EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE IUCN PROGRAMME 2017-2020

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FINAL REVIEW REPORT

Prepared for:

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Since 1991, IUCN has undertaken external reviews every four years prior to the Congress, as a joint exercise between IUCN and its framework partners. The previous 2015 IUCN external review focused on specific strategic aspects of IUCN, such as its niche, knowledge products, Commissions and organisational fitness for purpose. The findings and conclusions of this Review fed into the design of the 2017-2020 Programme.

This Review takes a different approach since it is not a strategic evaluation of IUCN as an organisation. Its objective is to **evaluate the overall performance of the IUCN Programme 2017-2020** to ensure the accountability of IUCN towards its members, donors and other stakeholders, and to provide lessons learnt meant to generate actionable recommendations for the effective implementation of the Programme 2021-2024, to be approved at the next IUCN Congress in Marseille in January 2021.

Although the Programme is designed as a Union programme, which means the entire membership of IUCN committed to contribute to the set objectives and targets, the scope of this Review mainly covers delivery by IUCN Secretariat, over the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019.

The Review assessed the 2017-2020 Programme according to the OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impacts and sustainability. It also assessed the gender responsiveness and social inclusion aspects of the Programme and its implementation.

The Review was carried out through the following steps:

- The team first conducted a preliminary documentation review and an analysis of the IUCN Programme and Project Portal. As a result of the sampling exercise, a total of 25 projects/programs were selected for an in-depth analysis. The Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO) and Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean (ORMACC) regional offices were selected for regional and country-level analyses.

- The team conducted almost 70 interviews with high-level staff from key Secretariat Head Quarters (HQ) units; Framework donors; Commission chairs; US and European offices in Washington and Brussels. The team also interviewed ESARO and ORMACC regional and national offices' representatives, managers of sampled projects as well

Baastel

as NGOs and state agencies that are IUCN members in the selected countries (in Kenya, Rwanda, Costa Rica and Guatemala). Due to the Covid19 crisis, country missions had to be cancelled except for the mission in Kenya. The interviews planned in the selected countries were therefore conducted remotely (except for Kenya where they were done in person).

- Based on the information collected during the documentation review and interviews, the Review team analyzed and triangulated the data compiled in a data collection matrix, in order to inform the selected indicators, confirm/deny the judgment criteria and answer the evaluation questions. This Review report was then elaborated.

Review Findings and Conclusions

Relevance

Question 1: To what extent has the IUCN Programme been coherent and relevant to the needs of conservation and the equitable management of natural resources at the global, regional and local levels?

The IUCN Programme 2017-2020 is relevant to the major needs of conservation and equitable natural resource management, as they were identified by a science-based approach and consultative process at the Programme design stage. The IUCN Programme is closely aligned with global conservation objectives and several United Nations frameworks (CDB, SDG). Regional needs are specified in regional work programmes and local needs are usually carefully considered in the project and program development processes on the ground.

The IUCN Programme 2017-2020 is internally coherent. Its broad approach ensures that the portfolio fits under the three Programme areas and is aligned with the Programme global and sub-results. However, resources to achieve its ambitious objectives cannot be mobilized by the IUCN Secretariat alone but should consider membership as a whole.

Coordination and synergies at the regional and local levels between IUCN and partners are satisfactory, as the organization's convening role is globally recognized. They could however be exploited further with the membership, paying specific attention to the clarity of the Union's positioning with respect to its different types of members.

The IUCN Programme 2017-2020 is coherent and relevant to the needs of conservation and the equitable management of natural resources at the global, regional and local levels. Nonetheless, IUCN's positioning towards its members as well the specific contribution of the Secretariat to the Programme could be improved.

Effectiveness

Question 2: Has the IUCN Programme been effective in achieving its objectives?

The current monitoring system (through its traffic lights system) shows good progress towards achievement of Programme targets. However, this system has strong limitations as it does not allow aggregation of the results achieved by projects, programs, Commissions and/or

members at the Global Programme level, which hinders the assessment of the effectiveness of the IUCN Programme in achieving its expected results.

Although the IUCN's M&E system has improved, it remains a significant accountability and credibility risk for the organization and requires additional improvements to robustly measure the achievements of the Programme and help support IUCN as a learning organization.

The IUCN Programme has the ambition to be implemented according to the One Programme Approach that promotes the collaboration of all IUCN constituencies. The concept of the One Programme Approach is widely supported and considered as a key asset of the Union. Nevertheless, its implementation remains challenging.

When it comes to communicating about the Programme and its results, corporate communication is considered satisfactory. However, the Review showed that IUCN's visibility in some international and national fora could be improved, as well as the internal communication about the Programme. With regards to communication with framework donors more specifically, the coordination is deemed effective, even though limited by donor's availability.

The overall effectiveness of the IUCN Programme is difficult to track given the lack of robust monitoring and evaluation system at the global level. Nevertheless, there are indications that the IUCN Programme has progressed in achieving its objectives overall.

Efficiency

Question 3: Has the IUCN Programme been efficient with regards to its objectives?

IUCN financial management is generally solid, with stable administrative and management cost ratios over the evaluated period, comparable to those of other similar organizations. Nevertheless, financial reporting could be significantly improved from a result-based management perspective, by aligning it to result achievement reporting. This may also help management better understand the delays in project/program budget execution and disbursement rates. Furthermore, reporting on co-financing is not systematic enough across the portfolio to document success or discrepancies in result achievements and leveraging effects of IUCN's work.

While restricted income raised by the Programme is significantly below the initial budget, the leveraging ratio between unrestricted and restricted income remains significant at 7.1 in 2019. This high leveraging ratio on unrestricted funding, coupled with the substantial in-kind contributions made by IUCN's Commissions to the work of the Programme, provide an indication of the good value for money generated by unrestricted funding. IUCN could however clearly benefit from a more robust resource mobilization strategy with a concrete operational plan.

The decrease in unrestricted framework funding has constrained human resource allocation within IUCN with the downside of reduced flexibility. IUCN's changing portfolio also requires a shift in competencies to implement projects and programs. In its move from "retail to wholesale", the Secretariat went through a rationalization process aimed at improving business practices and efficiency, but this process is still ongoing, will require improvements,

and has not yet led to the level of internal satisfaction hoped for. Nevertheless, the growth of the portfolio (both in project size and overall value) has been absorbed by a reduced number of staff, creating tensions in personnel allocation but also suggesting that this model has already provided some efficiency gains with respect to portfolio management.

IUCN delivery models – implementing/grant-making or executing agency – have their own advantages and drawbacks. While the executing agency portfolio is the most significant to date, the implementing portfolio is consistently increasing. Moving "from retail to wholesale", with fewer small projects and more large-scale programs is generally recognized as positive, but implementing projects funded by the GEF or GCF has not gained full approval to date given the high up-front investments. Relying too much on this implementing agency model with international multilateral funds could weaken IUCN stance and nature in the longer term. This encourages continued support for some form of on-the-ground implementation/execution of projects that bring full value to IUCN core competencies, its model and its members.

Finally, IUCN does have a risk management system in place at the corporate level, which is still at early stages of implementation. At the project level, risk management has improved with ESMS procedures but should be more systematically applied across the portfolio.

Overall, the IUCN Programme management can be considered efficient in its efforts towards its objectives, but financial reporting and the rationalization process now underway require improvements. Performance of different delivery models needs to be carefully monitored as the transition moves forward, to ensure the expected efficiency gains and mix in optimal delivery models materialize in a way that is not detrimental to the effectiveness nor the nature and niche of the Union.

Impact

Question 4: Does the IUCN Programme generate significant and lasting impacts?

The IUCN Programme 2017-2020 does not have a proper system in place to measure progress towards its intended impacts. Nevertheless, even though impacts are difficult to measure and not systematically collected nor compiled, several examples show that IUCN has contributed to impacts, in particular when it comes to its convening role, the rolling out of new concepts, tools or standards, change in practices, and influence on policy and governance processes.

Implementing further the One Programme Approach, improving communication and visibility, investing in policy work, working further with the private sector, promoting innovation and eventually restructuring the organization are potential avenues for improvement identified during the Review to strengthen the overall impact of the organization.

IUCN shows overall positive indications in its ability to generate impacts, although these are hardly measurable nor systematically reported on, and IUCN's contribution towards impacts could be strengthened on various aspects.

Sustainability

Question 5: How sustainable are the IUCN Programme interventions?

Although the IUCN Programme 2017-2020 does not include an explicit sustainability strategy, the organization's modus operandi is able to create enabling conditions for sustainability of results achieved, in particular by (i) engaging national and local stakeholders and IUCN members, (ii) generating and disseminating knowledge products, standards and tools, (iii) influencing and informing policy, (iv) ensuring a long term presence, and (v) building capacity at various levels.

IUCN's and/or its partners' ability in securing funds to sustain conservation outcomes beyond the regular funding cycle of specific project interventions is not systematically tracked at the portfolio level. Nonetheless, a few examples show that some IUCN interventions succeeded in leveraging funding for the continuation or replication of their results after project exit.

At the Global Programme level, financial sustainability is a concern given the steady decrease in unrestricted framework funding and high dependency on restricted project funding. This could jeopardize the sustainability of the Programme, therefore requiring rethinking of the overall funding model.

The IUCN Programme interventions can create enabling conditions for sustainability, which would benefit from being systematized as part of a result sustainability strategy at the Programme level. Further investment in learning, as well as rethinking the funding model of the organization as a whole, would also strengthen overall sustainability of the Programme and its operations.

Gender Responsiveness and Social Inclusion

Question 6:   To what extent has the IUCN Programme design and implementation been responsive to gender and social inclusion?

The IUCN 2017-2020 Programme document is not strongly responsive to gender and social inclusion in its design, as it does not include clear objectives on those aspects. The Programme is however more responsive in its implementation, with some good examples, but a lot of variability exists between projects. Projects/programs results frameworks are usually weak regarding gender and social inclusion, which does not allow for the good monitoring of their alignment with the IUCN Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy.

IUCN is recognized for its role in influencing policies at the global and national levels on gender aspects, but there is little evidence of mainstreaming of social inclusion and gender equality more generally in IUCN's own policy influencing activities. It seems rather clear however that IUCN aims to increase both the gender responsiveness and the social inclusion dimensions of future planning and execution in the proposed future Programme, including the role of indigenous peoples and their organizations.

The relatively recent establishment of an Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) as an intrinsic part of IUCN's project cycle has influenced project/program design processes in a first instance, and this should ultimately be reflected in their implementation.

Baastel

The planned evaluation of the ESMS will be an opportunity to assess how IUCN delivery models enhance gender equality and social inclusion in conservation

Gender and social inclusion responsiveness is a work in progress throughout IUCN. While a lot has been done to push forward those aspects to date, the new Programme 2021-2024 will be an opportunity to strengthen the role of women, indigenous peoples and overall social inclusiveness in conservation and sustainable development.

Recommendations[1]

Based on the Review findings and conclusions, the Review team proposes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Build a results-based 2021-2024 Programme

The Review highlights a number of weaknesses regarding the design process of the Programme 2017-2020, and the level of integration of projects/programs and Global Thematic programmes into the Global Programme. In the process of designing the 2021-2024 Programme, it is recommended to:

- **Build the Theory of Change** (ToC) of the Programme, clarifying how the Programme intends to contribute to longer term transformative impacts.
- **Clearly differentiate** between (i) which part of the Programme results are expected to be delivered/supported by the IUCN Secretariat, and (ii) which ones are expected from other Union constituencies.
- **Update guidelines for project development** to ensure that IUCN project/program results frameworks are clearly linked to the global quadrennial Programme, with clearly defined expected impacts, outcomes and outputs.

Recommendation 2: Transform IUCN into a learning organization

In order for IUCN to achieve its overall goals and remain at the forefront of nature conservation, it is crucial for the organization to build on a continuous improvement cycle and learn and grow from experience. This is particularly true for IUCN as a Union that can benefit and consolidate experience from a large number and diversity of members. In this regard, it is recommended to:

- **Strengthen the IUCN M&E and reporting system for the 2021-2024 Programme.** As highlighted in this Review, IUCN's M&E system remains a significant accountability and credibility risk for the organization and requires additional improvement to robustly measure the achievements of the Programme and help support IUCN as a learning

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[1] For more details on the recommendations, the reader shall refer to the Recommendations section of the report

Baastel

organization. Several sub-steps are recommended to do so in the Recommendations section of this report.

- **Develop a Programme-level sustainability-for-result strategy.** The sustainability and exit strategies at project level would need to be better tracked to ensure that the enabling conditions and building blocks that IUCN is able to create are effectively put in place across the portfolio, in a more systematic manner. This information should then be consolidated at the Global Programme level, which would provide useful insight on the overall sustainability of the Programme results, and their contribution to the paradigm change that IUCN is aiming to achieve.

- **Develop a mechanism to systematically capture lessons learned at the project, regional, programme, unit, and IUCN Global Programme level.** IUCN and its members produce an enormous quantity of valuable knowledge based on experiments and experience which needs to be captured, aggregated, analyzed and disseminated.

Recommendation 3: Clarify resource mobilization and place innovation at its centre

There is a need to clarify resource mobilization for Programme delivery. How much should be mobilized to deliver program objectives? How should these funds be mobilized? By whom? Given the broad scope of the quadrennial IUCN Programmes, sizing the resources needed to achieve the intended high-level objectives is complicated. Nonetheless, the Secretariat work programme set within the 2021-2024 Programme should clearly identify possible sources of funding, set funding targets and assign responsibilities in mobilizing funds, within a 10-year perspective. It is therefore recommended to:

- **Develop a robust resource mobilization strategy tailored to the IUCN Programme objectives.** Such strategy should explain which type of resources should be mobilized, from which source, and how, to achieve the IUCN Programme overall objective and expected results. It should also identify roles and responsibilities for its implementation, as well as the resources and staff time required to raise funding and develop the portfolio accordingly. The strategy should help IUCN's resource mobilization shift from being reactive and opportunistic to being strategic. It should clearly present the unique role and positioning of IUCN, as well as the specific tasks related to this role that need to be funded, in particular as regards non-project functions.

- **Boost innovation.** Putting innovation at the centre of resource mobilization would enhance IUCN's leading position and reinforce its legitimacy – i.e. attract donors based on the organization's capacity to innovate, to be cutting edge, and to remain relevant to its mission and members. Given the limited space to innovate currently, as IUCN staff is too stretched and must focus on day to day activities, the IUCN Secretariat could consider forming a strategic innovation unit of 2-3 people, directly under the Director General, that would be dedicated to monitoring the quickly changing international context in order to continuously identify and map out key emerging and cutting-edge issues of interest for IUCN. Alternatively, or as a complement, the establishment of an Innovation working group gathering Commissions' members with a diversity profiles, could be explored.

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Recommendation 4: Accompany change

For the last few years, the IUCN Secretariat has gone through a rationalization process which is strongly influencing the organizations' operations. It is therefore important to consider:

- **Providing adequate support and improving internal communication** to help staff understand and build ownership over the organizational changes introduced in the past years to professionalize the Secretariat and increase overall efficiency. This is key for the Union to move forward as a whole towards common objectives.

- **Developing a project analysis tool to help IUCN identify the most relevant interventions to implement.** This is key in recognizing the importance of executing projects on the ground (for technical, financial and positioning reasons), as well as the limits of this delivery model and the distinct expectations from the different categories of membership.

- **Acknowledging and addressing the required changes in competencies induced by the recent evolutions of IUCN organizational structure and portfolio.** The Secretariat must change the type of staff it recruits and ensure that training of human resources is strongly linked to ongoing and future changes in the organization, so that IUCN staff is adequately positioned to perform effectively, as well as adequately equipped in terms of knowledge, skills and expertise to adapt to this changing organization and its changing portfolio.

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ACRONYMS

ACC	African Conservation Centre
AT	Aichi Target
AWF	African Wildlife Foundation
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
ccGAPs	National Climate Change Gender Action Plans
CEC	Commission on Education and Communication
CI	Conservation International
EAC	East African Community
EAC	East African Community
EbA	Ecosystem-based Adaptation
ERM	Enterprise risk management
ERM	Environment and Social Management System
ESARO	Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office
EU	European Union
FLoD	First Line of Defense
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GCU	Global Communications Unit
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GRC	Governance, Risk Management & Compliance
HQ	Head Quarters
IBAT	Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool
IP	Indigenous People
IPO	Indigenous Peoples' Organizations
ITHCP	Integrated Tiger Habitat Conservation Programme
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IWT	Strengthening Community Engagement in Combatting Illegal Wildlife Trade
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators

NBS	Nature-based Solutions
NBS	Nature-based solutions
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee
ORMACC	Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean Regional Office
PAAS	Project Appraisal and Approval System
PMER	Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation and Risk unit
RLTS	RedList of Threatened Species
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TFCAs	Transfrontier Conservation Areas
ToC	Theory of Change
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WCC	World Conservation Congress
WWF	World Wildlife Foundation

Note to the Reader: in this report, the word "programme" follows spelling habits within IUCN:

- "Programme" refers to the Quadriennal Programme(s), such as the 2017-2020 Programme subject of this Review;
- "program", usually used as "projects/programs", refers to individual projects and programmes that together constitute the project portfolio of IUCN, under the quadrennial "Programme";
- "programme" is used for IUCN Global Thematic Programmes