consequently, there have been individual initiatives by regions or programmes to develop individual positions, systems, or approaches (e.g., deducting a certain amount of the project budget for MEL at programme or portfolio level (e.g., NBS Group), leading to a fragmented incoherent MEL system.

Thus, the governance review (2019) underpins the necessity to *'professionalise monitoring and evaluation of IUCN's strategic processes'.*[2]

Currently, PPME with its three staff members is responsible for coordinating MEL activities at the corporate level and provides guidance to other units. Throughout the Secretariat, there are various people involved in MEL planning, design, and budgeting at regional, portfolio and global level.

Usually, MEL staff is always linked to individual projects that are responsible for MEL planning, design, and implementation at project level. MEL processes or activities beyond the project level, i.e. for groups of projects by theme or geographical area, are all driven by the initiative of individual managers and not as an organisation-wide process. In addition, little or no resources are planned and available for MEL beyond the project level. During the interviews, responsibility for MEL was often relegated to another level or unit.

There are individually designed good practices throughout the organisation. For instance, ORMACC has established a regional portfolio overview to identify strengths, gaps and needs as a basis for strategic decision-making. Similarly, the Water Programme has established a framework for its projects (e.g., for selection and prioritisation, aggregation of indicators). The funding programmes have set up customised systems to strategically plan and monitor their portfolio of grant projects.
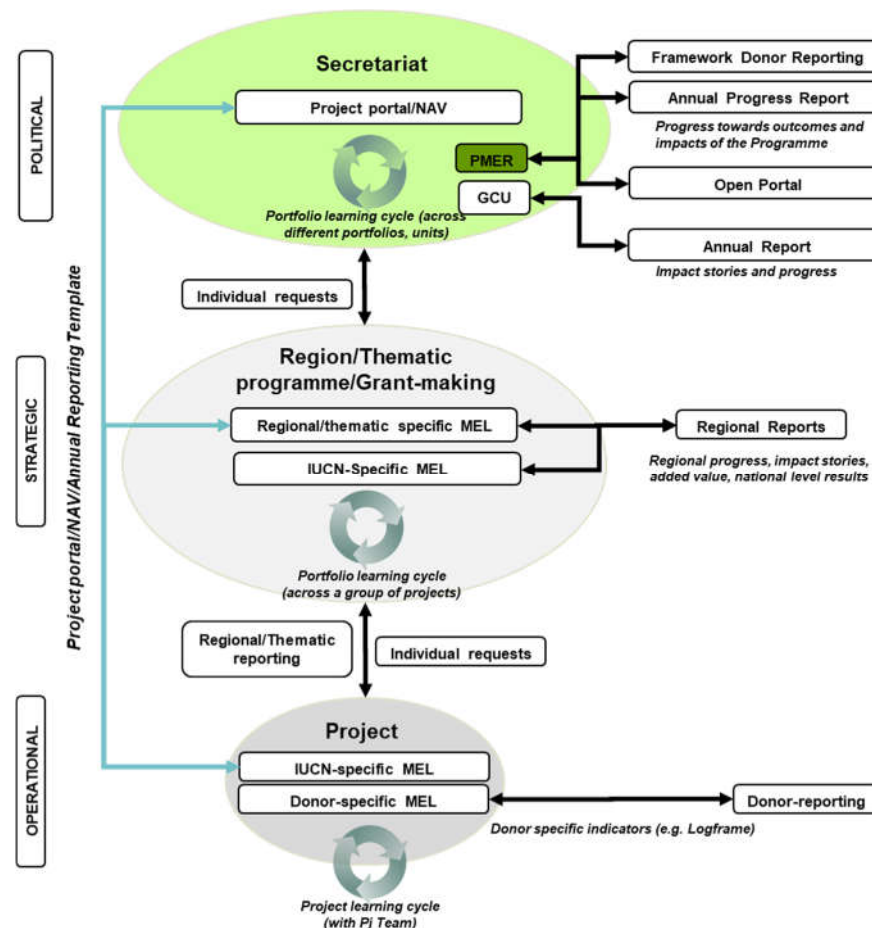
Figure 2: Levels of data collection and reporting incl. main communication lines (Author's draft based on interviews, workshops and document review)

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[2] Recommendation 6.3.6.a of the IUCN Governance Review (2019)

To what extent does the organisation have appropriate standard processes for project, programme, and portfolio cycle management?

The Project Guidelines and Standards (PGS) state, that 'projects' managed by 'project managers' are the relevant business unit responsible for reporting on the achievements of results. The project managers are responsible for delivering and reporting on project results every six months through the programme framework based on a template (Project Monitoring & Results Template) or on request for work planning.

<u>The Secretariat has well elaborated and successfully tested standards for project acquisition, portfolio alignment with policy goals and project management (the Project Guidelines and Standards).</u>

Project managers implement donor-related reporting through their own systems. This process is facilitated to a limited extent by the Project Guidelines and Standards (PGS). Project managers clearly expressed their need for a system that facilitates data entry, analysis, and reporting.

<u>In practice, however, and with a growing portfolio, projects are steered and executed as groups of projects either by theme or by region.</u> In this context, the terms '*programme*' and '*portfolio*' are used inconsistently (see Annex 4_4; Table 7). It is unclear whether a thematic programme is a business unit, a cost centre or simply a group of projects focused on the same programmatic goals (a portfolio). It is therefore a challenge for PPME to leverage the needed monitoring information.

Instruments / meetings / coordination groups in place to link interventions vertically and horizontally at project / programme and portfolio level

Across all levels, the analysis identified a wide range of different non-, semi-, or fully formalised formats such as:

Global level:

- <u>Concept Review meeting (CRM)</u>: Internal meetings for projects larger than CHF 1 Mio. These meetings serve as lateral and horizontal exchanges for the design of large projects and for the consideration of organisational experiences. Several interviewees emphasised the strategic usefulness of these and expressed a desire to strengthen these.

- <u>Strategic programme planning meeting</u>: A meeting held every four years that brings together representatives and coordinators from all programmes and regions to plan and discuss the upcoming Quadrennial Programme.

- <u>Project review/design panel meeting:</u> A regular meeting to review projects with representatives from different units (legal and technical staff, GEF-GCF Coordination Unit etc.). Interviewees mentioned the benefits of these meetings but they were discouraged/ reduced by the previous senior management as they were considered too resource intensive.

- <u>GEF-GCF Technical Group</u>*:* This collaborative body gathers all task managers in the regions and others to learn, either about design or implementation, and to discuss challenges and solutions in a practical way.

Regional / thematic programme level:

- <u>Monthly project coordinator meetings in some regional offices</u>: The regional coordinator keeps track of the projects (e.g. via SmartSheet and monthly updates of projects in the portfolio) and organises follow-up discussions with all coordinators to discuss progress and monthly operational reports.

- <u>Annual high-level management meeting in some regional offices</u>: An annual meeting of the regional director, administration finance department, RPC, national representatives, and other senior staff to discuss key achievements and the situation of the regional portfolio.

- <u>Team portfolio meetings in some thematic portfolios (e.g., species, water)</u>: Regularly organised team meetings to facilitate lateral exchange, sharing of experiences and learning.

Review of projects, programmes, portfolios, and corporate targets

Projects are frequently reviewed and adjusted as defined and required by the corresponding donor. For this, projects have developed customised processes based on specific donor needs. Global (external) reviews regularly address programme implementation. No information was available on regional or global thematic programme reviews, although according to the M&E Policy, regions and programmes are

supposed to regularly review and strategically develop their portfolios.

In general, the processes for review and adjustment are not formalised, although individual units or programmes have developed their own systems or processes (e.g., corporate risk register at PPME, risk flagging at GEF-GCF or the Framework of the Water Programme). Most of these processes are Excel-based and dependent on individual initiatives.

2_2_3 *Financial and human resources*

Do the existing resources (human and financial) for M&E and Learning meet the needs?

Neither the existing human and financial resources nor the needs for M&E and Learning are currently fully known at the Secretariat. Therefore, it is not yet possible to make a statement about their current and future adequacy impossible.

For the reasons elaborated below, it is highly unlikely that current resources will be adequately attributed for future M&E requirements. This is confirmed by the IUCN's current risk matrix (Corporate Risk Register), which identifies M&E as one of the areas of high-risk to organisational reputation. With regard to learning, there is currently no concept or strategy against which needs could be identified (Chapter 2_2_1).

In terms of M&E, the needs for core functions at global, regional/thematic and project level was identified by the practice. Posts have been created within the PPME Unit and are funded through the core budget. However, the functions of the PMER Unit vis à vis the M&E functions of the regions and thematic areas are currently unclear. A definition of M&E responsibilities (in terms of purpose and monitoring questions) for regions and thematic areas is not included in the M&E Policy and has not yet been provided by the Secretariat's leadership. An outlook on whether the existing M&E resources will be sufficient for the requirements of the future IUCN project portfolio has not yet been analysed.

Indications received through workshops and interviews clearly point in the direction that the allocation of (human and financial) M&E resources at regional and portfolio level is currently insufficient and will become a risk in the future. For example:

- The GCF and GEF project portfolio managers express concern about the current and future state of financial, human, technical and managerial M&E resources at project, portfolio, and global levels. At the project level, the capacity of existing staff needs to be strengthened by providing guidelines, standards and tools to manage large datasets without Excel files. At the portfolio level, aggregation of data on project progress against plan and budget expenditure is currently not feasible.

- Regional managers clearly stated that they need tools to overlook the performance of projects implemented in the region in terms of implementation progress, reporting requirements and contribution to the IUCN Global Programme.

- IUCN'S finance and risk managers express concerns that current resources are insufficient to meet donor requirements for large-scale programmes financed by KfW, EU, GCF and GEF in terms of financial and technical monitoring. They see a growing risk for the coming four years due to the expected growth of large-scale projects in the portfolio, their high visibility, and the inadequacy of M&E resources.

2_3 Performance of the MEL system

2_3_1 Efficiency: Degree to which the relevant unit(s) use resources optimally to achieve their goals or objectives.

To what extent do the existing MEL systems meet the minimum M&E requirements as defined in the M&E Policy?

The existing MEL systems meet the minimum M&E requirements to the best possible extent in the current organisational framework conditions. The minimum requirements of the M&E policy (see box below) are fulfilled to a limited extent.

It must be noted that the defined minimum requirements only partially cover one of three purpose areas of the M&E Policy: Evidence Based Management. Accountability and Learning and Improvement are not covered.

> **Minimum M&E requirements as per M&E Policy**
> Monitoring to be implemented at Programme, Project Portfolio and Project level.
>
> - Global Programme: results + impact indicators (annually)
>
> - Regional / thematic programmes: 4-year results indicators (annually)
>
> - Projects:
>   - Indicators + plans as per donor requirements, MEL plan
>   - End of project evaluation (for projects with a value > CHF 0,5 million)
>   - Mid-Term evaluation (for projects with a value > CHF 2 million

According to the IUCN M&E Policy, 'Results Based Management' is the broad management strategy to be adopted by IUCN. As a minimum, the policy requires the following in terms of results:

- All IUCN programmes shall provide annual data to support the measurement of result and impact indicators as defined in the IUCN Global Programme on an annual basis

- All IUCN programmes shall define and measure four-year results indicators and provide annual updates

- In addition, evaluations shall provide evidence of the achievement of results.

Neither the M&E Policy nor any other strategic document of the IUCN Secretariat includes a system overview describing:

- The planning system, objectives, and related indicators

- How to deal with baseline information and targets

- The specifications of which data from decentralised monitoring processes must be aggregated

- The outline of workflows and tools

- The outline of the communication lines and processes through which the MEL systems shall be linked

These findings on policy gaps are consistent with the observation that programme and project managers have devised their own systems (see Chapter 2_3_3). It also corresponds to the needs, leaders, and decision makers from global, regional and project level expressed during this assessment.

At the global level, through the Project Portal (see further below), PPME manages to monitor the estimated share of project budget allocation to the policy targets of the Global Programme, which for the first time allows projects to be aligned with global targets. This is a proxy indicator to determine whether the Secretariat's project portfolio is aligned with the goals of the Global Programme. In addition, the system enables the Secretariat to track the contractual status of individual projects (e.g., contracting, closure etc.) in a clearly defined process, thematic area, and location of implementation.

The regions have developed their own systems to maintain an overview of the project progress and the status of project contracts and financials. The quality of monitoring of the regional portfolios varies greatly from region to region. ORMACC has developed a convincing good practice

(see Annex 4_1). Through the Project Portal and with the support of PPME, regions can report on the alignment of projects with global targets according to the Global Programme.

For thematic portfolios in the Global Programme or at Secretariat level, the M&E minimum requirements are met in varying degrees. Some portfolios at IUCN implement monitoring for a group of projects (e.g., Species Conservation Programme, Water Programme). They are able to extract results indicators from the projects, aggregate them and track progress towards impact. However, as no standards, procedures and processes have been identified at the organisational level, there is no assessment and reporting of existing data.

Regarding project evaluations, given the size of the project portfolio compared to the number of evaluations published in the IUCN Evaluation Database, there is a question as to whether all planned evaluations will be carried out as expected (or whether they will simply not be published).

All MEL Systems identified during the analysis are listed in Table 8 and described further below. Their effectiveness in equipping decision-makers with evidence of progress of results is heterogenous.

Specification of M&E information requirements and tracking of compliance.

Currently, there is no systematic tracking of information compliance or the adherence to the M&E Policy. However, in some strategic/programmatic evaluations, the MEL System has been flagged as a challenge and the management has acknowledged in its response that improvements are needed.

Information and contents of regular reporting

At global level, the annual report provides an overview of activities, achievements, and the overall status of the previous year. It includes some aggregated information for evidence-based management. Evaluations or the results of evaluations are not part of the reporting, although management responses addressed to the global level are tracked in the annex of the report.

Similarly, all regional offices publish slightly heterogenous annual reports, often broken down by country in the region, covering all IUCN activities, not just those of the Secretariat. Some of these reports are very detailed with up-to-date figures, but they are prepared on a year-to year basis, which does not put multi-year results and impacts in perspective. At all levels, the reports contain little or no information on the progress of results and outputs.

More relevant information for learning would be contained in annual report templates and in the closure reports for projects and regions. Closure reports are mandatory and are stored in the Project Portal, but not all are fully completed and the quality varies widely.

To what extent do existing MEL tools facilitate time- and cost-efficient MEL implementation at project, programme, and portfolio level?

There are several good practice MEL tools at different levels of the Secretariat. Scaling up such good practices e.g., to facilitate MEL implementation, is currently hampered by weaknesses in the organisation's planning system and governance framework (compare Chapter 2_2_2). This particularly affects MEL application at programme and portfolio level.

All existing MEL tools have been elaborated with direct engagement and involvement of the users. As there is no comprehensive MEL system overview, the systems are neither linked to each other nor do they comply with a minimum standard. The existing tools and approaches are as diverse as the Union (for some examples see Annex 4_4, Table 10). Their application is limited to the ecosystem for which they were created.

The PPME Unit has successful developed these tools and established the associated workflows. The tools are central to ensuring, monitoring, analysing and reporting on the compliance of all projects implemented by the IUCN Secretariat with the targets of the Global Programme (see detailed description of the Project Portal in 2_3_1 and Table 10). However, the existing tools are outdated and require updating. A solution to demonstrate progress in achieving results is not yet established (see Chapter 2_3_3). Currently, indicators on results and output of projects cannot be aggregated (see also Chapter 2_3_1).

At the corporate level, the *IUCN Project Portal* and the *Transparency Portal* are the main tools. All projects must feed data into the database that provides relevant information for reporting. All projects are tagged to global targets and business lines (thematic areas). Each project has an

ID number and corresponding repository for project-related documents. The Project Portal is used across all units and is the central project database and main source of information. As integral part of the Project Portal, the *Project Standards and Guidelines* ensure that all projects comply with the Global Programme's goals. The Project Portal contains budget information but has limited linkage with the IUCN financial information system (e.g., actuals shown in the portal), which poses a challenge in terms of updates and coherence with financial information and limits the possibilities for results-based budgeting.
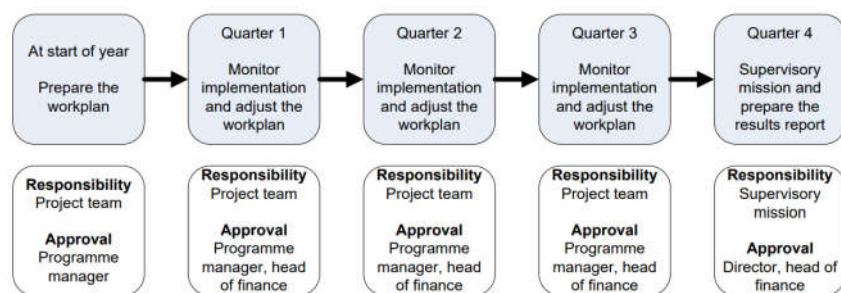
Figure 3: Well defined process description for project monitoring as defined in the PGS

Project managers are asked to regularly update project data in the Project Portal. Currently, the Project Portal provides a comprehensive overview of projects, but falls short on the programme and portfolio components, as well as the outcome and impact level. It is more of a repository and reporting tool than a MEL tool. The extraction of data reports is challenging and it does not contain options for automatic analysis and visualisation of data. This must be done manually through Excel data processing. Grant-making projects are currently not adequately entered into the Project Portal, as they comprise a number of (sometimes large) sub-projects of grantees.

The *Transparency Portal (or open portal)* builds on the data from the Project Portal. The purpose of the Transparency Portal is to provide a complete overview of the Secretariat's project portfolio by thematic area and region. It has also some functions for analysing and visualising data. It also tracks budget spending against the projects' allocated budgets. The system is not systematically linked to the financial management

system and therefore updating and accuracy of budget information is a challenge that needs to be addressed to ensure accuracy of information.

IUCN's accounting and financial management system *NAV(ision)* tracks project budget expenditure in line with donor requirements. According to interview results and workshops, the system does not provide for aggregation of data across several projects. It therefore does not facilitate assessing financial results of business units.

Different systems are in use at the regional level. One example is the *SmartSheet* tool introduced by the ORMACC Region. This tool is used for progress and risk monitoring of the regional projects (see also Annex 4_1). It is applied in regular management meetings at regional and country level and is able to link annual operational plans with budget, financial commitments, status of contractors and technical project management performance. As a platform for all projects in ORMACC (and ORMACC-Sur), SmartSheet allows to assess financial and managerial implementation risks of projects and groups of projects and to follow-up on budget, activities, persons, contracts, payments, products etc. ORMACC is the only region using this system so far.

At the project level, comprehensive databases have been developed for grant making programmes (BEST, Integrated Tiger Habitat Conservation Programme) to track and aggregate output and outcome indicators at the grantee (or sub-project) level. The Species Conservation Group has scaled up the project experience to a programme-wide *indicator tracking system* that will be launched shortly. The system comprises a full database of indicators with baselines and target values for output, outcome, impact level and contribution to global policy targets.

The *Water Programme* during the previous Global Programme had elaborated a comprehensive intervention logic and planning framework to align all projects with objectives at programme level. The Programme has established baselines in the countries where it is implemented. However, no targets for indicators have been set and there is no data base to collect and report on monitoring information. Aggregating outputs and outcomes and tracking progress towards outcomes and impacts is therefore not feasible.

In addition, many programmes, units and regions have elaborated a wide range of customised Excel and Word templates to track progress, risks,

implementation rates, learning, contributions to higher level goals or expenses (e.g. Risk Management, GEF-GCF Coordination Unit, PACO, ORMACC) (Please refer to the protocol of 2nd Workshop).

All regions, units and programmes interviewed use indicator tracking tables (e.g., PACO, ORMACC), risk registers (GEF-GCF Unit, Risk Management) or self-made databases (e.g., SOS, Tiger Programme). M&E Plans at programme or regional level are mostly Excel-based and updated manually.

A complete list of MEL tools observed is presented in Annex 4_4; Table 10.

Figure 4: Rating of elements of MEL (Minimum Standards) per level.
   (Author's draft based on the results of participant's assessment during first workshop)

Incentives to apply a MEL system and enter the data

It is evident that currently data for the Project Portal is mainly collected in the delivery type (enter and forget). The information generated by the Project Portal is of limited practical use for the work of the project managers. Currently, the majority of data providers perceive the annual reporting to the portal as a burden rather than an opportunity.

In terms of data on achievement of global level targets, data providers explicitly indicated a desire to a) know how and how much they contribute to the programme b) learn how to manage and steer their portfolios and c) learn how other projects/programmes address challenges. Project managers want to know what their contribution to the 'whole' system is. They state that this would motivate them. They complain that it is not really captured what projects and programmes achieve together. Therefore, workshop participants indicated the following as priorities for existing MEL systems: 'data systems', 'indicators' and 'baseline information' (see *Figure 4)*.

The main incentive for this request is the expected increase in the number of large-scale global / regional projects in the Secretariat's project portfolio over the next three to five years. The main funders of these projects are GEF, GCF, EU and KfW, which emphasise the importance of a thorough intervention logic and results-chain as eligibility criteria for funding.

Procedures to continuously improve the existing MEL tools and to actively involve stakeholder groups.

The PPME Unit regularly updates the Project Portal and the Project Guidelines and Standards. This is mostly triggered by reporting requirements to the Council, Donors, or the Director General and less by the needs of potential users. PPME as owner of the Portal offers frequent webinars about the use of the portal and can be contacted. The portal offers an FAQ section and provides detailed guidance.

At the programmes and portfolio levels, there are several individual efforts to integrate specific data needs (e.g., Grant-making projects, GEF-GCF) into the Project Portal or to link it with accounting into the project portal in cooperation with IT or to establish learning mechanisms linked to it. However, systematic procedures for continuous improvement cycles are lacking and the leadership does not ask for such processes.

2_3_2 *Effectiveness: The extent to which the relevant unit(s) can move towards achieving their mission and reach their objectives.*

To what extent, how and by whom do MEL systems provide IUCN decision-makers with evidence on the progress of results (i.e., what projects and programmes produce) and the contribution of these results to higher level targets (i.e., impact)? (Learning + improvement)

Decision makers at all levels struggle to get evidence on progress of results (project, portfolio, programme and global level). To address this challenge, the Secretariat has developed a Portfolio Results Framework. As of now, evidence is rarely used to make adjustments in the IUCN project portfolio and associated management processes (i.e., risk and performance management, decisions on changing programmes).

Interviews and workshops demonstrated that programme and project managers have a pressing need for appropriate hard data to address risks and strategically develop the project portfolio (GCU, GEF-GCF Unit, PPME, GF). Figure 4 demonstrates that there is an urgent and important demand for a monitoring approach to collect, use and analyse data for indicators and baseline information. This request clearly underpins the consultant's assessment that the planning system is insufficient (see Chapter 2_2_1 and Figure 10), the current indicators are not trackable (see Chapter 2_3_3) and most of the tailor-made tools are Excel and Word based, which hampers the processing of data into information (see Chapter 2_3_1 and Workshop 2). The M&E Policy does not provide a commonly shared approach for a planning and indicator logic. It only states that outputs, outcomes, and impact are collectively known as '*results*'. The Portfolio Results Framework only contains a set of indicators by thematic area. However, it does not comply with international good practice (e.g. results-chain) and is not linked to an intervention logic. Indicators do comply with SMART criteria but lack baselines and target lines.

Project and programme managers use different interpretations of the logical intervention chain. Inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact are formulated inconsistently. Indicators mostly lack baselines and target lines. Many of them are not measurable.

Interviewees and the participants of the two workshops expressed the following needs:

- They require guidance on indicators, objectives, and baseline information

- They want to '*maintain the line of sight*' to understand their contribution to the whole

- They want to understand whether a project is achieving what was planned.

Construction Site 1: Categories of outcome and key indicators	Construction Site 5: The Result story about the pathway of change
Develop a minimum set of parameters that shall be tracked at the project, regional office, thematic portfolio, and IUCN Programme level in line with the potential data sources.	What are visible and tangible results of the IUCN Project Portfolio regarding (1) the contribution to the IUCN Programme, (2) global targets and goals, and (3) the support of countries.

Figure 5: Line of sight and minimum set of indicators as highly prioritized "Construction Sites" (1st workshop)

To what extent, how and by whom is the evidence used to tell compelling impact stories?

Several interviewees emphasised that '*impact stories*' are a major missing piece at IUCN. A lot is going in projects, thematic areas and regions. There is a lot of information available. However, it is hard to find evidence to tell a compelling story about how the interventions had an impact. Mostly, these stories are bubbling up in individual networks rather than through reports and monitoring information. A heterogenous understanding of what exactly characterizes a good impact story was observed (An internal working document as a starting point is provided in Annex 4_3). As workshop participants stated, managers are uncertain

about their contribution and the difference their projects can make to the policy goals.

There is a lack of guidance in the design of operations that might contribute to long-term change as well as in the design of the MEL system to demonstrate the contribution of a portfolio of projects to a commonly shared objective and impact aspirations. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that the M&E Policy lists various evaluation types but none of them requires to assess long-term change.

As already identified in previous reviews[3], the procedure for conducting evaluations is well elaborated but insufficient for strategic, organisation wide learning due to the following reasons:

- Currently, in none of the guiding documents of IUCN's Secretariat (i.e., the Global Programme, the M&E Policy, or the Operational Plan) has a documented Theory of Change with an intervention logic. Some of the thematic programmes and many of the projects do have an implicit intervention logic (e.g., the Species Conservation Programme, the Integrated Tiger Habitat Programme, BRIDGE, the World Heritage Programme, the Water Programme).

- With some exceptions, projects and programmes lack baselines and target lines of indicators at output, outcome, and impact level. Therefore, the project's contribution to the expected impact remains unclear. It is often not possible to draw conclusions on the relevance of concepts as well as progress against plan. Without an understanding of the initial direction and expectations, the deviations from the plan remain largely unknown and information for learning is lost.

- Evaluation reports are archived only by year, without geographic or thematic context.

- There is no drawing of conclusions from achievements or challenges from the last years' programmatic period and it is unclear whether adjustments and changes were made to improve performance for the next programmatic area.

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[3] External Review of IUCN's Development Relevancy

2_3_3 *Relevance: Degree to which mission, goals, programmes, and projects of a unit remain valid to its key stakeholders and constituents.*

How relevant is the information derived through MEL for management decisions at corporate, portfolio and project/programme level?

The current system has no documented monitoring questions that are relevant for management decisions at portfolio and regional level. Outstanding managers have developed their own systems to generate portfolio overviews as a relevant input for management decisions. These good practices are an invaluable source to find solutions for the existing gaps of the M&E system (see Table 5).

Paradoxically, a lot of MEL information is produced at each level (see Table 5). Apparently, it is not the right information or alternatively the information is not in the right form to effectively use it. Paradoxes emerge as soon as higher-level order is missing. As confirmation of this conclusion the consultant found the following empirical observations:

- Organisational strategy is missing (see also Chapter 2_2_1)
- The M&E Policy is silent about the audience of MEL information and their information needs.
- The Secretariat's leadership team developed the Portfolio Results Framework, but programme and project leaders struggle to start working with it.
- Regional Programme managers speak of thousands of data and information about projects available as narratives, in Excel and Word format.
- Thematic Programme managers started to create their own systems
- The Project Portal contains a certain amount of data that is not used.
- Documents (i.e., annual reports, quadrennial reports, evaluations, programme reports) assessed by the consultant mostly lack the description of results, the degree of their achievement and an assessment how it contributes to impact.

Type of information generated	Projects	Programmes	Portfolio	Secretariat
Planned vs. Actual expenditures	green	yellow	red	red
Planned vs. Actual procurements	green	yellow	red	red
Planned vs. Actual activities	green	yellow	red	red
Project outputs (quality, quantity, timing)	green	green	red	yellow
Use of outputs	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow
Outcomes (achievements related to the use of outputs)	yellow	yellow	red	yellow
Impacts	red	yellow	red	red
Baseline information	yellow	yellow	red	red
Target line information	yellow	yellow	red	red
Needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow
Political & socio-economic context	yellow	yellow	yellow	yellow
Contributions to national and regional policy goals	green	yellow	red	yellow
Contributions to international policy goals	yellow	green	red	green
Contributions to IUCN Global Programme goals	yellow	green	red	green
Lessons learned	red	yellow	yellow	yellow

no information collected (red)
information collected in some projects/units (yellow)
information frequently collected in most cases (green)

Table 5: Estimate to which extent data on monitoring questions is collected (project level) or aggregated (Programme, Portfolio, Secretariat level)
   (Source: Second WS; Author's assessment based on second workshop, interviews and document review)

To further understand the empirical implications of these findings, workshop participants from regional and project management level were asked to estimate the percentage of projects monitored for standard monitoring questions (provided by the consultant; see also documentation of the 2nd workshop). The results demonstrate that almost 100 % of projects are monitored for the question '*Is the project on track?*'

but in two regions planned versus actual achievements are only monitored for about 50 % of projects. Almost 100 % of projects regularly monitor outputs.

In contrast to this, '*What do people achieve by using the outputs?*' and what are and '*How does the project progress totwards objectives?*' are only observed in about 50 % of all projects, whereby most projects stated to monitor the contribution to policy goals. Most monitoring questions were however answered by using Excel as main tool.

The outcome of the exercise shows that (1) tailor made systems seem to work for the managers as otherwise they would not apply them (2) the data are mostly stored in a format (Excel) that is not conducive to work with a high number of projects and to aggregate information e.g. into dashboards (3) this explains, why the information cannot be accessed from global or regional levels without personal communication. In other words: Aggregation of data into information is not feasible. Finally, (4) it shows that so far, the need for monitoring information about the project portfolio has not yet been sufficiently defined and understood at the global level (except for contribution to policy goals).
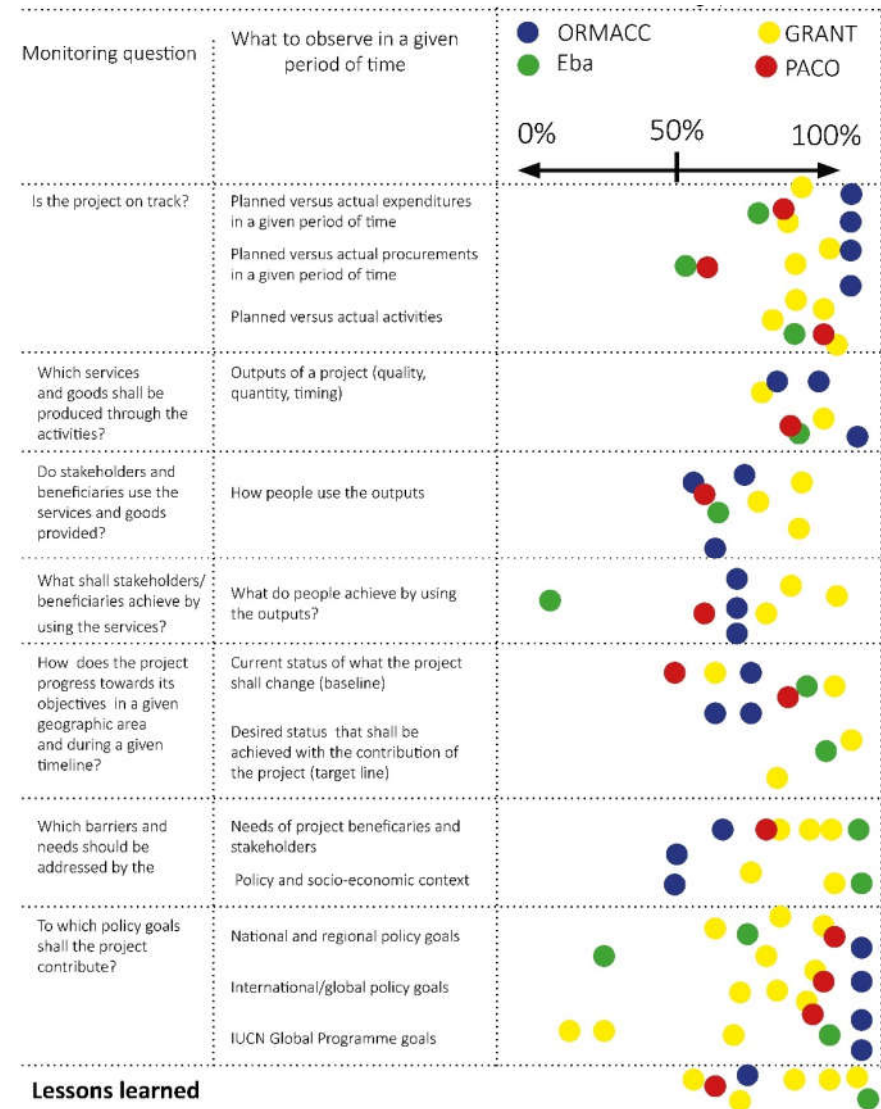

Figure 6: Rating of extent to which individual projects collect specific monitoring information
(Author's draft based on the results of the second workshop)

To what extent can the existing MEL system use indicators to measure health, performance and risks associated with a portfolio of programmes/projects?

With the *Project Portal* and the *Transparency Portal*, the PPME Unit has designed an efficient and pragmatic solution to ensure at least monitoring of a proxy indicator: The extent to which the projects of the IUCN Secretariat contribute to the targets of the Global Programme.

Currently, indicators are not traceable through project, programme, and portfolio levels. The current leadership team is determined to take transparency even one more step further. The aim is to monitor the progress of results of individual projects or groups of projects towards the achievement of targets in the Global Programme. For this purpose, a *Portfolio Results Framework (Full Draft)* has been elaborated. It contains more than 100 output and outcome indicators that shall be conducive to monitor the Secretariat's progress in the Global Programme's five thematic areas (people, land, water, ocean, climate).

Due to the missing planning system (see Chapter 2_2_1), it is a challenge to understand the intervention logic of the Results Framework. The logic of the indicator hierarchy (i.e., the input – output – results – contribution to objective – contribution to impact chain) is not described and does not correspond to international standards (e.g., OECD DAC definition). Output and outcome indicators do not contain baseline and target line values nor links to interventions, assumptions, and beneficiary groups. Therefore, the draft Portfolio Results Framework lacks relevant information about the planned contribution of IUCN Secretariat.

These findings are underpinned by a request resulting from interviews and Workshop 1 to: *Develop appropriate approaches and tools to establish a common data pool allowing the filtering/extraction of information in accordance with regions, themes, and other parameters.*

Health of the portfolio

Related indicators are implicitly included in the *Financial Plan for the IUCN Global Programme 2021 – 2024* and the *Risk Policy 2018.* There are good practices of regions or thematic portfolios (e.g., GEF) which monitor project related risks (mostly the contractual and financial risks) (see examples in Annex 4_1). No example was provided for the monitoring of environmental and social risks at portfolio levels.

Financial performance

The current Financial Plan defines indicators at the Programme level but leaves open to which extent thematic areas or regional portfolios should contribute to them. In terms of technical and financial performance of the portfolio, it is key to track spending vs. implementation rates. IUCN operates two separate systems: An accounting system capturing expenses and a recently introduced time-keeping system capturing person-time billed on a specific project. As of now, data is available for persons working on specific tasks in specific projects as well as for tracking implementation progress. It would have been beyond the scope of this assessment to include the existing processes for financial and staff-time monitoring and controlling into the analysis. However, it is obvious that financial controlling can provide a crucial set of indicators helping managers to keep track of their portfolios. During the assessment, several observations were shared by interviewees and Workshop participants:

- The aggregation of groups of project budgets for controlling purposes currently is not feasible.

- Project financial reports are provided to the global financial management, i.e., there is not one financial management information system but several and the information must be transferred between the systems.

- The Transparency Portal has the challenge that in most projects (i.e., ca 150) the budget executed (i.e., reported on) represents only a fraction of the planned budget. This does by far not only concern recently started projects but also those that have started two or three years ago.

- Most project budgets seem to be based on cost categories rather than outputs. Therefore, a linkage between budget execution versus plan and output delivery versus costs is currently not feasible.

Compliance with contractual provisions

So far compliance with progress reporting, budget execution and progress of contracting is monitored through tailor made systems. What remains unclear so far, is the process and documentation to systematically integrate ESMS into project management.

Project related risks and enterprise risks of portfolios

The indicators implicitly included in the Risk Policy have not yet been made explicit and operationalized. Furthermore, guidance for programme and portfolio managers is required with a set of measurable thresholds. These thresholds shall allow managers to assess when a portfolio shows tendencies of becoming 'unhealthy'. The current MEL system does not explicitly include risk indicators. Project related risks are basically assessed at project (and to some extent at regional level). Units track their risks according to their own, mostly Excel based, templates. Regarding the responsibility for risks, IUCN follows the Three Lines of Defence model4. It could not be clarified during the assignment to which extent this Policy is being implemented. However, given the current staffing of PPME and the Oversight Unit (2nd and 3rd line), it is assumed that the Policy is not fully enforced/enforceable due to a lack of capacities. There are no tools yet available to operationalize enterprise risk monitoring of portfolios in line with the risk appetite stated in the Risk Policy.

How does MEL audience use the information provided through MEL systems? (information only / used for project or portfolio progress + quality management / used for development of knowledge products / used for experience exchange)

The main MEL audience comprises internal audiences (project managers, programme managers, senior management), the Council, members, and donors. So far, the information generated by the MEL system at global level, serves mainly for information purposes and to maintain an overview of the overall progress and contributions to the Programme. The information is mainly presented in the Annual Reports at the different levels.

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4 IUCN (2018) Policy on Enterprise Risk Management, Annex 2 to Decision C/94/2 Approved by the IUCN Council at its 94th meeting (May 2018), Decision C/94/2

2_3_4   *Impact: The planned or unplanned consequences, within and outside the IUCN unit, resulting from the unit's activities.*

What is the intended purpose and impact of MEL?

A MEL system is like the ability to track dotted lines in a map of a complex landscape, representing different trails to the summit. Tracking the line and comparing it with data from reality indicates whether the trail has been followed or a different routing has been chosen. This gives confidence, provides evidence and justification for accountability. Moreover, understanding the reasons and achievements when the initially planned trail was changed, is a crucial element for learning.

Figure 7: Comments (in green) on the consultant's hypothesis regarding the purpose of MEL (in blue) made during the first workshop.

The Leadership Team clearly stated that more visibility on the Secretariat's results and their contribution is needed (see Figure 7). Statements made in the personal MEL vision stories went even further

and attached a cultural importance to MEL to reduce fragmentation at IUCN and thereby contribute to the One Programme Vision (see Figure 8). Interviews yielded a very coherent picture from the regional, portfolio and project management levels: Representatives from all levels pointed out that they want system improvements to better be able to provide evidence for results, be accountable and learn from successful and unsuccessful project implementation (see Table 9).
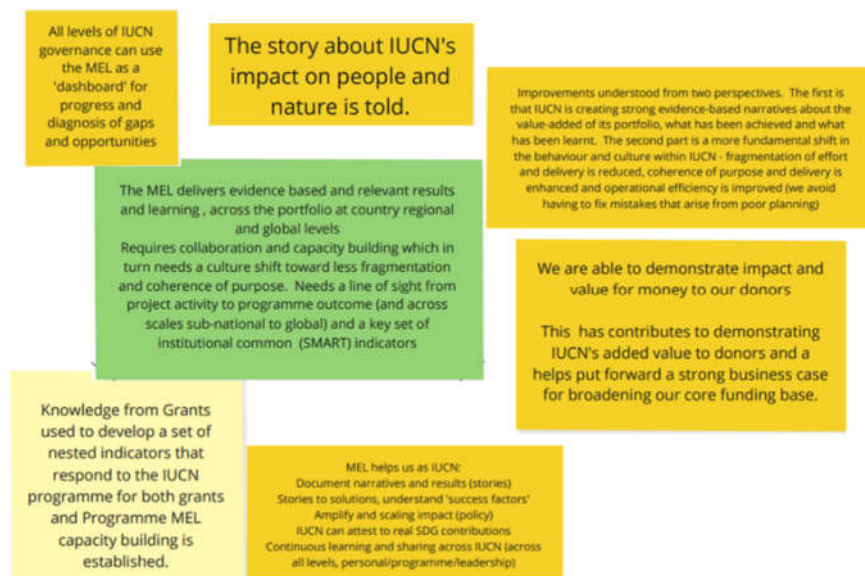

All levels of IUCN governance can use the MEL as a 'dashboard' for progress and diagnosis of gaps and opportunities

The story about IUCN's impact on people and nature is told.

Improvements understood from two perspectives. The first is that IUCN is creating strong evidence-based narratives about the value-added of its portfolio, what has been achieved and what has been learnt. The second part is a more fundamental shift in the behaviour and culture within IUCN - fragmentation of effort and delivery is reduced, coherence of purpose and delivery is enhanced and operational efficiency is improved (we avoid having to fix mistakes that arise from poor planning)

The MEL delivers evidence based and relevant results and learning , across the portfolio at country regional and global levels
Requires collaboration and capacity building which in turn needs a culture shift toward less fragmentation and coherence of purpose. Needs a line of sight from project activity to programme outcome (and across scales sub-national to global) and a key set of institutional common (SMART) indicators

We are able to demonstrate impact and value for money to our donors

This has contributes to demonstrating IUCN's added value to donors and a helps put forward a strong business case for broadening our core funding base.

Knowledge from Grants used to develop a set of nested indicators that respond to the IUCN programme for both grants and Programme MEL capacity building is established.

MEL helps us as IUCN:
Document narratives and results (stories)
Stories to solutions, understand 'success factors'
Amplify and scaling impact (policy)
IUCN can attest to real SDG contributions
Continuous learning and sharing across IUCN (across all levels, personal/programme/leadership)

Figure 8: Selected MEL Stories prepared by workshop participants from Senior Management

How useful is the current MEL system as a contribution to learning at project/programme, portfolio, and corporate level?

A general purpose of MEL-related learning is provided by the M&E Policy considering learning and improvement as a process to *'understand why, and to which extent, intended and unintended results are achieved and what their impact on stakeholders is.'* However, strategic and operational aims of learning or beneficiaries have not yet been defined by the Secretariat. There is no strategy and process in place to frame and guide learning at the Secretariat. During this analysis, leaders and managers expressed a clear need for learning on (1) intervention logic and assessment of results towards change objectives (2) MEL systems and data management and (3) successful project concepts that can be scaled up into global programmes.

Currently, learning is taking place at individual level and as team events (e.g., in regional teams or portfolio teams). The approaches shared with the consultant during the assessment demonstrate a high action research orientation and very reflective stance.

To which extent is MEL useful in the identification, development, and dissemination of knowledge products?

The teams at the Secretariat seem to be quite strong in sharing of project related experiences. Templates for the documentation of knowledge and relevant good practice exist through the PGS. However, managers frequently mentioned that no resources are available for compiling, categorising, and assessing documented experiences across several projects (e.g., in regions or thematic portfolios). Likewise, evaluations of projects have been frequently mentioned as helpful but there are no resources to analyse evaluation results across several projects. Knowledge products are published but more as an opportunity driven / funder driven process and not so much with the scope of organisational wide learning.

To which extent is the current MEL system adequate for risk mitigation and early warning?

As per the Risk Policy, IUCN has a low-risk appetite for *reputational risks*. With the expected evolvement of the portfolio, the higher number of programmes with two-digit million budgets and global visibility, expected accreditations and the growing responsibility of programme and project managers the need for assertiveness clearly has been raised.

The IUCN Risk Policy states that *IUCN's strategic planning process aims to ensure that finances and operations are sustainable* and adequately support and develop the programmatic objectives. *The Leadership Team must annually review their decision making and confirm that it has been aligned with IUCN's targets.* Furthermore, *financial sustainability* 'to continue to serve the organisation's purpose and achieve its vision and mission' *is a key priority* of the Risk Policy. The Policy also states that IUCN must have *comprehensive operational systems and practices* that

support *achievement of its strategic objectives through a diverse and large global and regional programme and project portfolio.* To achieve this, the Union will apply *programme and project management standards.*

Regional and portfolio as well as project managers have devised their own systematic for managing risks according to their own understanding. The current MEL system' usefulness for risk detection is limited. There are two good practices of risk observation at portfolio level, which are supported by a visualized management tool: (1) ORMACC Smartsheet project tracking (2) GEF / GCF dashboard of contractual compliance and status (see Annex 4_1).

2_3_5 *Financial Sustainability: The Unit's capacity to secure a diversified inflow of financial resources for MEL.*

As outlined in Chapters 2_3_1, 2_3_2 and 2_3_3, the majority of data is available in formats that can only be shared through personal exchange. In addition, some data is not used because resources and guidance for their compilation and categorisation are missing. Other data cannot be aggregated because these have been collected with different methods or their reference base or units are uncertain. Moreover, Excel is frequently used as a format for data capturing. In other words: A lot of financial and human resources are lost because of lacking procedures and suboptimal data handling.

Project managers can secure resources for monitoring. Several regional managers and portfolio managers succeed in coordinating persons in charge for project related M&E in such a way that they get the necessary data for a portfolio overview. However, across the organisational units of the Secretariat, there are no commonly agreed workflows and processes, principles, segregation of functions and designation of positions for this effort. Therefore, from a global level perspective, it is currently unclear which positions are in charge for monitoring and what the existing capacities are.

Therefore, an assessment of annual costs and human resources existing compared to the requirements currently is not feasible.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELEMENTS OF A FUTURE M&E PLAN

3_1 Summary of performance assessment

The current MEL systems have dealt quite efficiently with the limited resources at PMER level and the lack of strategic guidance in the planning system. Each level has developed tailor-made solutions. This has been at the expense of the effectiveness and relevance of monitoring data. Existing data covers information needs and only partially meets the minimum requirements of the M&E Policy. As an impact,, the Secretariat is currently unable to demonstrate the contribution of its 400+ projects towards the achievement of the Global Programme. The leadership team is aware of this situation and shows great willingness to change. There is therefore a high probability that the MEL System will improve within the next three years. The strengths and weaknesses of the current MEL System are summarised in the following figure:

Strengths
IUCN Programme providing guidance
Alignment of projects
Reliable workflows
Data availability along specific criteria
Basic data available for all projects
User-friendly subsystems

Weaknesses
Limited standards and frameworks to compile data
Unclear roles and responsibilities
Limited data management systems allowing for visual reporting
Limited evaluation and integration of needs in planning
Evaluations disjunct from monitoring

MEL System

Threats
Limited shared understanding of the planning system
Limited ability to demonstrate outcomes and impacts
Change of portfolio includes reputational risks
Limited risk management
Fragmentation of MEL activities

Opportunities
High change readiness
Existing good practice
Solutions underway
Excellent global databases

Figure 9: SWOT Analysis of the IUCN MEL System (Author's draft)

3_2 Prepare a roadmap for MEL change

Recommendation 0: **Prepare a roadmap for MEL change based on principles for managing complex challenges.**

In line with the findings of the performance assessment, the consultant proposes the following elements of a MEL System, representing simultaneously the components of a roadmap for MEL change:

- Create enabling conditions for MEL in a complex setting
- Define the purpose of the MEL System
- Identify boundaries and components
- Elaborate standards and guidelines
- Establish a continuous learning and improvement cycle

The IUCN Secretariat's MEL System operates in a complex setting: The Secretariat is implementing a huge number of projects in a broad variety of settings, the level of autonomy to conceive MEL at project, region and portfolio level is currently quite high. The change approach should therefore follow some principles that have proven helpful in managing complex challenges:

- Creation of a secure and clear framework setting strategic boundaries and providing values as an orientation for managers
- Solving the challenges at the level of persons who must deal with them (subsidiarity principle)
- Using action research approaches to experiment with solutions, repeatedly assess the outcome and plan for the next steps
- Plan for a stepwise implementation with a corresponding rolling cost plan, that is continuously adjusted in accordance with progress made.
- Accepting that no single person can overlook all aspects of complex challenges. Therefore, give preference to co-creation, dialogue and exchange, work with pilot groups and communities of practice.
- Solving paradoxical situations by joint assessment from different perspectives.

3_3   Create enabling conditions

Recommendation 1: **Co-create Planning systems for each level of the Secretariat with relevant stakeholders.**

Complex organisations are successful if they have clear objectives and a limited but critical set of standards and guidelines for work processes.

Figure 10 shows the current planning system compared to international good practice. At the strategy level, the Secretariat's planning system has a gap that is currently filled by the Global Programme. For organisational steering, this is however not appropriate. The Secretariat should define what it will contribute through its 400+ projects towards achievement of the Global Programme. This contribution should become part of the Secretariat's strategic objectives in each thematic area. It should be determined in a co-creative process and based on empirical information from the existing project portfolio. In this context, the aspect of pipeline management and alignment of projects with higher level strategic and policy goals is very important as this is currently the only well-functioning steering mechanism that the IUCN Secretariat has.
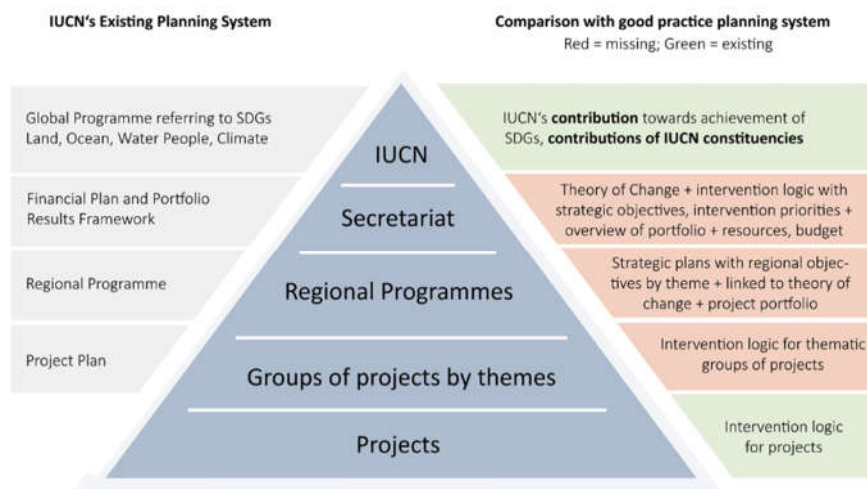
Figure 10: Comparison between IUCN Planning Systems and good practice planning systems

(Author's draft based on workshops, interviews and document review)

Recommendation 2: **Provide a clear governance scope to portfolio and programme management, including purpose of thematic areas, roles and responsibilities of portfolios and regional programmes as well as sufficient capacities for project support functions.**

The MEL system is a function of the organisation's governance and planning systems (see Figure 10). Unambiguous responsibilities are therefore key for monitoring. Roles and responsibilities in portfolio, programme and project management with their respective workflows at all levels of the Secretariat must be clarified and documented in a database. The existing PGS is a good starting point if supplemented accordingly and if enforced by higher level management.
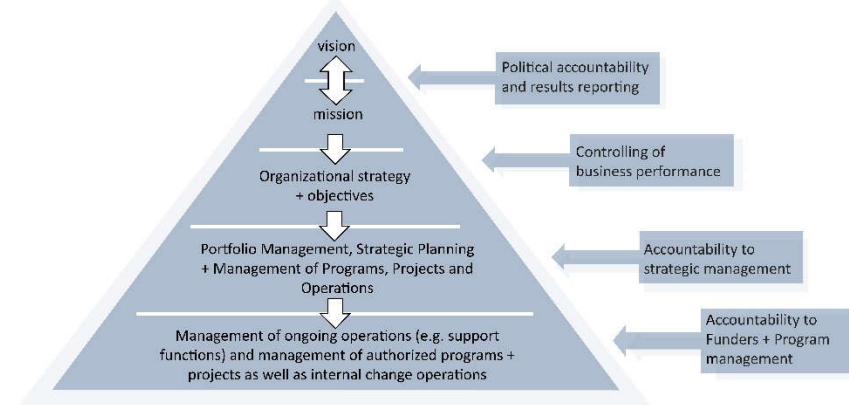
Figure 11: Governance, planning systems and accountability in complex organisations
(Author's draft based on workshops, interviews and document review)

At the Secretariat, the meaning of portfolio and programme is not clear and does not correspond to international standards. In the understanding of the consultant, Regional Offices have a statutory responsibility to report on the achievement of the IUCN Global Programme Goals and they appear as cost centres in annual financial reports. Regional Offices must acquire projects to secure the financing of their structural costs. Being a statutory structure, Regional offices are key in ensuring financial sustainability and good reputation of the Secretariat (ref. Risk Policy,

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IUCN).

Portfolios are essentially consisting of groups of donor-funded projects with a global scale. In theory, global leads for thematic areas should have a coordinating function and they shall facilitate quality, standards, innovation, and learning. In practice, they must acquire and manage projects to finance their positions. This places them into an awkward position towards regional offices as both might compete for similar resources. If this ambiguity is not addressed, functions in coordination and quality assurance of thematic groups of projects will be distorted with negative implications for monitoring.

Another essential issue for monitoring is that the project portfolio must be structured in an unambiguous way. In this context, it is crucial to decide the purpose of allocating projects to thematic areas. For example, if the purpose is to assess the business performance of a thematic area (which would be, for instance, required for performance monitoring in accordance with the financial plan), one project should be attributed to one thematic area. However, if the purpose is to demonstrate alignment of projects with thematic areas, then one project must be attributed to several thematic areas. Because alignment is already demonstrated through the Project Portal by attributing the policy goals of the Global Programme to projects, thematic areas should be used for business performance monitoring and projects should be allocated to a maximum of two thematic areas.

3_4 Define the purpose

Recommendation 3: **The purpose of the MEL System should be to provide standards and processes for improving the use of existing data. For quick wins, converging points of data availability and information needs should be leveraged.**

It will be important for the Secretariat to have realistic expectations concerning the purpose of M&E system and to create the enabling conditions for its functioning. As shown by the assessment of the consultant, data collection is already done by many units. Monitoring therefore is going on. However, regional and thematic managers require a consolidated overview of the portfolio development (size, value, progress, deviations from plan, donors, risks, thematic area, geographic

scope). Additionally, an approach for results monitoring is urgently needed to link thematic interventions logics to project outputs and thereby demonstrate the Secretariat's contribution to the policy goals of the Global Programme. Potential converging points of data availability and information needs are regional offices and portfolio heads (Figure 12).
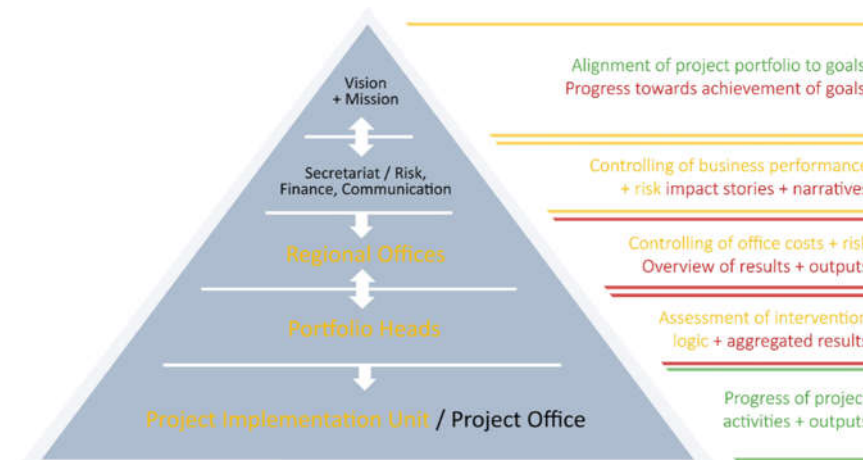
Figure 12: Converging points of data availability and information needs
Red= urgently + most importantly needed; Orange = partially existing;
Green=existing
(Author's draft based on workshops, interviews and document review)

3_5 Define scope and system components

Recommendation 4: **Define the scope of the MEL System by collating MEL questions, data providers, data users, standard givers, and external audience. Define MEL System components and compulsory parts accordingly. Attribute corresponding MEL responsibilities to PPME Unit and other support units at the Secretariat.**

The most pragmatic way to identify the scope of MEL is to collectively compile the MEL questions and their data sources (see example below, designed based on outcome of Workshop 2).

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MEL Question (example)	Standard provider	Data generator	Data user	Audience	Recommended MEL components
What is IUCN's contribution to nature related SDGs and other international obligations?	PPME	PPME	DG, SPU, GCU	Council, Donors	Continuous, global
What does IUCN provide to members?	PPME + Risk Management (RM)	Regional offices	DG, SPU, Regional offices	Council, Members	Continuous, regional
What are the contributions of a portfolio of project in a specific region/country?	PPME + Regional Offices (RO) + Project Management (PM)	Regional offices	DG, SPU, Regional offices, Portfolio Management	Members, Donors	Periodic assessments
How can the Secretariat demonstrate that it operates effectively?	PPME + RM + RO	Regional offices	Regional offices, PMER,	DG, Donors	Continuous decentralized; reactive assessments
Is the project on track and healthy?	PPME + CFO	Regional offices	Regional offices, project management, Portfolio management	CFO, Regional offices	Continuous, global & regional
Does the input-output-outcome-impact chain work?	Project management, Portfolio management, PPME	Project Management	Project management, Regional offices, Portfolio management	Secretariat' staff	Continuous decentralized; periodic assessments

Table 6: Summarised MEL purpose and information needs
(Understanding of the consultant based on interviews, workshops and document review)

In line with the above, not all levels of an organisation require monitoring data in the same frequency and detail. For example, tracking of portfolio progress at regional level or in a grant programme is required on a daily and project level basis. At the global level, a monthly checking of the global list of projects being in a high-risk category might be required. Likewise, project activity and output information are needed monthly at project level, while it is needed annually as an aggregated information towards respective outcomes that shall be achieved in a specific geographic context. In such a setting, it is crucial to decide which information will be needed by all levels and therefore must be collected by a shared approach (see Figure 13).

These findings and recommendations are coherent with international practice of monitoring in complex organisations. There is usually not the

'ONE M&E System' integrating all data into one database. Most globally acting organisations operate through various levels (sub-country, country, region, global) and sectors with a range of different systems. Research on complex M&E in international NGOs states, that over 80 % of the M&E carried out within a large organisation is carried out for local purposes and only 20 % is integrated into an institution-wide system (Levine, van Vijfeijken, & Jayawickrama, 2016). It is therefore key to understand which parts of ongoing MEL activities must be regulated by compulsory standards and processes and which parts can be left to the autonomy of managers.

Finally, importantly MEL responsibilities of PPME versus other support units, such as finance, communication and risk management, must be clearly defined and data systems of relevant support units at the Secretariat should be conceived in a MEL supportive manner. For example, currently the interface between project monitoring and financial controlling is unclear. The Transparency Portal contains budget and expenditure data. It is uncertain how reliable and updated these data are and whether they are consistent with financial controlling information. Similar examples were experienced by the consultant on aggregated budget figures or contract volumes of groups of projects in thematic areas. Also, budgets are not output based but based on cost categories.

Continuous collection monitoring data global level:
- Portfolio overview: projects, contribution to Global Programme
- Overview of themes by share of total and by location
- Regional offices + projects, income-expenditure situation
- Contracted volume by region, donor, theme, status of contract
- Cumulated outputs, % achievement of result indicators

Reactive assessments:
- Studies
- Joint learning
- Specific risks reviews

Subset of selected data

Coordinated data collection and aggregation

Central policies, workflows, standards, indicator registries

Compulsory process + format

Periodic assessments:
- Baseline assessments
- Project Evaluations
- Ex-Post evaluations
- Strategic reviews
- Process reviews

Continuous collection at regional and portfolio level
- Tracking activities + expenditures per project + portfolio
- Status of procurement, contracts, budgets
- Risks + assumption indicators
- Output + outcome indicators
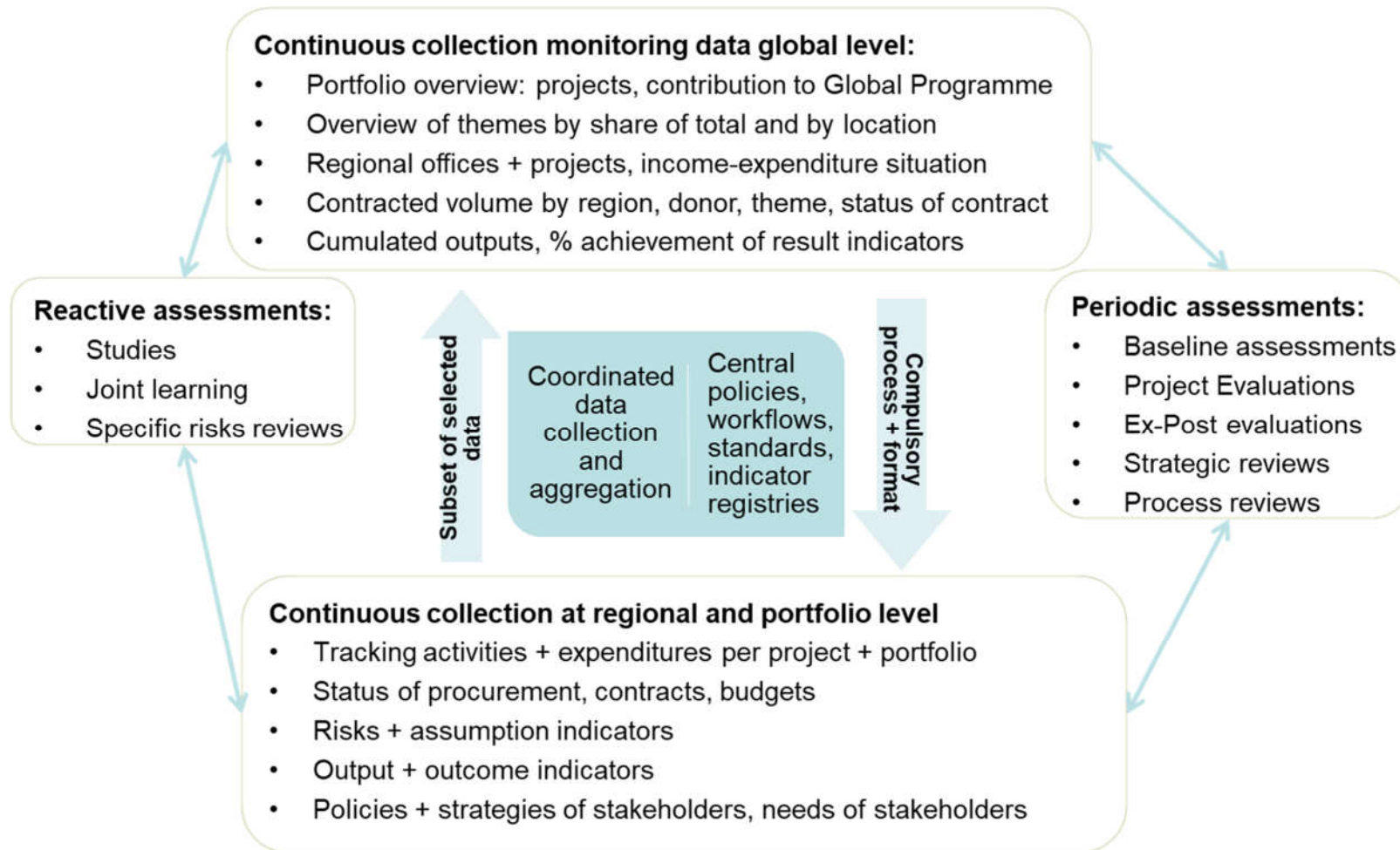- Policies + strategies of stakeholders, needs of stakeholders

Figure 13: Different data collection and aggregation priorities at different levels
(Author's draft based on workshops, interviews and document review)

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3_6 Establish relevant MEL standards

Recommendation 5: **Co-create thematic intervention logics with compulsory sets of objectives to which thematic groups of projects must contribute. Design projects along one commonly shared results-chain logic.**

Portfolio heads with relevant stakeholders should develop the intervention logics in each of the five thematic areas. This should be done based on currently employed implicit intervention logics, such as the 'IUCN Business Line Canvas: Enhancing Resilience and reducing Risks' (see also Figure 20) or the intervention logic of the SOS Species Conservation Programme[5].

Global Programme:
Support policy change towards sustainable use and conservation of nature
Objective + impact indicators for land, water, ocean, climate and people

Secretariat's Strategy:
Implementation of projects to overcome stakeholder's barriers for catalysing policy and society change // performance indicators

Intervention logic and objective
for land, water, ocean, climate and people // objective indicators for projects & outcome indicators for Global Programme

Regional strategies with selected intervention logics cumulate project outputs
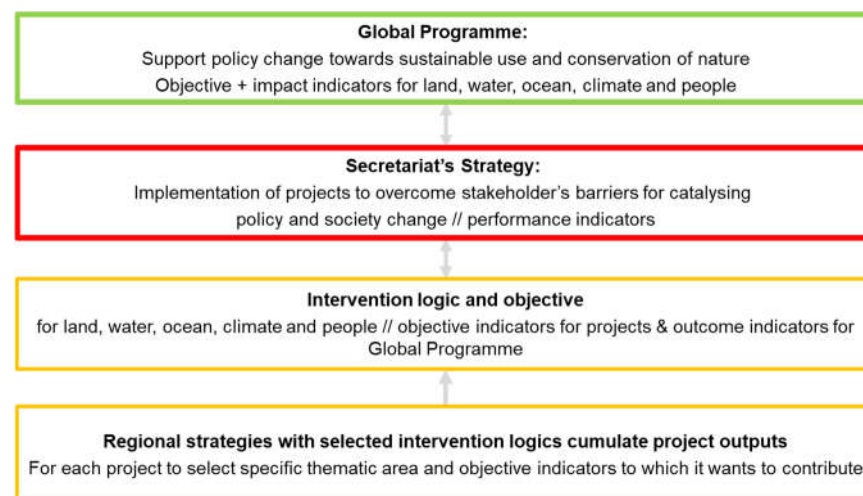For each project to select specific thematic area and objective indicators to which it wants to contribute

Figure 14: Thematic intervention logic and its integration into planning system (Author's draft)

These implicit intervention logics can be made explicit by provision of guidelines and standards and a commonly adopted presentation of the information demonstrating the linkage to the Secretariat's strategy and the Global Programme. Intervention logics should include objectives and related indicators for each thematic area. Furthermore, a set of typical outcomes, outputs and their indicators should be included. Future projects could be designed by choosing from these sets. Furthermore, thematic intervention logics would support Regional Offices in mapping existing projects (see Figure 14, Figure 15 and example in Annex 4_2).

For the results-chain a commonly shared approach that complies with OECD-DAC standards is needed because > 70 % of the portfolio currently is financed through development cooperation partners. This is simply a matter of speaking the same language as the representatives of the main funding sources of IUCN. Thereby inefficient 'translation work' is avoided. Additionally, working with a common understanding of a harmonized project planning logic will tremendously facilitate the identification of impact stories.

Recommendation 6: **Design impact/outcome/results indicators in accordance with thematic intervention logics, available data quality and pragmatism.**

For impact indicators, the Secretariat has a set of globally trusted monitoring platforms (e.g., the Red List, World Data Base on Protected Areas, World Heritage Monitoring Report etc.) As a good practice, intervention logics in regions should be justified by referring to the evolvement of the global indicators in the respective region. This automatically provides a baseline and tool to track long-term and high-level impact for the next decade and beyond a timespan of a Quadrennial Programme or an individual project. It also underpins high level policy targets for regions (e.g., status of key species in the Red List to be maintained or to improved). A programme already applying this practice is the SOS Species Programme.

Concerning output indicators, a lot of monitoring is going on, but the data quality is unknown. Providing typical outputs for each thematic area as part of the intervention logics will support standardisation. Furthermore, data systems to capture and visually analyse output data would be most needed.

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[5] https://iucnsos.org/our-impact/species/ as well as habitat and people

Global Programme

By 2030 biodiversity is stabilized across intact landscapes and key species are protected.

Indicator: Red List Index overall development, Protected Areas overall development

Secretariat's Strategy

Implementation of projects to overcome stakeholder's barriers for catalysing policy and society change

Indicators: Policy changes to increase from # to # in # years; Ha of KBA under protection status to increase by % in # years; # of regional initiatives to…

Intervention logic:

To reduce pressures on land and improve status of protection of key habitat together with people; narrative of intervention logic

demonstrate relevance of portfolio by: *# of projects + whether they are implemented in relevant geographic areas*

Max 3- 4 result indicators to underpin narrative: e.g. # of protected areas with improved management; # of communities engaged with IUCN, # of policy changes

Provide baselines on stakeholders' needs, risks and strategies, evaluate developments

Cumulated outputs of projects in a geographic area

| : # knowledge platforms created in # years (baseline = 0, target = 5) | % increase of patrolling in # years (baseline = 0, target = #) | # Grantees empowered through provision of funds and training in # years (baseline = 0, target = #) |

Figure 15: Example for an intervention logic and potential indicators
(Author's draft based on workshops, interviews and document review)

Concerning outcome indicators, direct aggregation is a challenge across many development cooperation projects. There are several reasons:

- Outcomes might happen only after the end of the project.

- Baselines and targets for outcomes are not determined and thereby progress cannot be tracked.

- Especially in complex environments and projects, the certainty to achieve the outcome is low because of its dependency from framework conditions (e.g., policy change is depending on the good governance of a country).

- Outcomes can only be aggregated if they are collected in a standardized way across all projects.

An alternative to direct aggregation of outcome indicators is to frame results in a sentence that establishes a logical link with the outputs and the impact indicators by referring to the intervention logic. Outcomes can then be reported on qualitatively and based on examples from the field. Quantitative progress on outputs and demonstration of relevance of project sites chosen is used as a proxy for outcome monitoring. Final evidence on outcomes is achieved by tracking of impact indicators.

The following steps would be therefore required towards outcome monitoring:

- Baselines and target lines

- Indicators for the framework conditions (i.e., risks and assumptions)

- An assessment of data quality and decision whether aggregated indicators or framework indicators will be used

Good practice examples for outcome indicator aggregation were observed in the Tiger Habitat Conservation Programme as well as the BEST and BIOPAMA Programmes (see Documentation Workshop 2). An example for framing result indicators can be found e.g., in the Global Water Programme[6].

In any case, it is more efficient to monitor a few indicators consistently than to have an inconsistently monitored extensive list of indicators.

3_7 Establish a communication plan

Recommendation 7: **In line with the IUCN Secretariat's strategy, elaborate a communication plan for internal and external communication that focuses on performance and policy messages.**

During the assessment it became clear that different levels at the Secretariat have different communication needs for which they require specific information. With an existing strategy for the Secretariat, a communication plan could be developed.

For each level of the Secretariat, the communication plan should define the purpose of internal and external communication, the target groups, the type of information and the respective tools. Accordingly, the MEL data management systems should be designed in such a way that key users can generate regularly required information themselves. Existing IUCN websites and information materials should be streamlined in accordance with the communication plan and commonly agreed intervention logics. Flagship projects could be identified for each thematic area that will be prioritised for monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendation 8: **Integrate financial information into internal and external reporting on portfolios, regional and global programmes.**

Currently the Global Programme is simply silent about its costs and financing. This is unacceptable in terms of transparency and efficiency. The Global Programme is implemented in its major parts through more than 400 development-funded projects and the Secretariat raises > 80 % of the costs for implementing the Global Programme with just around 12 % membership fees. This should be emphasised as a key strength in key reports.

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[6] https://www.iucn.org/theme/water

For the internal reporting, the contribution of a thematic portfolio to generated income is a key parameter. Otherwise, it is impossible to understand the importance of thematic areas for financial sustainability of the organisation. For the same reason, a uniform and easily accessible income and expenditure reporting should be introduced for each cost centre (e.g., regional offices). Financial information should always be presented for the entire Secretariat including all funding sources (core and project based) and cost centres. The current Financial Plan is a good starting point for such integrated financial reporting.

These pieces of information represent the kind of MEL questions that need to be identified in the scoping of the MEL System (see Chapter 3_5). The examples clearly underpin the need to assess financial information and controlling in line with the Secretariat's MEL requirements.

3_8 Use evaluations to enhance institutional learning

Recommendation 9: **Evaluations should focus on understanding ability and key success factors of projects and intervention logics to contribute to social change.**

IUCN's mission is centred around behavioural change. IUCN's implicit assumption is, that societies change if they have access to knowledge, innovation, and good practice.[7] Evaluations are tools to confirm this assumption or provide the ground to amend it.

As demonstrated in Figure 16, knowledge products result from shared experiences, access to codified and documented knowledge as well as sorting, categorising, and adding good practices that can be published. The improvement of the MEL System will directly contribute to these processes, because:

- Relevant information will be available at institutional rather than individual levels and thereby become accessible

- MEL stakeholders become a community of practice: They speak the same language and share the same understanding about change, intervention logics, complexity, and result-chains. Thereby fragmentation is reduced across the Secretariat.

- Leaders work towards a commonly understood strategy and communication plan. They will understand their contribution to the whole and have more effective exchange. Thereby knowledge becomes institutional and gaps (e.g., in publications) become more obvious.
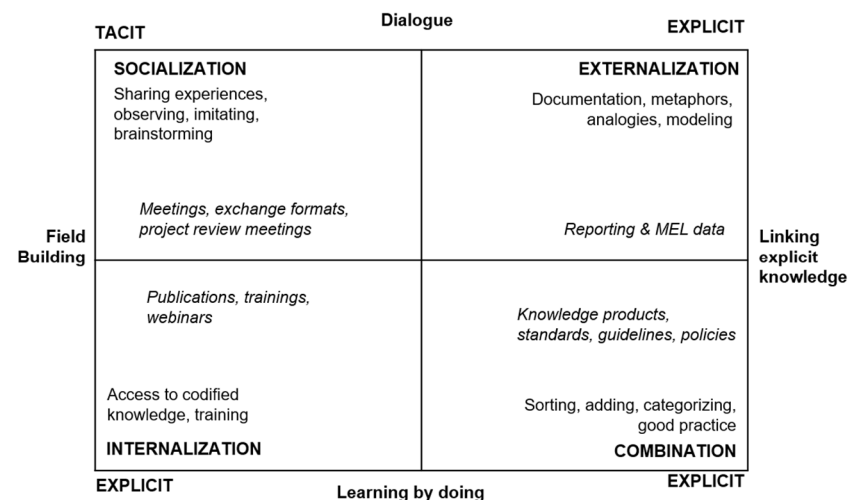

Figure 16: Schematic model of knowledge generation processes (Author's draft based on the SECI Model of Nonaka & Takeuchi)

Recommendation 10: **Conceive evaluation tasks and data bases in such a way, that they are useful for long-term observations and complement ongoing monitoring.**

Periodic assessments (i.e., evaluations) form an integral part of learning

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[7] See for example the mission statement in the IUCN Statutes, the Theory of Change in the IUCN Global Programme 2021 – 2024 and the SDC Evaluation

if they are intertwined with the monitoring process (see also Chapter 3_5). Ex-post and meta-evaluations are international good practice to generate conceptual learning. They require the assessment of information patterns resulting from project reporting, mid-term and final evaluations across a group of projects or longer period of time. Furthermore, all evaluations (mid-term, final, ex-post and meta evaluations) are only useful if the findings are interpreted in the context in which a project took place. Baseline information and data on the political, social, and economic challenges and potentials is thus crucial to learn about appropriateness of intervention logics. Therefore, the following should be considered concerning evaluations:

- Evaluations should be conceived to answer questions arising from the regular observation (i.e., monitoring) of projects, portfolios and intervention logics.

- In addition to mid-term and end of project evaluations, ex-post and meta evaluations (e.g., on thematic intervention logics) should be implemented.

- Baselines and target lines should be determined for all indicators (objective, outcome, and output). Baselines at objective and outcome level should be stored in such a way that they are accessible for evaluations.

- Storage of project reports should allow categorisation of information for evaluations e.g., by country, region, theme, type of report etc.

3_9   Essential short- and medium-term actions

Implementing the above recommendations is a long-term process requiring several years. At the beginning, priority setting will be difficult. In complex systems many processes are intertwined, which requires simultaneous workflows in managing change. However, there are some essential actions that promise quick wins, get the ball rolling and provide the foundation for the first action research cycle on improving the MEL systems at the Secretariat. For this, the consultant proposes the following actions:

Essential short-term actions (STA) (> 6 months)

Enabling conditions

STA 1 — Co-create thematic intervention logic in line with existing portfolios

Purpose of MEL

STA 2 — Assess regional + project level output data: quality, categories, data management systems

Scope of MEL

STA 3 — MEL questions, data providers, users, audience, high risk / chance portfolios

MEL standards

STA 4 — Provide standards for: strategy, intervention logic, results chain

Learning & Improvement

STA 5 — MEL change roadmap, implementation structure & budget, priority programmes / portfolios

Learning & Improvement

STA 6 — MEL change agents + series of workshops

Essential medium-term actions (MTA) (> 24 months)

Enabling conditions

MTA 1 — Co-create IUCN Secretariat's Strategy based on insights from output assessment & intervention logics

Purpose of MEL

MTA 2 — Needs assessment of stakeholders in regions, baselines and target lines for outputs

Identify & test data management systems for visualized portfolio management

MEL scope

MTA 3 — Define integration of MEL with other units; define components of MEL system

MEL Standards

MTA 4 — Elaborate set of typical output and objective indicators, identify smart approach to deal with results indicators

Learning

MTA 5 — Establish workflow to integrate evaluation with monitoring at portfolio + project level, integrate evaluation reports in open portal