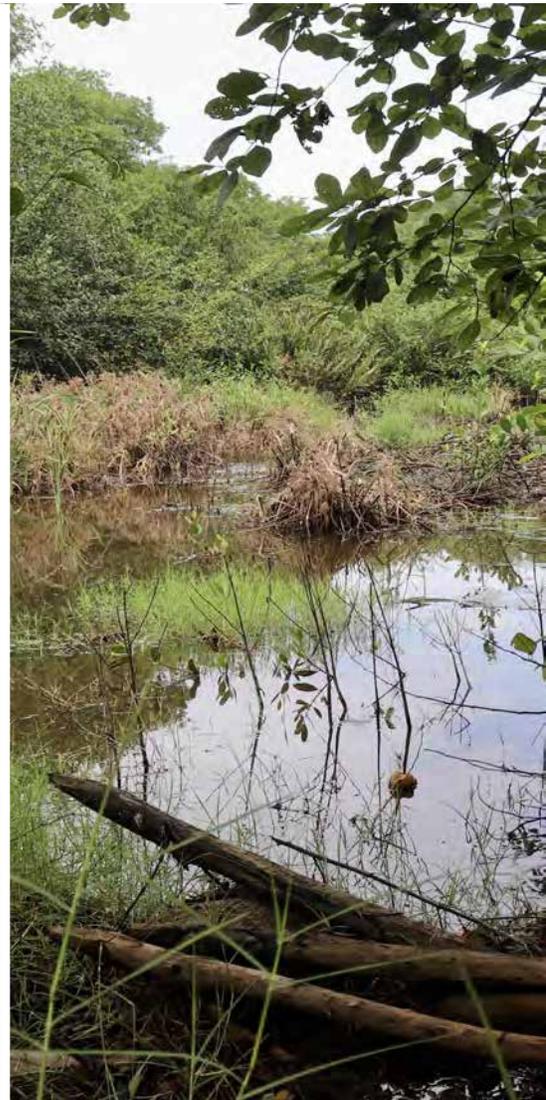




# Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs): concept guide and guidelines for their identification and monitoring in Central America

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## Acknowledgments

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## About this guide

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“Other effective area-based conservation measures” (OECMs) represent an opportunity to recognize social stakeholders’ efforts in biodiversity conservation and quantify such efforts at a national level. However, it also means an opportunity for social stakeholders to consolidate biodiversity conservation processes and generate additional opportunities for sustainable human well-being. OECMs represent an important opportunity to achieve national and international goals for restoration, mitigation and adaptation to climate change. In this sense, this guide serves as a complement to the guide for the implementation of Target 3 (30x30) of the Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity ([CBD](#)) (WWF and IUCN WCPA 2023).

The main objective of this guide for identifying, evaluating and monitoring OECMs is to provide a tool to help governmental and civil society stakeholders engaged in strengthening biodiversity conservation, management and restoration actions recognize their contributions to biodiversity conservation in the Central American region. Therefore, it provides an instrument that allows for the continuity of the process, planning strengthening processes, and concrete actions to achieve OECM objectives beyond mere identification.

In addition to presenting guidelines for identifying and monitoring OECMs, the document synthesizes the OECMs’ conceptual framework. By consolidating this information, which has been relatively scattered until now, users can more easily implement proposed criteria and indicators for assessment. Also, integrating indicators as a necessary part of the evaluation structure enables the design of monitoring processes to evaluate the fulfillment of the OECMs’ objectives and promote continuous management improvements. Therefore, the tool broadens the scope of published documents primarily designed to identify OECMs.

This guide compiles the best available knowledge on the subject. As such, it has been constructed based on the guidelines established by the CBD and IUCN, the technical bodies designated to generate global guidelines, and the information generated in other countries.

The guide is a complement and can be used along with other related instruments (Jonas et al. 2023). The development of this present instrument included key elements from said guidelines.

As a complement, this guide underwent a consultation process with government authorities and civil society in Costa Rica, Honduras and El Salvador. Additionally, to assess the effectiveness of using this tool, it was implemented in two potential OECMs in El Salvador and Honduras, which produced positive outcomes regarding the tool's comprehensibility, practicability, applicability, and usefulness. As a result, the guide includes two case studies in areas where IUCN is currently carrying out activities to showcase how the tool can be used to identify OECMs and evaluate their management effectiveness.

The input received from this consultation process has been valuable not only in enhancing the technical proposal but also in understanding the feasibility and necessary improvements for implementing OECMs. Additionally, it helped tailor this instrument to meet the requirements and socio-ecological conditions of the Central American region.





# 1. International framework: The Convention on Biological Diversity

## 1.1. The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Biodiversity conservation efforts focus primarily on establishing and strengthening national public systems of protected areas. Nevertheless, various public and private stakeholders, local organizations, and Indigenous peoples have undertaken biodiversity conservation actions over the years.

These efforts have different names in different countries and regions and need to be recognised and linked to national conservation systems. While certain countries like Canada have attempted to do so, it is the bodies of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that give this recognition a global scope. For instance, the Programme of Work on Protected Areas highlights the importance of including other forms of conservation in addition to protected areas (SBSTA-2003).

Thus, the Plan's objectives could be achieved not only through protected area systems but also through OECMs (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2010, Jonas et al. 2018). This, in turn, is a significant step towards acknowledging that improving governance quality through greater participation, social inclusion<sup>1</sup>, and other types of governance arrangements can contribute decisively to reaching national and international goals.

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1 cf: National Gender and Climate Change Plans of Panama, Guatemala and Belize.

Panama: <https://www.undp.org/es/panama/publicaciones/plan-nacional-de-genero-y-cambio-climatico>

Belize: <https://networkedintelligence.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Belize-NCCGAP-FINAL-VERSION-27June2022.pdf>

Guatemala: [https://www.marn.gob.gt/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd\\_category\\_id=820&wpfd\\_file\\_id=25979&token=&preview=1](https://www.marn.gob.gt/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=820&wpfd_file_id=25979&token=&preview=1)

During the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties held in 2018, the CBD adopted a definition for the concept of OECMs, following work carried out by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice, with support from the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas. This working group developed the guidance for identifying OECMs, which was later discussed within the framework of the Convention and is the starting point of the present document (IUCN-WCPA Working Group on OECMs 2021).

During the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties held in 2018, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted a definition for OECMs based on the work by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice, with support from the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas. This working group developed the guidance for identifying OECMs that was later discussed within the Convention's framework and became the starting point of the present document (IUCN-WCPA Working Group on OECMs 2021).

## 1.2. The CBD's Global Biodiversity Framework and OECMs<sup>2</sup>

During the [Fifteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties](#) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, a post-2020 global biodiversity framework was adopted as a stepping stone towards the [2050 Vision of "Living in Harmony with Nature"](#).

The framework's objective is to encourage governments, Indigenous peoples and local communities, civil society, and the business sector to take immediate and transformative action to achieve the outcomes described in its vision, mission, goals, and targets. This will help achieve the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity, its Protocols, and other biodiversity-related multilateral agreements, processes, and instruments.

The framework recognizes that urgent policy action is necessary on a global, regional and national scale to transform economic, social and financial models so that the trends that have exacerbated biodiversity loss can be stabilised within the next ten years (by 2030). This will allow for the recovery of natural ecosystems over the next 20 years and net improvements by 2050, thus achieving the Convention's vision of "living in harmony with nature by 2050".

The framework has four long-term targets related to the Biodiversity Vision for 2050. Each target has a set of milestones to measure, in 2030, the progress towards achieving the long-term targets.

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<sup>2</sup> Section summarised from the document CBD/COP/DEC/15/4; 19 December, 2022. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf>

In addition, it has 23 action-oriented targets for immediate action for the decade and into 2030. The OECMs are a key component in achieving and directly contributing to at least three area-based proposed targets: Targets 1, 2, and 3 (Box 1). Target 1 on "participatory, integrated and inclusive biodiversity spatial planning and/or effective management processes addressing land and sea-use change" overlaps with Target 3, "integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes, and oceans." Target 3 will be an important planning component for Target 1. Target 2 is also known as "30x30," which calls for the effective restoration of "at least 30 percent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and marine and coastal ecosystems" by 2030 (WWF and IUCN WCPA 2023).

**Box 1.** Targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework where OECMs are fundamental for their achievement.

#### **Target 1**

Ensure that all areas are under participatory, integrated and biodiversity inclusive spatial planning and/or effective management processes addressing land- and sea-use change, to bring the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance, including ecosystems of high ecological integrity, close to zero by 2030, while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

#### **Target 2**

Ensure that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and marine and coastal ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity.

#### **Target 3**

Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

In addition, OECMs are fundamental conservation instruments that contribute to achieve other framework targets, such as those related to genetic conservation and ensuring human well-being.

This means that in addition to protected areas, countries will have the opportunity to promote OECMs as a possibility to advance their international commitments.

In cases where the viability of protected areas may be limited by institutional, legal, or other factors, or where the declaration of new protected areas could generate conflicts with local communities, such as Indigenous peoples, OECMs are particularly important because they become an opportunity to achieve conservation goals while also promoting human well-being.





## 2.

# Definition and criteria for identification

### 2.1. Concept definition and criteria for their identification

The CBD, in decision 14/8 of 2018, adopts the definition of OECMs (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2018):

“A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity,<sup>1</sup> with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values”.

According to the same CBD, four major criteria were established for identifying OECMs (Figure 1) and which should be evaluated (see Section 4).



Figure 1. Criteria for identifying OECMs according to the CBD.  
Source: Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2018).

These criteria generally start from the principle that an OECM is not and does not overlap with a protected area (Criterion A), Figure 1, as defined by IUCN (Dudley 2008). In addition, it must be proven that the area contributes positively to biodiversity conservation (Criterion C) and that its functionality and other conservation values are maintained over time and space (Criterion D). To fulfill these requirements, OECMs must demonstrate adequate management capacity and governance arrangements (Criterion B).

Table 1 presents a set of guidelines included in the CBD decision 14/8 of 2018. These support and guide each criterion (B-D) to clarify their objectives and scope.

In addition, these indicators were considered for the identification, evaluation and monitoring of OECMs.

Table 1. Scope of criteria established for identifying OECMs according to decision 14/8 of the CBD (Annex III).

<b>Criterion A: Area is not currently recognized as a protected area</b>	
<b>Not a protected area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The area is not currently recognized or reported as a protected area or part of a protected area; it may have been established for another function.</li> </ul>
<b>Criterion B: Area is governed and managed</b>	
<b>Geographically defined space</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Size and area are described, including in three dimensions where necessary.</li> <li>Boundaries are geographically delineated.</li> </ul>
<b>Legitimate governance authorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governance has legitimate authority and is appropriate for achieving <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity within the area.</li> <li>Governance by indigenous peoples and local communities is self-identified in accordance with national legislation and applicable international obligations.</li> <li>Governance reflects the equity considerations adopted in the CBD.</li> <li>Governance may be by a single authority and/or organization or through collaboration among relevant authorities and provides the ability to address threats collectively.</li> </ul>

**Managed**

- Managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained outcomes for the conservation of biological diversity.
- Relevant authorities and stakeholders are identified and involved in management.
- A management system is in place that contributes to sustaining the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity.
- Management is consistent with the ecosystem approach with the ability to adapt to achieve expected biodiversity conservation outcomes, including long-term outcomes, and including the ability to manage a new threat.

**Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to *in situ* conservation of biodiversity****Effective**

- The area achieves, or is expected to achieve, positive and sustained outcomes for the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity.
- Threats, existing or reasonably anticipated ones are addressed effectively by preventing, significantly reducing or eliminating them, and by restoring degraded ecosystems.
- Mechanisms, such as policy frameworks and regulations, are in place to recognize and respond to new threats.
- To the extent relevant and possible, management inside and outside the other effective area-based conservation measure is integrated.

**Sustained over long term**

- The other effective area-based conservation measures are in place for the long term or are likely to be.
- “Sustained” pertains to the continuity of governance and management and “long term” pertains to the biodiversity outcome

***In situ* conservation of biological diversity**

- Recognition of other effective area-based conservation measures is expected to include the identification of the range of biodiversity attributes for which the site is considered important (e.g. communities of rare, threatened or endangered species, representative natural ecosystems, range restricted species, key biodiversity areas, areas providing critical ecosystem functions and services, areas for ecological connectivity).

**Information and monitoring**

- Identification of other effective area-based conservation measures should, to the extent possible, document the known biodiversity attributes, as well as, where relevant, cultural and/or spiritual values, of the area and the governance and management in place as a baseline for assessing effectiveness.
- A monitoring system informs management on the effectiveness of measures with respect to biodiversity, including the health of ecosystems.
- Processes should be in place to evaluate the effectiveness of governance and management, including with respect to equity.
- General data of the area such as boundaries, aim and governance are available information.

**Criterion D: Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values**

Valores culturales, espirituales, socioeconómicos y otros valores relevantes a nivel local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance and management measures identify, respect and uphold the cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values of the area, where such values exist.</li> <li>• Governance and management measures respect and uphold the knowledge, practices and institutions that are fundamental for the <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity.</li> </ul>
Ecosystem functions and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecosystem functions and services are supported, including those of importance to indigenous peoples and local communities, for other effective area-based conservation measures concerning their territories, taking into account interactions and trade-offs among ecosystem functions and services, with a view to ensuring positive biodiversity outcomes and equity.</li> <li>• Management to enhance one particular ecosystem function or service does not impact negatively on the sites overall biological diversity.</li> </ul>

Applying these criteria in a general manner can help identify a potential group of OMECs, as shown in Table 2. These examples enhance the understanding of the concept and emphasize the importance of having specific indicators to assess compliance with a given criterion in each particular case, which forms an essential component of this guide.

Table 2. General examples of potential OECMs

Likely	Unlikely
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous territories / Communal lands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban parks.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some marine and coastal areas protected for reasons other than conservation (e.g., sites with permanent or temporary fishing bans).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary fishing bans.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some watersheds or parts of watersheds for cities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensively used pastures for livestock production.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seascapes or landscapes whose objectives are focused on the management/conservation of a limited number of biodiversity elements (e.g. particular fishing bans for individual species).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oceanic areas or areas for forest management for large-scale extraction.</li> </ul>

Source: IUCN-WCPA working group on OECMs 2021.

## 2.2. Management objectives as a starting point for identifying OECMs

The main difference between an OECM (Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures) and a protected area lies in their objectives. A protected area's primary objective is nature conservation, while an OECM focuses on effective *in situ* biodiversity conservation, regardless of its objectives. While the main objective of protected areas is nature conservation management, the same is not necessarily true in OECMs.

Thus, the following set of objectives is the first step to identifying OECMs (see Section 4) (IUCN-WCPA working group on OECMs 2021):

- i) Primary conservation. Refers to areas that conform to the IUCN definition of a “protected area” but are not officially designated as such.
- ii) Secondary conservation. Refers to areas where biodiversity conservation outcomes may be a secondary objective to their management. (For example, watershed management and protection policies that promote effective protection of such watersheds, though the areas are managed with objectives other than conservation).
- iii) Ancillary conservation. Refers to areas that deliver *in situ* biodiversity conservation outcomes as a by-product of management activities, even though biodiversity conservation is not a management objective (e.g., by protecting shipwrecks and war graves in the Orkney Islands, Scapa Flow has allowed for the ancillary conservation of a significant biodiversity pool).



## 2.3. Governance

Governance is one key factor in the effective management of protected and conserved areas. It can be defined as “the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are taken on issues of public concern, and how citizens or other stakeholders have their say” (Graham et al. 2019).

The governance of a specific site should be analysed, evaluated and, where possible, improved to better serve conservation and have a fairer effect on communities. For the purposes of this guide, under the principle of maintaining the OECM identification process, two main dimensions are recommended: i) the type of governance of the site, i.e., who holds the authority, responsibility and accountability for key decisions, regardless of the process used; and ii) the quality of governance, i.e., how well the agreed principles are followed in the decision-making process (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2019).

### 2.3.1. Types of governance

According to the latter authors, four types of governance can be identified as applicable to the context of OECMs (Figure 2).

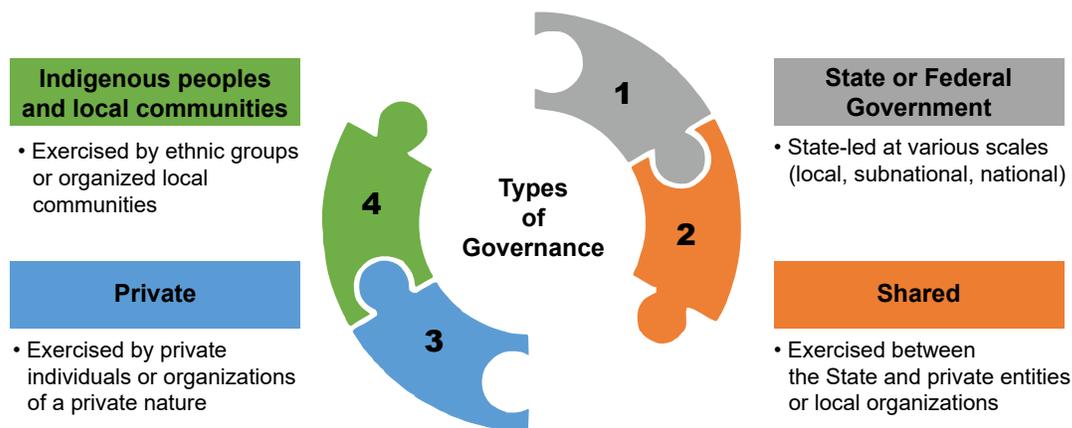


Figure 2. TGovernance types for protected and conserved areas. Source: Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2019.

3 The description of the four governance types is based on Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2019) and will therefore no longer be cited.

## Governance by the State or Federal Government<sup>3</sup>

In this type of governance, one or more government agencies, such as a ministry, a protected area agency reporting directly to the government, or a municipal agency, hold the authority, responsibility, and accountability for managing a particular site. These institutions are also responsible for defining the site's conservation goals and objectives, as well as developing and implementing its management or master plan. The state or federal government may or may not own the site.

### Box 2. A potential OECM: Areas of responsible fishing (ARF) in Costa Rica.

The Fisheries and Aquaculture Law No. 8436 published in La Gaceta on 25 April 2005, intends to regulate and promote fishing and aquaculture activities in their different stages, corresponding to the capture, extraction, processing, transport, commercialization and sustainable use of aquatic species. The conservation, protection and sustainable development of the hydrobiological resources are guaranteed, by means of adequate and suitable methods that assure their permanence for the use of the present and future generations and the relationship between the diverse subjects or agents related to the activity.

ARFs are delimited areas as specified by creation decrees, located outside of protected wild zones.

The effectiveness of governance and management measures for a given area can only be evaluated on-site. To this end, several provisions of interest are established. As per the legal framework, applicant organizations are required to support and respect the management measures outlined in the Fisheries Management Plan approved by the Costa Rican Institute for Fisheries and Aquaculture (INCOPECA). This plan will serve as the management instrument for the established area, and INCOPECA will establish the terms and conditions for the management of these areas, as well as the responsibilities of the organizations involved.

Based on the characteristics mentioned above, ARFs are expected to generate positive benefits for biodiversity. This is because regulations in these areas are implemented to guarantee the long-term sustainable exploitation, management, and conservation of fishery resources. However, it is necessary to verify these at each specific site.

It is important to verify the provision of associated ecosystem services and the cultural, spiritual, and socioeconomic values of the sites. In accordance with the legal framework, these areas are established to promote the development of fishing communities and strengthen the sustainable use, management, and protection of marine resources in Costa Rica's jurisdictional waters.



### **Shared governance**

This type of governance, based on institutional mechanisms and processes, involves several actors who share authority and responsibilities, both formally and informally. It is a widely used model, and in many cases, laws, policies, and administrative arrangements have been put in place to facilitate shared management. In shared governance situations (sometimes called joint governance or joint management), representatives of different interests or constituencies sit on a governance body with joint authority and responsibility to make decisions.

### **Private governance**

Private governance refers to sites controlled and/or owned by individuals, NGOs, or corporations. Private governance represents a wide range of interests, including:

- individuals (where ownership is held by a single person, family, or trust);
- corporations (i.e., companies or groups of people authorised to act as one entity);
- non-governmental organizations (i.e., private or semi-private non-profit organizations that operate to achieve a specific mission and are usually controlled by a board and/or bylaws).

### Box 3. Are private protected areas an OECM?

IUCN defines a protected area as “a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.” (Dudley, 2008)

A private protected area (PPA) is a protected area as previously defined under private governance which includes:

- individuals and groups of individuals;
- non-governmental organizations (ONG);
- corporations: commercial companies and small companies established by groups of private owners to manage groups of PPAs;
- for profit owners;
- research entities such as universities and field stations; or
- religious entities (Stolton et al., 2014, cited by Mitchell et al. 2018).

Mitchell et al. (2018) suggests that the first filter in distinguishing a private protected area from an OECM is to determine whether it meets all the criteria to be considered a protected area. Only then should governance be taken into consideration. The authors clarify that having private governance alone is not sufficient to classify an area as an OECM. If a private area meets the definition of a protected area, it is considered a PPA; otherwise, it may be a private OECM.

Therefore, an area cannot be considered an OECM, if it is a private protected area that the government has not recognised or if the managers of the area do not want it to be reported as a protected area. These two cases are mutually exclusive. In other words, an area can either be a private protected area or an OECM, but not both (Mitchell et al. 2018).

### **Governance by Indigenous peoples and local communities**

The concept of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) is used to describe “natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services, and cultural values voluntarily conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities, both sedentary and mobile, through customary laws or other effective means.”

This type of governance pertains to areas where the control and management of resources are in the hands of Indigenous peoples or local communities through a variety of customary or legal, formal or informal institutions and regulations. An effective governance regime under this type implies that Indigenous peoples or local communities have an institutional structure

that allows them to make decisions and establish rules for land, water, and natural resources. Customary and local institutions can be diverse and relatively complex.

### 2.3.2. Governance quality

The quality of governance can be assessed according to certain general principles of good governance developed by various individuals, nations, and UN agencies. These principles include, among others, legitimacy and voice, leadership, performance, responsibility, accountability, fairness, and rights (Franks and Booker 2018).

The guide for rating good governance of OECMs prioritizes principles and indicators based on the recommendations of Franks and Booker (2018). Therefore, this methodology guide uses the following principles: participation, transparency, accountability, measures to mitigate negative effects on Indigenous populations and local communities, and benefit-sharing.

It should be clarified that if there are possibilities and a need is identified, more detailed governance analyses could be developed. For this, available tools such as the "Site Level Assessment of Governance and Equity" (SAGE)<sup>4</sup> methodology, which has already been applied in the context of the OECMs, can be used (Echeverri et al. 2021).



4 <https://www.iied.org/site-level-assessment-governance-equity-sage>

## 2.4. Indicator selection process

The IUCN conceptual framework for evaluating protected area management effectiveness was used as the technical framework for defining indicators based on CBD criteria for identifying OECMs (see Section 1). The assessment involves six components, namely context, planning, inputs, processes, outcomes, and outputs. Figure 3 illustrates how different areas are integrated and provides questions to guide the assessment of management effectiveness.



Figure 3. The planning cycle for managing and monitoring the effectiveness of protected areas (adapted from Hockings et al. 2006).

Table 3 details key elements and general criteria for such evaluation.

This technical framework helped define the indicators. The selected indicators comply with a series of characteristics that are desirable and compatible with OECM objectives and scopes. This ensures that these indicators are relevant to each of the criteria. The desirable characteristics of the indicators integrated into the tool are:

- a) Relevance. Indicators should be relevant to the technical framework component to be measured.
- b) Measurable. The indicator can be measured qualitatively or expressed as a numerical value on a measuring scale.
- c) Cost-effective. The cost of data collection should be proportional to the quality and quantity of the information yielded by the indicator when measured.

**Table 3.** Conceptual framework for defining OECM indicators (adapted from Hockings et al. 2006).

Management Cycle Component	Context	Planning	Inputs	Process	Outputs	Outcomes
Evaluation Focus.	Assessment of importance, threats and policies.	Assessment of design and planning.	Assessment of resources needed to carry out management.	Assessment of the way management is conducted.	Assessment of the implementation of management programmes and actions; delivery of products and services.	Assessment of the outcomes and the extent to which they achieved objectives.
Criteria that are assessed.	Significance/values. Vulnerability. Stakeholders. National context.	Legislation. Management design and planning.	Resources available to the managing agency. Available resources.	Suitability of management processes and the extent to which processes are being implemented.	Results of management actions Services and products.	Impacts: effects of management in relation to objectives.

- d) Ease of measurement and interpretation. Minimal investment is required to collect the information and interpret the results.
- e) Complementarity. The information in the indicator should complement other indicators so that the interpretation allows for an adequate understanding of each component of the reference framework.
- f) Redundancy. Efforts shall be made to avoid redundancy in the information provided by the indicators as much as possible. In other words, indicators that provide the same information shall be avoided.

It is important to mention that, due to the voluntary nature of the OECMs initiatives, the proposed set of indicators tends to be the minimum necessary to achieve the long-term conservation of biodiversity, which is the ultimate goal of the OECMs. This ensures that the conservation efforts are cost-effective.

It has been suggested that more indicators could be added to the current proposal. However, this would increase costs which could disincentivize their application and hinder the objectives of the OECMs. It is recommended to us this minimum set of selected indicators and adjust the tool in the future once more information on its feasibility and costs is available.



# 3.

## OECMs in the regional context

### 3.1. How can OECMs support biodiversity conservation in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean?

The establishment of protected areas has expanded in the region in recent years, both on land and in marine-coastal areas, thus becoming the backbone of national conservation systems. Given the objectives of the OECMs, these areas are undoubtedly a fundamental complement to the objectives pursued by the protected areas. This is particularly important in cases where protected area systems could be equitable or effective or align their objectives with local values, needs and governance (Alves-Pinto et al. 2021).

OECMs allow the recognition of managed areas that support biodiversity conservation within a wide range of management objectives (Gurney et al., 2021). This recognition can be relevant for rural or indigenous communities to consolidate nature conservation processes, in addition to opening conservation opportunities for different stakeholders and key areas for biodiversity conservation. They also become fundamental instruments for achieving country goals based on conservation priorities identified during systematic conservation planning processes (Herrera Fernández and Finegan 2008).

Some governance models outside protected areas in the region have been reported to be effective in reducing or controlling deforestation. For example, sustainable forest management by communities in the Selva Maya has reduced deforestation, although it has not stopped deforestation. This has important implications for flora and fauna conservation (e.g., Alejo et al. 2020). This trend has also been reported in other Latin American countries.

A study from the Peruvian Amazon found that indigenous peoples' territories were, on average, more effective than state-governed protected areas in preventing deforestation (Schelicher et al 2017). In addition, a study conducted in Chile found that 61 areas managed under land-use rights in fisheries had a positive impact on biodiversity. Some of these areas had fish biomass

and biodiversity levels similar to those in protected areas where all fishing is restricted (Gelcich et al. 2019).

Significant efforts have also been made in the conservation and restoration of ecological connectivity. These biological corridor efforts, which combine biodiversity conservation and sustainable development goals (Herrera et al. 2016), can be strengthened by recognizing them as OECMs or areas within them that qualify as such (e.g., private reserves).

Therefore, efforts to recognize OECMs can improve the distribution of benefits obtained by local biodiversity stakeholders, given they are a fundamental component of these areas. They can also promote gender equity and improve transparency in management. OECMs could, thus, strengthen existing local governance rather than displacing or substantially altering it.



### 3.2. The need for a conceptual and operational framework in the region

Although the tools to identify OECMs continue to be improved and developed, they must be adapted to the biophysical, legal, and socioeconomic context of each region and country. Such is the case of the guide developed for Colombia that takes into consideration the country's unique characteristics and a wide range of potential OECMs. This socio-ecological complexity is repeated throughout the region, highlighting the need for either specific instruments or possible adaptation of existing ones. Furthermore, it is important to discuss these proposals not only with national governments but also with the key actors who manage these OECMs.

### 3.3. Indigenous peoples and local communities in biodiversity conservation and management

The well-being of Indigenous and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) is often linked to biodiversity and associated ecosystem services (IPBES 2022 cite regional study ). The contribution of indigenous peoples and local communities in achieving biodiversity conservation outcomes has been recognised globally (Gannon et al. 2019, IPBES 2022). Furthermore, the involvement of ICCAs is relevant because it increases social equity in conservation outcomes (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2019). In this regard, a positive association has been documented between the degree of engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities in conservation efforts and the achievement of positive ecological and social outcomes across regions, ecosystems, and intervention types (Dawson et al., 2021).

The latter authors concluded that positive outcomes for both well-being and biodiversity conservation are associated with cases where ICCAs play a central role, such as when they have a substantial influence on decision-making or when local institutions that regulate land tenure form a recognised part of governance (Dawson et al. 2021). These findings suggest that equitable conservation, which empowers and supports the stewardship of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, represents the main pathway to effective long-term biodiversity conservation, particularly when upheld in broader laws and policies (Dawson et al. 2021). Thus, OECMs could represent a more effective conservation opportunity through a greater focus on the type and quality of governance and by supporting solutions that strengthen the role, capacity, and rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities.

### 3.4. Barriers and opportunities for OECMs in the region

The recognition of OECMs should be viewed as a process. This means that it is possible that additional efforts may be required to achieve full compliance with the criteria in order to ensure the achievement of biodiversity conservation objectives pursued by this figure. As previously mentioned, this is fundamental for complying with international agreements. Nonetheless, from a local perspective, it represents an opportunity not only to contribute to conservation but also to improve biodiversity management and its benefits for various social stakeholders involved.

Thus, once the identification criteria detailed in this document have been applied, a recommended exercise is to identify the barriers and potential incentives that could be used to drive the consolidation of the OECMs. This should be part of the implementation plan, either at the governmental level or at the level of each of the OECMs evaluated.

The barriers identified may depend on the analysed criteria, as well as the specific context of the OECM being analysed. In other words, these barriers could be particular to each biophysical or socioeconomic context of each territory where the area is located. Table 4, built from the consultation process of this guide in the Central American region, shows examples of the type of barrier that could be faced in the process of OECM consolidation.

Incentives, both monetary and non-monetary, can be fundamental instruments to move forward with consolidating the OECMs. These incentives may even include opportunities for management certification at a global level, with a high degree of international recognition. The site could be included in "The Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas," an IUCN programme designed to help conservation administrations and their partners meet global targets for biodiversity conservation, in particular, the environmental objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (Goals 14 and 15) and the Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, these incentives may already be contemplated in the institutional framework to be channeled with the purpose of supporting the consolidation of the OECMs. This means that these incentives aim to consolidate the conservation efforts made by the managers of these areas and, therefore, the efforts at the national level. Table 4 shows an example in Costa Rica, complementary to the barriers identified.

In this regard, it could be generalised that the authorities responsible for managing and governing potential OECMs require the necessary capacities to identify these areas and demonstrate long-term *in situ* conservation of biodiversity (Jonas et al. 2018). This implies capacity building

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5 <https://www.iucn.org/es/node/33337>

**Table 4.** Synthesis of barriers and potential incentives for consolidating OECMs identified in Central America<sup>6</sup>.

Barriers	Opportunities	Incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiations are not smooth with the organizations present in the territory.</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge or omission in the preparation and implementation of management evaluations.</li> <li>• There is no management committee (biological corridor), nor a governance model.</li> <li>• Limitations in dissemination and communication strategies.</li> <li>• Lack of diagnosis to determine the baseline for the development of monitoring instruments.</li> <li>• Lack of required legal backing.</li> <li>• No management tools are in place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spaces for sharing knowledge and technical capabilities.</li> <li>• Existence of international recognition.</li> <li>• Legal mechanisms exist for conservation and natural resource management processes (e.g. water tariffs, payments for ecosystem services).</li> <li>• The creation of financial strategies.</li> <li>• Continuous improvement tool.</li> <li>• Political advocacy.</li> <li>• Continuity of conservation processes.</li> <li>• If there is a network of OECMs, technical support can be provided for these procedures.</li> <li>• Visibility of conservation efforts in concrete results through planning tools.</li> <li>• Belonging to a peer group; Identification and support.</li> <li>• Structuring fair and equitable governance.</li> <li>• There is a human resource committed to management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved access to information.</li> <li>• Recognition of key stakeholders.</li> <li>• Financial resources.</li> <li>• Recognition (Brand).</li> <li>• Tax exemption.</li> <li>• Include priorities for allocation of payments for environmental services.</li> <li>• Generate income through water tariffs.</li> <li>• Improve technical support from related institutions in terms of their ancestral productive activities (in the case of Indigenous territories) and rescue of their cultural heritage.</li> <li>• Recognition by the State or IUCN.</li> <li>• Existence of a policy for strengthening and developing OECMs, with a budget.</li> <li>• Possible advantage over other private areas (e.g. international cooperation).</li> </ul>

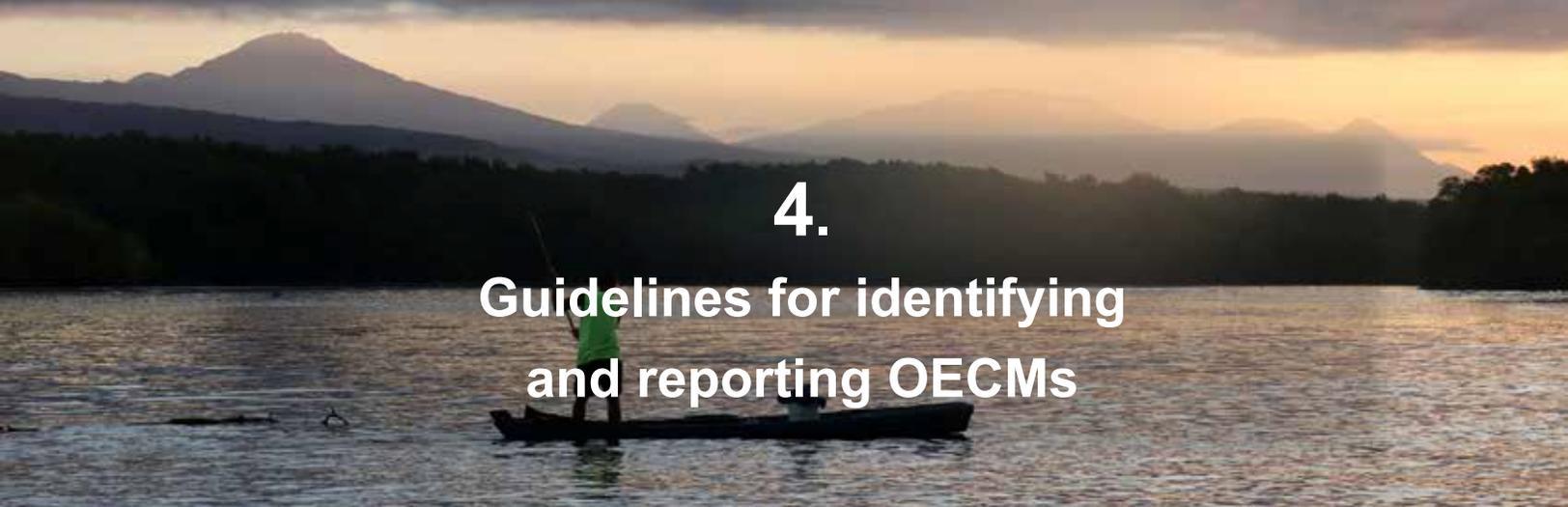
<sup>6</sup> This information was collected during the consultation and revision process of this guide (2022-2023) in Costa Rica, Honduras and El Salvador.

at the local level and engaging local stakeholders in identifying and monitoring OECMs. Often, government agencies have limited capacity, and/or field staff are overburdened with actions.

In addition, more funds will need to be allocated for biodiversity conservation. This will strengthen and create new capacities for managing, monitoring, and reporting OECMs in public and private institutions (Jonas et al., 2018).

In summary, over the past twenty years, the international law and policy of area-based conservation has evolved from a model largely dominated by state-governed protected areas to one that is more inclusive of non-state actors and efforts occurring beyond protected areas, more explicit about its recognition of and support for diverse, effective and equitable forms of governance, and increasingly focused on effective and long-term *in situ* conservation outcomes (Jonas et al. 2021).





# 4. Guidelines for identifying and reporting OECMs

Figure 4 summarises the steps for applying this guide. As such, the guide has four phases: the assessment preparation process (Phase I), preliminary assessment of key criteria (Phase II), full rating of the criteria (Phase III), when applicable, and preparation of the management plan (Phase IV) when deemed necessary. Phase V involves monitoring management effectiveness and compliance with OECM objectives. This is a continuous process that will allow the evaluation of compliance with the proposed criteria and indicators. Each one of them is detailed below.

In order for the process to begin, it requires the prior consensus among governmental authorities, Indigenous peoples or rights holders, as suggested by Jonas et al. (2023).

As a complement to this guide, Annex 6.2 details two case studies on its implementation. In those sites, IUCN is currently implementing conservation measures through the programme "[Linking the Central American Landscape](#)".

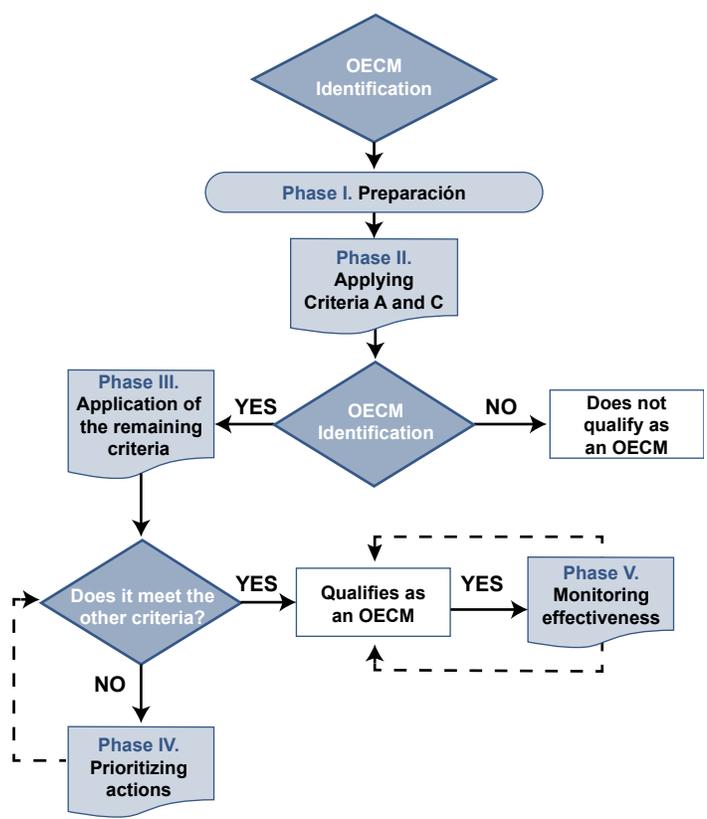


Figure 4. Steps for identifying OECMs.

#### Box 4. Key concepts.

**Conserved areas:** Areas that meet the OECM criteria. CBD and other organizations are increasingly referring to “protected and conserved areas” (see, for example, CBD Decision 14/8 and the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas).

**In-situ conservation:** The conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties (Article 2 of the CBD).

**Management:** Consists of what is done in pursuit of given objectives, as well as the means and actions to achieve such objectives.

**Governance:** The interactions between structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are made and how citizens and other stakeholders have a voice.

In order for governance to be considered "acceptable" it must meet the following attributes: transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation, and responsiveness to the needs of all populations, including vulnerable groups such as Indigenous peoples, youth, women, the elderly, and people with disabilities (Source: OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/es/good-governance/about-good-governance>).

**Stakeholders:** Individual, group or organization who possesses direct or indirect interests and concerns regarding land, water and natural resources, but does not necessarily enjoy a legal or socially recognised title to them.

**Rights holders:** Actors socially endowed with legal or customary with respect to land, water and natural resources.

**Sustainable use:** The use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations (Article 2 of the CBD).

**Cultural and spiritual values:** Refers to recreational, religious, aesthetic, historical and social values related to tangible and intangible benefits that nature and natural features have for people of different cultures and societies, with a particular focus on those that contribute to conservation outcomes (e.g., traditional management practices on which key species, biodiversity or whole ecosystems have become reliant or the societal support for conservation of landscapes for the maintenance of their quality in expression or beauty) and intangible heritage (cultural and spiritual practices).

**Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI):** A concept that aims to understand and address inequalities in power relations between different social groups to ensure equal access to rights, opportunities (ndlr: including participation in governance) and respect for all individuals regardless of their social identity. (Source: IUCN Gender Analysis Guide, 2021 <https://genderandenvironment.org/iucn-gender-analysis-guide/>).

**Gender equity:** The fairness of treatment for women and men according to their respective needs. A gender equity goal often requires measures to rectify the imbalances between the sexes, in particular to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages faced by women. Equity can be understood as the means, whereas equality is the end. Equity leads to equality. (Sources: FIDA, IUCN, <https://genderandenvironment.org/es/glossary/>).

## 4.1. Phase I: Assessment preparation

### 4.1.1. Who participates, and how do they participate in the implementation of this guide

A participatory approach is recommended for stakeholders involved in the governance and management of OECMs in this process of identification and eventual management effectiveness. Despite the central government's preponderant role in officially recognising and reporting OECMs' contributions, local stakeholders' participation in biodiversity conservation processes has proven to generate sustained results. Also, right-holders or authorized parties, including independent entities with the required capacities for this task, may conduct the identification or assessment process.

Thus, a technical team should lead the assessment under a consultation process designed jointly with these local stakeholders. This team is responsible for applying the evaluation criteria and reporting to the appropriate parties. It should also compile the necessary evidence for the assessment and systematise the entire process.

### 4.1.2. Assessment preparation: potential OECMs

The criteria detailed in this section must be used to identify OECMs. Figure 4 summarises the general steps.

In the first phase, solid and reliable evidence must be collected to support the assessment team's decision-making process. The information collected must meet two basic criteria associated with the definition of OMECs, as explained below. If these requirements are met, the team may proceed with collecting information. The assessment team should use this information and record evidence for each criterion. This is not only essential to support the decision but also for any subsequent verification process by a state or international entity.

If the guide is to be applied on a national scale and the process aims towards the eventual officialization of OECMs by government authorities, analysing existing legislation on potential sites is desirable. This analysis can be based on comparing general criteria for identifying OECMs with the current legal framework, as shown in Table 5. This could provide a fairly comprehensive list of potential OECMs in the country, serving as an excellent starting point for an analysis at such a scale. However, if applied to a single site or a small group of sites, the legal analysis could always be an important input to support the OECM identification process.

## 4.2. Phase II: Preliminary assessment

To conduct a preliminary assessment, two key criteria are applied to answer the following questions:

- a) Is the evaluated site a protected area? (See criterion A, Table 3).
- b) Does the evaluated site contribute to the long-term *in situ* conservation of biodiversity? (See criterion C, Section 4.3).

If the answers to both questions are positive, then there is a potential OECM, and the application of the other criteria should continue. The information generated in this step should be integrated later (Table 5) to complete the analysis.

## 4.3. Phase III: Criteria and indicators rating

Table 5 details the assessment criteria based on the indicators outlined in Section 4.2. Table 1 (Section 2) can be used as a reference to understand the objectives of the proposed indicators in greater detail.

The rating scale used is nominal: "Yes," "No," or "Partial." In each case, two additional elements must be documented, such as evidence and justification for the rating. The "Partial" category indicates that the evaluated indicator has been partly fulfilled (see Annex 6.1).

The decision about whether the indicator is met requires supporting evidence for the rating process. This information must be documented and can be used to verify indicator compliance (see Annex 6.1).

It is particularly important to document the rating when any of the criteria are not met. This is because, as shown in Figure 4, it will be necessary to identify the actions required to improve any aspects related to the corresponding indicator. The missing information is collected under the "Missing evidence" column, as shown in Annex 6.1. Therefore, this justification should be precise enough to offer guidance in this matter.

It's worth mentioning that the process outlined can also be used for OECMs that have already been identified. This will enable the assessment of their management effectiveness, for which it's important to collect evidence to support the rating of indicators or evidence that needs to be produced to ensure efficient management, as discussed in Section 4.5.

**Box 5.** Participatory consultation process in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras (2022-2023).

Three workshops were held in these three countries during the last quarter of 2022 and 2023 to review the tool used for identifying OECMs. Local organizations, indigenous peoples, and government representatives participated in these events to provide technical input on the methodology. The participation process not only raised awareness of the importance of OECMs but also their importance of moving forward the agenda to consolidate biodiversity conservation efforts.



Indicator B.1.2. Table 5 is used to assess governance: "Governance quality is acceptable for achieving *in situ* conservation outcomes." The term "acceptable" implies that the indicators selected to evaluate governance (Table 6) have been fully met. Therefore, all other indicators in Table 6 must also be met to comply with this indicator.

Compliance with all proposed indicators is required for the site to be considered an OECM.

Annex 6.1 shows a complementary tool that teams could use to document the two elements mentioned above.

Table 5. Criteria and indicators for identifying, evaluating, and monitoring OECMs.

Criterion A. The site is NOT recognised as a protected area	
Subcriterion	Indicator
A.1. The site is NOT registered as a protected area.	A.1.1. No evidence of official declaration of the site as a protected area.
	A.1.2. The site has no spatial overlap with a protected area.

Criterion B. The area has a defined governance*** and is managed	
Subcriterion	Indicator
B1. Geographically defined area.	B.1.1. The area has defined geographic boundaries, recognised by the corresponding authorities.
B2. <b>Governance</b> of the area ensures the achievement of long-term and sustained conservation results.	B.2.1. Governance quality is <b>acceptable</b> for achieving <i>in situ</i> conservation out-comes (see Table 6 for rating).
B3. Area governed and managed by legitimate authorities	B.3.1. Governance and management agreements have a legitimate legal or other form of recognition (e.g. customary) and support to ensure their long-term continuity.
B4. The area has a defined <b>management</b> model.	B.4.1. The area has a periodically updated plan that defines long-term management objectives and strategic actions, as well as monitoring and constant improvement of conservation actions.
	B.4.2. The management system ensures <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity and provides measures to control future threats to biodiversity.
	B.4.3. Management is linked to relevant stakeholders.
	B.4.4. The management system is adaptable, allowing for continuous improvement.

**Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to in situ conservation of biodiversity**

Subcriterion	Indicator
<p>C.1. Areas are effective in achieving positive <i>in situ</i> biodiversity conservation outcomes.</p>	<p>C.1.1. The area clearly contributes to conservation priorities in at least one of the following ecological values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Rare, threatened, or endangered species or ecosystems.</li> <li>b) Natural ecosystems with little or no representation in the national system of protected areas.</li> <li>c) Ecosystems with a high level of ecological integrity.</li> <li>d) Significant populations of species or ecosystems of restricted distribution.</li> <li>e) Added value of important species (e.g., breeding, nursery, or feeding areas).</li> <li>f) Ecological connectivity in the framework of a network of conservation areas.</li> </ul> <p>C.1.2. Critical threats to biodiversity are identified and actions to control them reduce their negative impact.</p>
<p>C.2. Conservation outcomes are maintained in time and space.</p>	<p>C.2.1. The area has the financial and legal backing required to ensure long-term conservation.</p> <p>C.2.2. Management and governance mechanisms or those related to their legal or other forms of recognition ensure long-term biodiversity conservation out-comes.</p>

**Criterion D. Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values**

Subcriterion	Indicator
<p>D.1. Ecosystem functions and services are conserved.</p>	<p>D.1.1. Management of the area ensures the functionality of long-term ecological processes.</p> <p>D.1.2. The conservation and use of ecosystem services do not compromise biodiversity conservation.</p>
<p>D.2. Cultural, socio-economic and other locally relevant values are respected and adequately managed.</p>	<p>D.2.1. Governance and management identify and respect ecological, cultural, spiritual and socio-economic values where these exist.</p> <p>D.2.2. Governance and management respect the knowledge, practices and institutions that are fundamental to the conservation of the area's biodiversity, taking into account gender and intergenerational differences.</p>

### 4.3.1. Governance quality assessment

Use the indicators detailed in this section to evaluate Criterion B related to governance, specifically Criterion B2 and Indicator B.2.1 in Table 5.

Given that the rating system requires compliance with all the indicators, a 100% score in the "Yes" category is equivalent to a "Yes" in the score for indicator B.2.1 in Table 5. The system requires full compliance with all indicators, i.e., a full 100% "Yes" score. Therefore, Indicator B.2.1 in Table 5 must also be a "Yes."

The quality of governance is assessed using 17 indicators divided into five fundamental principles that characterize good governance (Table 6).

Table 6. Indicators for assessing governance quality of OECMs.

Subcriterion	Indicator
<p>1. Full and effective participation of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making, following the social inclusion approach.</p>	<p>1.1. The necessary mechanisms and platforms are in place for the participation of relevant stakeholders in decision-making.</p> <p>1.2. There is an adequate mechanism for decision-making based on dialogue and consensus-building.</p> <p>1.3. Participants have the material resources and capabilities to participate in decision-making.</p> <p>1.4. There is a process for selecting representatives of the groups that participate in decision-making, and which considers gender equality and social inclusion</p> <p>1.5. Communication mechanisms are in place between representatives and constituents.</p> <p>1.6. The groups represented have an influence on decision-making</p>
<p>2. Transparency is supported by timely and adequate access to relevant information..</p>	<p>2.1. Relevant management information is available in the appropriate formats, including in the language and wording accessible to local stakeholders.</p> <p>2.2. Stakeholders receive the required key management information in a timely manner.</p>

Subcriterion	Indicator
<p>3. Accountability for fulfillment of responsibilities and other actions and inactions.</p>	<p>3.1. Stakeholders involved in site management are aware of their responsibilities.</p> <p>3.2. Accountability and reporting lines within the decision-making structures are clearly defined.</p> <p>3.3. Human and financial resources for management have been defined in accordance with the established management objectives.</p> <p>3.4. The performance of decision-makers is adequately evaluated by linking the quality of results with concrete and adequate incentives and sanctions.</p>
<p>4. Effective measures to mitigate the negative effects of biodiversity conservation management on indigenous peoples and local communities at the site.</p>	<p>4.1. An evaluation of the negative social impacts and their influence on human well-being is conducted.</p> <p>4.2. A strategy is in place to mitigate identified negative impacts, which includes monitoring, appropriate division of responsibilities, and communication with relevant parties.</p> <p>4.3. Negative social impacts are minimized, avoided or eliminated in accordance with the defined strategy.</p>
<p>5. Biodiversity conservation benefits are equitably distributed among stakeholders.</p>	<p>5.1. An evaluation of social benefits and their effect on human well-being is carried out.</p> <p>5.2. A transparent and inclusive strategy has been developed for distributing and accessing benefits.</p> <p>5.3. Benefit-sharing outcomes (quantitative and qualitative) are identified, including beneficiaries.</p>

#### 4.4. Phase IV: Follow-up plan

The area can only be considered an OECM if it meets all evaluated criteria (A, B, C, and D). If any criteria are not met, the recommendation is to analyse the feasibility of correcting the component in question.

There is no minimum number of criteria classified as "No" to rule out an area as an OECM. This will depend on the feasibility of strengthening the respective process. This feasibility study should consider elements related to the necessary human and financial resources and the benefit/cost ratio of the investment, among others.

Based on the summary results, it is possible to create a plan to improve the indicators that are not fully or partially met. The plan should be specific and detailed, serving as the roadmap to comply with the indicators.

This plan should specify the necessary actions required for each indicator, including the time frame, required human and financial resources, and responsible individuals or institutions.



## 4.5. Phase V: Monitoring the effectiveness of OECMs

The Merriam-Webster English dictionary defines “effectiveness” as “having a definite or desired effect,” where “effect” is “the power to bring about a result”<sup>7</sup>.

The management of OECMs involves a range of actions, such as political, legal, technical, administrative, planning, protection, coordination, promotion, interpretation, and education. These actions are undertaken to achieve the OECM's goals. To achieve this, it is important to have the necessary capabilities, capacities, and competencies in place to effectively fulfill the function for which the OECM was established (Adapted from Cifuentes et al. 2000). This assessment aims to continuously improve management's adaptive capacity, ensuring the achievement of biodiversity conservation objectives.

Monitoring involves the systematic collection of information over time to improve continuous management in OECMs. It is a crucial component of adaptive management, given that it helps to assess whether the plan is being followed as expected and, therefore, continue with what works, adjust what is not working, and eliminate activities that clearly have no impact (Conservation Measures Partnership 2020). In turn, the assessment involves rating or appraising achievements against predetermined criteria that generally correspond to the objectives of a given OECM.

This monitoring should be carried out using the same set of indicators used to duly recognise the OECM (Tables 5 and 6).

The assessment will require verification means, which are reliable and trustworthy information sources that support the objective rating of each indicator. Given that a site must comply with all indicators to qualify as an OECM, this principle is maintained in the assessment of management effectiveness. Therefore, for the OECM to be effective, it must comply with 100% of the indicators.

Annex 6.1 provides a tool for assessing management effectiveness. Additionally, the case studies outlined in section 6.2 can serve as a reference for understanding and planning processes for assessing management effectiveness for a particular OECM.

Based on the information in Annex 6.1(missing evidence), processes can be designed to prioritize actions that improve the site's management capacity. This should be integrated into a

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7 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/effectiveness>

report with respective actions and responsible parties for follow-up. This step is connected to the "Monitoring Plan" mentioned in the previous section.

Annex 6.2 presents two case studies that demonstrate how the indicators were used to assess the management effectiveness of two potential OECMs in Central America.



# 5.

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# 6. Annex

## 6.1. Tool to support the identification and assessment of OECMs' management effectiveness

Criterion B. The area is governed* and managed						
Subcriterion	Indicator	Rating			Means of verification	Missing evidence
		Yes	No	Partial		
B.1. Geographically defined area.	B.1.1. The area has defined geographic boundaries.					
B.2. <b>Governance</b> of the area ensures the achievement of long-term and sustained conservation results.	B.2.1. Governance quality is <b>acceptable</b> for achieving <i>in situ</i> conservation outcomes.					
B.3. Area governed and managed by legitimate authorities.	B.3.1 Governance and management agreements have a legitimate legal or other form of recognition and support to ensure their long-term continuity.					
B.4. The area has a defined management model.	B.4.1. The area has a periodically updated plan that defines long-term management objectives and strategic actions, as well as monitoring and constant improvement of conservation actions.					

Criterion B. The area is governed* and managed						
Subcriterion	Indicator	Rating			Means of verification	Missing evidence
		Yes	No	Partial		
	B.4.2. The management system ensures <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity and provides measures to control future threats to biodiversity.					
	B.4.3 Management is linked to relevant stakeholders.					
	B.4.4. The management system is adaptable, allowing for continuous improvement.					

\* For governance quality assessment see Section 4.3.

Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity						
Subcriterion	Indicator	Rating			Means of verification	Missing evidence
		Yes	No	Partial		
C.1. Areas are effective in achieving positive <i>in situ</i> biodiversity conservation outcomes.	C.1.1. The area clearly contributes to conservation priorities in at least one of the following ecological values:					
	a) Rare, threatened, or endangered species or ecosystems. b) Natural ecosystems with little or no representation in the national system of protected areas. c) Ecosystems with a high level of ecological integrity.					

**Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to *in situ* conservation of biodiversity**

Subcriterion	Indicator	Rating			Means of verification	Missing evidence
		Yes	No	Partial		
	<p>d) Significant populations of species or ecosystems of restricted distribution.</p> <p>e) Added value of important species (e.g., breeding, nursery, or feeding areas).</p> <p>f) Ecological connectivity in the framework of a network of conservation areas.</p>					
	C.1.2. Critical threats to biodiversity are identified and actions to control them reduce their negative impact.					
C.2. Conservation outcomes are maintained in time and space.	C.2.1. The area has the financial and legal backing required to ensure long-term conservation.					
	C.2.2. Management and governance mechanisms or those related to their legal or other forms of recognition ensure long-term biodiversity conservation outcomes.					

Criterion D. Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values						
Subcriterion	Indicator	Rating			Means of verification	Missing evidence
		Yes	No	Partial		
D.1. Ecosystem functions and services are conserved.	D.1.1. Management of the area ensures the functionality of long-term ecological processes.					
	D.1.2. The conservation and use of ecosystem services do not compromise biodiversity conservation.					
D.2. Cultural, socio-economic and other locally relevant values are respected and adequately managed.	D.2.1. Governance and management identify and respect ecological, cultural, spiritual and socio-economic values where these exist.					
	D.2.2. Governance and management respect the knowledge, practices and institutions that are fundamental to the conservation of the area's biodiversity, taking into account gender and intergenerational differences.					

Indicators for assessing governance quality of OECMs						
Subcriterion	Indicator	Rating			Means of verification	Missing evidence
		Yes	No	Partial		
1. Full and effective participation of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making.	1.1. The necessary mechanisms and platforms are in place for the participation of relevant stakeholders in decision-making.					
	1.2. There is an adequate mechanism for decision-making based on dialogue and consensus-building.					
	1.3. Participants have the material resources and capabilities to participate in decision-making.					
	1.4. There is a process for selecting representatives of the groups that participate in decision-making, and which considers gender equality and social inclusion.					
	1.5. Communication mechanisms are in place between representatives and constituents					
	1.6. The groups represented have an influence on decision-making.					
2. Transparency is supported by timely and adequate access to relevant information.	2.1. Relevant management information is available in the appropriate formats, including in the language and wording accessible to local stakeholders.					
	2.2. Stakeholders receive the required key management information in a timely manner.					

Indicators for assessing governance quality of OECMs						
Subcriterion	Indicator	Rating			Means of verification	Missing evidence
		Yes	No	Partial		
3. Accountability for fulfillment of responsibilities and other actions and inactions.	3.1. Stakeholders involved in site management are aware of their responsibilities.					
	3.2. Accountability and reporting lines within the decision-making structures are clearly defined.					
	3.3. Human and financial resources for management have been defined in accordance with the established management objectives.					
	3.4. The performance of decision-makers is adequately evaluated by linking the quality of results with concrete and adequate incentives and sanctions.					
4. Effective measures to mitigate the negative effects of biodiversity conservation management on indigenous peoples and local communities at the site.	4.1. An evaluation of the negative social impacts and their influence on human well-being is conducted.					
	4.2. A strategy is in place to mitigate identified negative impacts, which includes monitoring, appropriate division of responsibilities, and communication with relevant parties.					
	4.3. Negative social impacts are minimized, avoided or eliminated in accordance with the defined strategy.					

Indicators for assessing governance quality of OECMs						
Subcriterion	Indicator	Rating			Means of verification	Missing evidence
		Yes	No	Partial		
5. Biodiversity conservation benefits are equitably distributed among stakeholders.	5.1. An evaluation of social benefits and their effect on human well-being is carried out.					
	5.2. A transparent and inclusive strategy has been developed for distributing and accessing benefits.					
	5.3. Benefit-sharing outcomes (quantitative and qualitative) are identified, including beneficiaries.					



## 6.2. Application of the methodology for identifying, assessing and monitoring OECMs in Central America: case studies

Case study of the Karataska lagoon system, Honduras, Herrera-F, (2023a) and case study of the Barra de Santiago Mangrove, Herrera-F (2023b).

### Case study 1: The Karataska Lagoon System, Honduras

#### Site description<sup>1</sup>

The Karataska Lagoon System (SLK, Spanish acronym) is located in the department of Gracias a Dios, and it covers an area of 3,700 km<sup>2</sup>. Its physical boundaries are as follows: it is bordered by the Patuca River to the west and the Segovia River to the east; to the north, it extends into the Exclusive Artisanal Fishing Zone in the Caribbean Sea, while to the south, it extends into the plains of Puerto Lempira. Please refer to Figure 1 for a visual representation of its location.

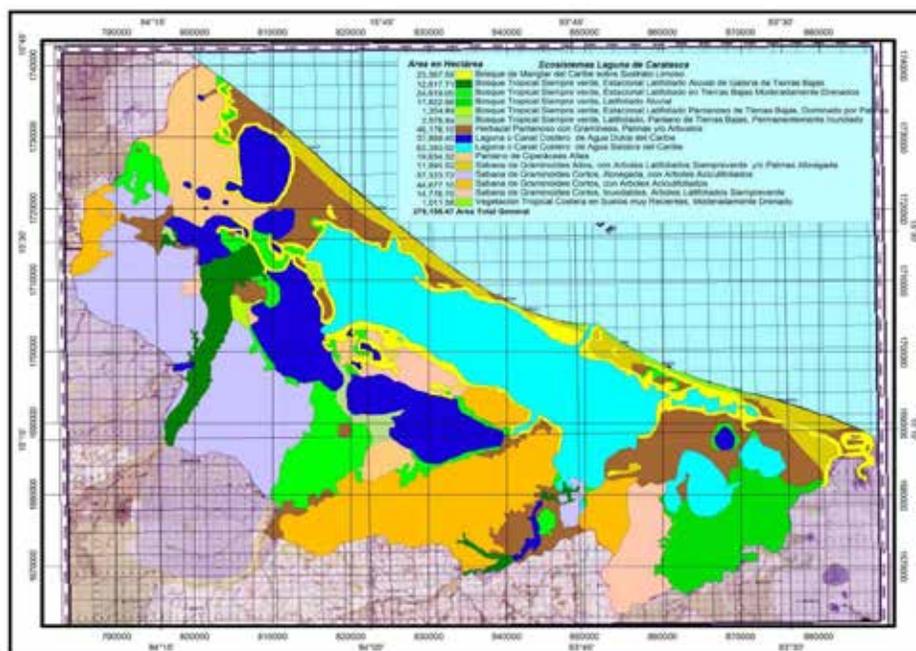


Figure 1. The Karataska Lagoon System and its ecosystem diversity. Source: Carrasco and Colindres (2020)<sup>2</sup>.

- 1 The information in this section is mainly taken from the Fisheries Governance Committee in the Karataska Lagoon System (2020) and the Fishing and Aquaculture Management Plan for the Karataska Lagoon System. <https://www.goalglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/GOAL-Honduras-MiPesca-PMPA-SLK-Diagramado.pdf>
- 2 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343657284\\_Diciembre\\_2011\\_Proyecto\\_Conservacion\\_de\\_la\\_Biodiversidad\\_de\\_los\\_Paisajes\\_Productivos\\_de\\_la\\_Moskitia\\_GEFNUD\\_Plan\\_de\\_Manejo\\_del\\_Sistema\\_Lagunar\\_de\\_Karataska](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343657284_Diciembre_2011_Proyecto_Conservacion_de_la_Biodiversidad_de_los_Paisajes_Productivos_de_la_Moskitia_GEFNUD_Plan_de_Manejo_del_Sistema_Lagunar_de_Karataska)

The SLK is the largest in Mesoamerica and occupies an important place at the eastern end of the Mesoamerican Reef System (MRS). The lagoons that make up this wetland system are Laguntara 1 and 2, Karataska, Kaukira, Kohunta, Awastigni, Sirpi, Sukatbila, Daiwrass, Mukuro, Sitawala and 18 small lagoons. (Carrasco & Colindres, 2011, Figure 1)<sup>3</sup>.

At least 76 species of fish belonging to 31 families inhabit the lagoon system. The species of great interest for fisheries are common snook (Mupi), cawacha (Trisu), corvina (drumar), catfish (Lah), mackerel (Lasisi), jack mackerel (Krahwi), and goliath grouper (Kuha) (*Epeniphelus itajara*) (Carrasco & Colindres, 2011). The lagoon system's primary source of biological productivity. The primary contributor to the biological productivity of the lagoon system. Unfortunately, some areas, such as Kruta or Krata, are already experiencing deforestation due to the construction of houses or the expansion of communities. This deforestation is causing beach erosion and housing encroachment on the lagoon. The reduction and absence of mangroves directly impact fish and crustacean populations, and communities are increasingly vulnerable to climatic events.

The SLK comprises five Indigenous Territorial Councils (CTI) that have been granted legal status as WATIASTA 387-2014, KATAINASTA 172-2012, LAINASTA 390-2014, AUYHA YAI 450-2013, and BAMIASTA 399-2014. This legal status empowers them to assert the collective rights of the Miskito communities over the wetland system and its resources. This is the most important basis for territorial institutionality, which supports any management and conservation action. It is expressed through the Surveillance Commissions and a network of community inspectors. CTIs, together with MASTA's regional governance action through the Fisheries Commission, promoted the Association of Honduran Indigenous Miskito Fishermen (APIMH).

In Puerto Lempira, there are also permanent offices of the Mistruk Regional University of Agriculture (UNAG), the National Agrarian Institute (INA), La Moskitia Business Development Center (CDE), the Forest Conservation Institute (ICF), the General Directorate for Fisheries and Aquaculture (DIGEPESCA), the Merchant Marine, the Department of Education, the Navy, and the Task Force, which are the government agencies responsible for fisheries regulation.

The Karataska CTIs seek a dignified life for the entire Muskitia population in general and the communities of the Coastal Territorial Councils through the management, use, and exploitation of natural resources to ensure the well-being of current populations without compromising the quality of life for future generations.

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3 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343657284\\_Diciembre\\_2011\\_Proyecto\\_Conservacion\\_de\\_la\\_Biodiversidad\\_de\\_los\\_Paisajes\\_Productivos\\_de\\_la\\_Moskitia\\_GEFNUD\\_Plan\\_de\\_Manejo\\_del\\_Sistema\\_Lagunar\\_de\\_Karataska](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343657284_Diciembre_2011_Proyecto_Conservacion_de_la_Biodiversidad_de_los_Paisajes_Productivos_de_la_Moskitia_GEFNUD_Plan_de_Manejo_del_Sistema_Lagunar_de_Karataska)

Most of the population of the Karataska Lagoon system is engaged in fishing as a daily activity for self-consumption. However, in recent years, the fishing yield has decreased significantly due to overfishing linked to precarious conditions and/or lack of income.

## **Methodology**

The methodology from this guide was used to assess this site. However, it should be noted that the methodology was still under review at the time of application. In fact, its application at this site also provided inputs for preparing the final document. Therefore, it is possible that the final document of the methodology may differ from the one applied in this exercise.

The assessment was carried out in accordance with the phases recommended in this guide.

### **Phase I: Preparation**

For this phase, representatives from local organizations responsible for managing the site were invited to a workshop. In advance, these organizations were asked about the need for evidence to document progress in managing, governing, and processes aimed at conserving biodiversity.

### **Phase II. Preliminary assessment**

As per the guide, a preliminary assessment was conducted to evaluate criteria A and B. Technical staff from IUCN carried out the assessment using information gathered from the "Linking the Central American Landscape" project, given this site is among one of the project's priority work areas. As a result, the staff concluded that the site is not a protected area and its management contributes to biodiversity conservation, thus justifying the formal application of the tool.

### **Phase III. Indicators and criteria rating**

For assessment purposes, the participants (approximately 25) were divided into two groups, each with approximately ten people and a facilitator. One group evaluated the indicators related to governance quality (Table 2), while the other group analysed the remaining criteria (B, C and D). Both groups assessed the indicators based on supporting evidence or sources of verification and recorded the evidence required to meet each indicator.

At the end of the exercise, each group presented their findings. This enriched the evaluation of all the indicators and ensured the participants' engagement.

## Management effectiveness assessment

### Assessment results

Table 1 summarizes the effectiveness assessment results of SLK's management based on the tool's four criteria (Figure 3). Table 2 summarizes the evaluation of the subcriteria associated with governance quality (indicator B.1.2 in Table 1).

Out of the 17 indicators assessed, ten were met, resulting in 59% compliance. Criterion A was fully compliant as two indicators were met, while Criterion B, which pertains to governance and management, had a compliance rate of 67% (as shown in Table 1). On the other hand, both Criteria C and D, which relate to the site's sustained contribution to biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of the site's functionality, cultural, and spiritual values, had a 50% compliance rate each (as shown in Table 1).

Seven of the 18 indicators related to good governance principles were achieved, resulting in a 39% compliance rate (Table 2).

The findings suggest that the site has made remarkable progress in terms of ensuring the full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders in decision-making (83% compliance). However, important areas for improvement were identified in the remaining governance principles (Table 2).

None of the indicators related to the principles of accountability, designing measures to mitigate negative effects on local populations, and benefit-sharing were fully met, resulting in 0% compliance. However, the principle of accountability achieved 50% compliance, according to Table 2.

According to the methodology, this site does not qualify as an OMEC since 100% compliance is required for all indicators. This implies that it is necessary to design and implement a process to strengthen the indicators that are not being met in order for this site to qualify as an OMEC and, therefore, ensure its long-term contribution to biodiversity conservation.

### Summary of the findings

As it is not declared a protected area and has no spatial overlap with any protected areas (Criterion A, Table 1), the site has the potential to be classified as an OECM.

Regarding the rest of the criteria, Criterion B achieved 86% compliance, whereas the indicators related to a defined geographic boundary and legal recognition of those responsible for

governance and management were met. However, the indicator related to governance quality (B.1.2) was not met, which has relevant implications for the effectiveness evaluation, as detailed below.

In Table 1, one criterion is 25% met while the other is 100% met, providing an opportunity for corrective actions if the target is to pursue an OECM recognition.

In the case of rating **Criterion B**, related to the site's governance and management, the site has a geographic definition and a legal basis that ensures its long-term permanence (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Summary of the compliance rate of the criteria for assessing the management effectiveness of the Karataska Lagoon System.

Criteria	Total indicators	Indicators achieved	Compliance (%)
A. The site is NOT recognised as a protected area	2	2	100
B. The area is governed and managed	7	4	57
C. Achieves sustained and effective contribution to <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity	4	2	50
D. Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values	4	2	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>59</b>

The site also has a defined management model, with a management instrument that allows it to define medium-term objectives and goals. The management system is reported to ensure biodiversity conservation (Table 3). Stakeholders have been involved in the site's management through the different governance and management structures established at the site.

It is reported that stakeholders have been involved in the management of the site through the Indigenous Territorial Committees and other participation mechanisms, which involve national institutions.

Site management must incorporate a monitoring system into their planning to facilitate adaptive management (indicators B.4.2 and B.4.4). In addition, a monitoring implementation plan is required to define the mechanisms for incorporating the information into site management.

According to the results, the lack of monitoring is one indicator that requires attention to comply with Criterion B.

In terms of **governance**, significant compliance was reported in two of the principles concerning the quality of governance. Participants reported evidence that all relevant stakeholders participate fully and effectively, and platforms and mechanisms are available for decision-making. The results indicate that responsibilities were satisfactorily met in terms of accountability indicators (Table 2).

However, and always within the framework of governance quality, it is necessary to improve transparency in terms of access and distribution of relevant information, especially when none of the indicators are met. At this site, such information is not available in the native language or formats adapted to the site's socioeconomic and cultural reality, so access to it is limited for local stakeholders.

An additional component of good governance that requires attention is the need to develop a strategy, including monitoring, to identify and mitigate negative impacts on local communities resulting from biodiversity management or site management in general. Once the strategy has

Table 2. Summary of the compliance rate with the indicators used for assessing governance quality in the Barra de Santiago mangrove.

Principles	Total indicators	Indicators achieved	Compliance (%)
1. Full and effective participation of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making.	6	5	83
2. Transparency is supported by timely and adequate access to relevant information.	2	0	0
3. Accountability for fulfillment of responsibilities and other actions and inactions.	4	2	50
4. Effective measures to mitigate the negative effects of biodiversity conservation management on indigenous peoples and local communities at the site.	3	0	0
5. Biodiversity conservation benefits are equitably distributed among stakeholders.	3	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>39</b>

been developed, the necessary capacities and resources will be required for its implementation and monitoring (Table 2).

Table 2 identified the need for developing and implementing a strategy to ensure fair distribution of benefits among local stakeholders.

In the case of **Criterion C**, related to the site's sustained and effective contribution to achieving biodiversity conservation (Table 1), the evidence suggests that the site and its management contribute to this objective, by controlling the primary threats to biodiversity (Indicator C.1.2, Table 1). However, there is no monitoring plan in place to ensure that these threats do not harm the ecological integrity of the site in the future (Indicator C.1.3).

Financial support is a key component of an OECM's effective and sustained contribution to biodiversity. However, this was reported as an area for improvement in the assessment process (Indicator C.2.1).

**Criterion D** is focused on maintaining ecosystem functions and services, including socioeconomic and spiritual values. During the assessment, some indicators did not fully comply with this criterion. Specifically, evidence must be generated to ensure the long-term functionality of ecological processes and whether or not the use of ecosystem services (e.g., fishing) compromises biodiversity conservation (Indicators D.1.1 and D.1.2).

Regarding cultural values, the assessment concluded that both governance and management respect the site's knowledge, practices, and institutionalism, which is fundamental to achieving long-term biodiversity conservation results.

## Case study 2: Barra de Santiago Mangrove, El Salvador

### Site description<sup>4</sup>

The Barra de Santiago Mangrove is located in the municipality of Jujutla, Department of Ahuachapán, El Salvador. It covers an area of 3,414 hectares and is between 13° 42'00" North Latitude and 90° 03'00" West Longitude. It belongs to the Cara Sucia River basin (Grimaldi Calderón, 2012) and is part of the Barra de Santiago - El Imposible Conservation Area.

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<sup>4</sup> The information in this section was taken from an unpublished document provided by the coordination of the "Linking the Central American Landscape" project in El Salvador.



The Barra de Santiago, along with other mangroves and surrounding ecosystems such as Garita Palmera, Bola de Monte, El Zapote, El Chino, Santa Rita, and Metalío, was declared the Barra de Santiago Complex Ramsar Site by the International Convention on Wetlands in 2014. This local wetland system supports endangered species and important populations in biological cycles, and it also serves as a reservoir and habitat for maintaining coastal biodiversity.

The Barra de Santiago mangrove does not have the legal category of Natural Protected Area. However, the Natural Protected Areas Law establishes that the wetlands of El Salvador are part of the National System of Natural Protected Areas (Dec. Leg. 579, Art. 9, 2005).

In addition, this ecosystem provides more than 26,000 people with environmental goods and services associated with harvesting, regulation, local economy and livelihoods, culture, recreation, food security, health and genetic reproduction.

Fishing and beach tourism are the most important economic activities for the population of Barra de Santiago. More than 3,500 people in Barra de Santiago are estimated to be involved in artisanal and individual fishing in the sea and estuary.

In the Barra de Santiago mangrove, two governance structures implement conservation, sustainable use and ecological restoration actions. One is the Women's Association of Barra de Santiago (AMBAS), which has had a co-management agreement with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) since 2017. The second is made up of fishermen who are organised into six groups under the Sustainable Use Plan (PLAS) agreed upon by MARN.



Figure 2. Location of Barra de Santiago mangrove site.

The PLAS is a regulatory instrument that governs the exploitation of mangrove species. It sets guidelines for extraction and regulation, such as closed areas, types of techniques, equipment for fishing, and approved sectors, among others). In addition, it outlines compensation actions, including mangrove restoration, surveillance, and threat control, that must be followed by fishermen. It is also a regulatory tool that governs the exploitation of mangrove species, given it sets guidelines for extraction and regulation, such as closed areas, approved fishing techniques and equipment, and designated sectors. In addition, it outlines compensation actions, including mangrove restoration, surveillance, and threat control by fishermen.

These two structures form part of various governance initiatives in the area, including the Local Ramsar Committee of Barra de Santiago, a group of local organizations and public institutions dedicated to protecting wetlands, and the Local Advisory Committee, a multi-sectoral governance structure that involves stakeholders from the Barra de Santiago - El Impossible Conservation Area.

## Methodology

The methodology from this guide was used to assess this site. However, it should be noted that the methodology was still under review at the time of application. In fact, its application at this site also provided inputs for preparing the final document. Therefore, it is possible that the final document of the methodology may differ from the one applied in this exercise.

The assessment was carried out in accordance with the phases recommended in this guide.

### Phase I: Preparation

For this phase, representatives from local organizations responsible for managing the site were invited to a workshop. In advance, these organizations were asked about the need for evidence to document progress in managing, governing, and processes aimed at conserving biodiversity.

### Phase II. Preliminary assessment

As per the guide, a preliminary assessment was conducted to evaluate criteria A and B. Technical staff from IUCN carried out the assessment using information gathered from the "Linking the Central American Landscape" project, given this site is among one of the project's priority work areas. As a result, the staff concluded that the site is not a protected area and its management contributes to biodiversity conservation, thus justifying the formal application of the tool.

### Phase III. Indicators and criteria rating

For assessment purposes, the participants (approximately 24) were divided into two groups, each with approximately ten people and a facilitator. One group evaluated the indicators related to governance quality (Table 2), while the other group analysed the remaining criteria (B, C and D). Both groups assessed the indicators based on supporting evidence or sources of verification and recorded the evidence required to meet each indicator.

For assessment purposes, the 25 participants were divided into two groups, each with a facilitator and approximately ten people. One group assessed the indicators related to governance quality (listed in Table 2), while the other group analysed criteria B, C, and D. Both groups evaluated the indicators based on evidence or sources of verification and recorded the evidence required to meet each indicator.

At the end of the exercise, each group presented its results, enriching the evaluation of all indicators and ensuring the participation of all participants.

## Evaluation of management effectiveness

### Results

Table 1 presents the evaluation results for mangrove management effectiveness based on the four criteria used in the evaluation tool (Fig. 3). Table 2 summarizes the subcriteria evaluation linked to governance quality (Indicator B.1.2 in Table 1).

Of the 17 indicators assessed, 13 were met for a compliance rate of 76%. Criterion A achieved 100% compliance (2 indicators), while Criterion B, related to governance and management, achieved 86% compliance (Table 1). Criteria C and D, related to the site's sustained contribution to biodiversity conservation and maintenance of the site's functionality and cultural and spiritual values, achieved compliance rates of 25% and 100%, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of the compliance rate of the indicators used to assess governance quality in the Barra de Santiago mangrove.

Criterion	Total indicators	Indicators achieved	Compliance (%)
A. The site is NOT recognised as a protected area	2	2	100
B. The area is governed and managed	7	6	86
C. Achieves sustained and effective contribution to <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity	4	1	25
D. Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values	4	4	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>76</b>

Out of the 18 indicators related to good governance principles, seven were achieved, resulting in a 39% compliance rate (Table 2)

The findings suggest that the site has made remarkable progress in terms of ensuring the full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders in decision-making (83% compliance).

However, important areas for improvement were identified in the remaining governance principles (Table 2).

None of the indicators related to the principles of accountability, designing measures to mitigate negative effects on local populations, and benefit-sharing were fully met, resulting in 0% compliance. However, the principle of accountability achieved 50% compliance, according to Table 2.

According to the methodology, this site does not qualify as an OMEC since 100% compliance is required for all indicators. This implies that it is necessary to design and implement a process to strengthen the indicators that are not being met in order for this site to qualify as an OMEC and, therefore, ensure its long-term contribution to biodiversity conservation.

Table 2. Summary of the compliance rate with the indicators used for assessing governance quality in the Barra de Santiago mangrove.

Principles	Total indicators	Indicators achieved	Compliance (%)
1. Full and effective participation of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making.	6	5	83
2. Transparency is supported by timely and adequate access to relevant information.	2	0	0
3. Accountability for fulfillment of responsibilities and other actions and inactions.	4	2	50
4. Effective measures to mitigate the negative effects of biodiversity conservation management on indigenous peoples and local communities at the site.	3	0	0
5. Biodiversity conservation benefits are equitably distributed among stakeholders.	3	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>39</b>

## Summary of the findings

As it is not declared a protected area and has no spatial overlap with any protected areas (Criterion A, Table 1), the site has the potential to be classified as an OECM.

Regarding the rest of the criteria, Criterion B achieved 86% compliance, whereas the indicators related to a defined geographic boundary and legal recognition of those responsible for governance and management were met. However, the indicator related to governance quality (B.1.2) was not met, which has relevant implications for the effectiveness evaluation, as detailed below.

In Table 1, one criterion is 25% met, while the other is 100% met, providing an opportunity for corrective actions if the target is to pursue OECM recognition.

In the case of rating Criterion B, related to the site's governance and management, the site has a geographic definition and a legal basis that ensures its long-term permanence (Table 1).

The site also has a defined management model, with a management instrument that allows it to define medium-term objectives and goals. The management system is reported to ensure biodiversity conservation (Table 3). Stakeholders have been involved in the site's management through the different governance and management structures established at the site.

However, it is suggested that the assessment team may be referring to the existing management plan for the Ramsar Site, rather than the evaluated site. Therefore, reviewing these results and their implications for management is recommended (Personal communication with Gregorio Ramírez IUCN-ORMACC, AUGUST 2023).

According to the evidence reported by the participants, governance represents the greatest challenge at the site, given that only seven out of the 18 indicators are being met (Table 2). Participants reported evidence of all relevant stakeholders' full and effective participation and mechanisms and platforms for participation in decision-making processes. However, participants lack the material resources and capacities to participate in decision-making, which may have important implications for the site's governance quality (Table 2).

In this case, none of the transparency-related indicators were met (Table 2). This implies improving stakeholders' access to information in the appropriate formats and improving information-sharing mechanisms so that the information is what the relevant stakeholders require.

Only two of the four accountability indicators were met (Table 2). The human and financial resources available must be linked to the established management objectives. In addition, a process for evaluating decision-makers' performance within the governance structures defined for the site must be designed.

An additional component of good governance that requires attention is the need to develop a strategy, including monitoring, to identify and mitigate negative impacts on local communities resulting from biodiversity management or site management in general. Once the strategy has been developed, the necessary capacities and resources will be required for its implementation and monitoring.

The assessment also identified the need to develop and implement a strategy to ensure equitable distribution of benefits among local stakeholders (Table 2).

In the case of Criterion C, related to the site's sustained and effective contribution to achieving biodiversity conservation (Table 2), the evidence suggests that the site and its management partially contribute to this objective, mainly through adequate control of threats to biodiversity. However, the site needs an instrument that defines management objectives and targets and allows for constant monitoring and improvement of conservation actions.

One of the most important aspects of achieving effective and sustained biodiversity contributions from an OECM is providing adequate financial support to secure its objectives. However, this area needs improvement.

Criterion D, which relates to maintaining ecosystem functions and services, including socioeconomic and spiritual values, has been found to be fully compliant, as shown in Table 2.

