

# Learning and sharing to improve integrated conservation and development programs

Best practices from Mozambique, Tanzania and Nepal

In 2008, the CARE-WWF Alliance embarked on a unique strategic partnership that seeks to realize coequal conservation and development objectives. The design of the Alliance's flagship project in Mozambique, which launched the same year in the Primeiras e Segundas archipelago, built on the lessons and failures from early integrated conservation and development projects. Because such work is fraught with trade-offs, capturing evidence and communicating lessons learned from integrated program experience has always been central to the Alliance approach. This brief describes evaluation, research, and learning approaches the Alliance has used to advance evidence, lessons, and impacts across its integrated conservation and development portfolio.

## Investing in research and learning in Mozambique

In 2008, the Alliance invested in a socioeconomic and ecological baseline to design an effective flagship project in Primeiras e Segundas. An extensive household survey and several biological assessments were used to design project interventions that took into account the region's complex, social-ecological system. In Mozambique, the Alliance focused subsequent research and learning on evaluating and improving the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of interventions critical to its integrated approach to livelihood security and biodiversity conservation. Qualitative mid-term evaluations in 2010 and 2016 helped to analyze what seemed to be working well and identify necessary course corrections. Follow-up household surveys in 2014 and 2018 provide a mid-term and end-line against which to measure social impact. Throughout the decade, the Alliance created space for learning through exchange visits between Alliance community members and CARE and WWF staff within and between project countries.

The Alliance filled identified evidence gaps through more targeted research studies by staff, expert consultants, and university and government partners. Research with consultant and university Proactive research, opportunistic learning by doing, reflection with partners and stakeholders and consolidation into guidance documents produces actionable lessons for integrated programming.





partners explored: the effects of conservation agriculture on soil stability and water filtration, two important determinants of yields and resilience to climate change impacts; and adoption rates of conservation agriculture practices among Mozambican farmers. Similarly, Alliance research with consultant and government partners addressed the biophysical impacts and social perceptions of community-managed, notake zones for fish stock regeneration (see also, Creating a new kind of protected area: In Mozambique, best practices for influencing policy to empower communities). The Alliance used research about these interventions as a decisionmaking tool, offering a critical evidence base for policy advocacy discussions and other scaling up decisions.

Despite these investments in research and learning, the Alliance in Mozambique simultaneously offers a cautionary tale for integrated conservation and development projects. First, the 2008 household survey was completed before sampling design shortcomings were identified. Since the baseline sampling methodology is critical to establishing statistical significance, detailed oversight is necessary to establish a valid baseline against which impacts can be meaningfully compared in the future. Meanwhile, biological data was not collected with the same rigor or regularity as the social data. This is largely due to the complexity and cost of collecting biological data, especially in marine environments. Finally, lessons identified through exchange visits and mid-term evaluations did not always lead to implementation of recommended project adaptations due to limited funding. Budgeting during proposal development must take into account the expense and challenge of biological data collection and the necessity of adaptive project management. These shortcomings offer important insights for ensuring that research and learning investments effectively and efficiently drive conservation and development results.

# Reflective learning engages stakeholders for adaptive management in Tanzania

The Alliance in Tanzania took a less research-based and more reflective approach to adaptive management based on program experience. In Nachingwea, the Alliance team uses an Alliance lessons learned template as a framework for reflection with stakeholders. The template was designed, based on best practice, as a step-wise process to help staff identify what has gone well, what has not gone as planned, and why. The template also challenges staff to articulate a succinct summary of the lessons learned, to provide supporting evidence, and to identify what they will do differently.

In Tanzania, these annual reflection meetings with diverse stakeholders have helped to capture lessons and keep interventions on target. In November 2016, the team facilitated the first annual, multi-stakeholder meeting since the beginning of the pilot project the previous December. Participants were divided into three groups-beneficiaries, village leaders, and District government representatives-to gather distinct perspectives on the project's successes and challenges. The project team then compiled and synthesized the three groups' results. Stakeholders concluded that five aspects of the project were working well, while two were deemed less effective. The groups articulated reasons for these determinations and recommendations for improvement; the synthesized findings were presented to the participants for further discussion.

In 2017, Alliance staff, government, and project participants agreed that freshwater management presented among the project's greatest challenges to sustainability. Farmers in a community called Kiegei B were reluctant to stop cultivating rice and vegetables in the fertile zone near the river. As such, the project team agreed that additional training on water resources management and laws was critical; for instance, the Alliance socialized the legal prohibition on farming within 60 meters of a natural water body. The team also prioritized well construction in the community and organized a learning exchange between influential leaders and farmers in Kiegei B and a community that had overcome similar livelihood concerns to benefit from sustainable natural resource management. Finally, the project resolved to engage other influential community members in a Community Score Card exercise to deepen



Villagers participate in a community scorecard exercise in Mbondo Village, Tanzania.

understanding and accountability around the importance of good governance of village water and forest resources (see also, *Effective strategies for improving policy implementation and law enforcement: at the community and district level in Tanzania*).

As explored in depth in Successful approaches for promoting best-practice adoption: Lessons for sustainable community-based natural resource management in Tanzania, these project adaptations successfully convinced a reluctant community to adopt more sustainable natural resource management practices. In short, the Alliance in Tanzania team effectively used a participatory learning approach to quickly identify what wasn't working, as well as valuable insights about what's working well, to adapt and prioritize approaches for subsequent integrated programming.

### Systematic learning and documentation for impact at scale in Nepal

The Alliance in Nepal's approach to learning includes the best practices of research as a decision-making tool, as in Mozambique, and collaborative learning, as in Tanzania. The Hariyo Ban program—a USAID-funded consortium of WWF, CARE, the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal and the National Trust for Nature Conservation illustrates how proactive, strategic learning with diverse partners can drive adaptive management to improve integrated programming at scale.

Hariyo Ban established a systematic learning approach throughout the program cycle to understand and communicate what works and what doesn't, and to adapt programmatic approaches accordingly. Systematic learning encompasses learning from existing literature and knowledge, learning proactively around agreed questions through research and experience with regular reflection, learning by doing, and taking advantage of learning during windows of opportunity that may emerge. For instance, existing community-based and ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation formed the basis of early adaptation program design. Recognizing knowledge gaps, program staff and consortium partners proactively developed challenging research and learning questions to be answered as part of the project's learning agenda. One example from the first phase of

Hariyo Ban (2011-2016) was: "How can a river basin approach help to integrate conservation, adaptation, and payments for ecosystem services (PES), and what are the challenges?"

During implementation, regular meetings were held to reflect on project experiences, study intervention successes and challenges, and synthesize lessons from research and experience. An important lesson that emerged from community adaptation work is that climate adaptation cannot be achieved by working only at community scale. Larger scale interventions that engage upstream and downstream stakeholders collaboratively—e.g., reforesting the upper parts of a catchment to reduce the risk of floods and landslides that

> Systematic, multi-level learning in Nepal, village reflection meetings and learning visits in Tanzania, and collaborative learning with external researchers in Mozambique highlight the broad spectrum of practices that the Alliance has used effectively to capture and communicate lessons learned.

can result from more intense rainfall in the lower catchment—are required for effective climate adaptation. An example of opportunistic learning comes from recovery interventions that Hariyo Ban supported after the devastating and tragic earthquake of 2015. The Ghorka Earthquake caused many landslides and the project learned about the value and limitations of participatory bioengineering approaches in restoring landslide sites in watersheds to reduce future disaster risk.

This combination of proactive, learningby-doing and opportunistic learning approaches proved critical to developing Hariyo Ban's approach to integrated water resources management. One pilot PES activity in the project initially focused on reducing siltation in the Marshyangdi River with scattered, site-based interventions. Learning from results of the pilot and the integrated river basin approach elsewhere, the team shifted the intervention toward integrated watershed management planning. This helped the intervention to go beyond siltation control, engaging upstream and downstream stakeholders through a single plan at a larger scale to integrate terrestrial and freshwater conservation, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and carbon sequestration while ensuring economic benefits for communities. Including the river basin question in the learning agenda helped the Nepal team to reflect on this approach and take advantage of synergies across project components. The program's mid-term evaluation was also valuable in affirming the importance of taking this approach to scale.

The severity and unpredictability of climate change impacts in Nepal underlines the importance of learning for adaptive management to build human and ecosystem resilience from community to river-basin scales. The program has published extensively about its programmatic approaches as lessons learned briefs, practical tools and guidance documents. In Hariyo Ban Phase II (2016-2021), these disasterresilient, climate-adaptive methods for



As a result of its learning, the Hariyo Ban Program worked with stakeholders at different levels to combine community-level climate adaptation with larger scale climate-sensitive watershed management in order to build human and ecosystem resilience.

river basin management will be scaled up in collaboration with local authorities

#### Conclusion

Learning approaches in Nepal include and build out best practices also used by the Alliance in Mozambique and Tanzania - research as a decision-making tool and regular reflection meetings. In Tanzania and Nepal, reflection with stakeholders on lessons learned through experience has provided strategic insights to drive the adaptive management process that characterizes the Alliance's dynamic, evidence-based approach to integrated programming. While the global Alliance facilitated identification of a set of common learning questions in Mozambique and Tanzania mid-way through programming, identification of a strategic learning agenda upfront is clearly more effective. Hariyo Ban's consistent investment in addressing its learning questions-whether through planned research or reflection or more opportunistic learning-by-doing-sets the Nepal consortium apart.

Broader application of Hariyo Ban's

multi-pronged approach to programmatic learning stands to enhance learning and adaptation practices across the Alliance portfolio. Engagement with relevant partners and stakeholders around a proactive learning agenda helps ensure that scarce time and human and financial resources are utilized to advance knowledge around the highest priorities for program impact. Capturing and documenting lessons with diverse partners makes them more relevant to a wide range of stakeholders. Hariyo Ban's publication of the program's lessons-todate in the form of practical guidance makes them accessible for adoption by local to global practitioners. Strategic use of these guidance documents could strengthen the sound foundation that the Alliance has laid for capturing, communicating and applying lessons learned for adaptive project management in Mozambique and Tanzania. Continuous learning and adaptation are critical to improving integrated approaches in order to accelerate and scale up conservation and development impacts.

This learning series was co-authored by EcoAgriculture Partners and the Alliance.

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