

POLICY BRIEF

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Recognising and Supporting the Role of Culture in Effective Area-based Conservation

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Highlights

Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) can achieve positive biodiversity outcomes in a larger area than is covered by protected areas. But this requires OECMs to be better integrated into sustainable production systems in conjunction with protected areas. Good examples of productive social-ecological systems exist. Recognising potential OECMs requires recognising the cultures that make them possible.

Recommendations:

- Fully recognise and support the role of culture in fostering interlinked human–nature relationships and nurturing biodiversity in production landscapes and seascapes.
- Develop sustainable market mechanisms using landscape approaches that promote respect for local cultures and the rights of all stakeholders.
- Apply good practices for empowering cultures to enhance long-term biodiversity outcomes.
- Provide innovative incentives including capacity development to encourage local communities to manage their landscapes and seascapes for biodiversity conservation.

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures

The concept of OECMs first gained attention when the term was included in Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 developed by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The language concerning OECMs was inserted to help ensure that protected areas (PAs) are not standalone islands of natural spaces, but rather part of a network of areas that are “effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected”, and “integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes” (CBD/COP/DEC/X/2).

After the adoption of the Aichi Targets, a policymaking process was initiated to determine how OECMs can be implemented, resulting in a definition and set of guidelines (IUCN–WCPA Task Force on OECMs 2019). An OECM is defined as “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, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values” (CBD/COP/DEC/14/8). OECMs have continued to attract attention throughout the development of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

The Aichi Target 11 mandate that 17% of the planet should be covered by PAs and OECMs by 2020 was not achieved. Even so, negotiations toward the GBF have converged on increasing the figure for area-based conservation to 30% of the planet by 2030. OECMs will account for a large proportion of this 30%, as the extent of remaining areas of wilderness where new PAs could be established is limited. For this reason, it is important to reach consensus on exactly what forms OECMs can take, how they function, and how they differ from PAs — and to ensure that they are truly effective for conservation.

While conservation of natural areas — traditionally the purpose of PAs — is an important goal, OECMs are expected to be more closely integrated into areas that are influenced by human activities, including agriculture and other production activities that are part of global commodity chains. Given that drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation are most prominent in human-influenced areas, OECMs will be essential to conserve biodiversity outside of PAs, and therefore to help achieve the goals of equitable management, ecological representation, connectivity, and integration.

OECMs are likely to vary more than PAs in terms of human influence on the ecosystems they cover, and in how they fit into each landscape. This diversity is reflected in the guidelines' categorisation of OECMs into those that provide "primary", "secondary", and "ancillary" conservation. Most OECMs provide secondary conservation — they are areas where conservation is not the primary objective, but nonetheless management practices result in effective, long-term, in situ protection of biodiversity (IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs 2019). The area is managed by people, and it is their management practices that result in biodiversity conservation outcomes. Thus identifying management regimes that actually provide conservation is important for OECM identification and implementation.

Recognition of OECMs in Socio-Ecological Production Landscapes and Seascapes

There are examples of management regimes that provide biodiversity conservation in landscapes and seascapes around the planet, creating biodiversity benefits through sustainable human–nature relationships. The term socio-ecological production landscapes and seascapes (SEPLS) is used under the Satoyama Initiative, a global effort to promote landscape approaches for conservation and human well-being. Members of the International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative (IPSI; see Notes)

have produced hundreds of case studies outlining good practices for human–nature relationships at the landscape level. These case studies show that resilient production systems can be developed by societies with knowledge for living in harmony with nature, fostering rich biodiversity and good quality of life.

Because much of the biodiversity that is to be conserved under OECMs exists in human-influenced ecosystems, the process for designating OECMs in these places is different from the process for creating PAs. PAs have often been planned as natural areas where people do not live on and use the land, so efforts to create PAs have often focused on more untouched places. Candidate OECMs in SEPLS, on the other hand, are actively managed social-ecological systems that provide important benefits for human well-being as well as biodiversity. In this sense, these OECMs would be "recognised" rather than "created".

The Role of Culture

Cultural values and practices determine human–nature relationships (IPBES 2022a), and there is sufficient evidence to show that the cultures of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) have enabled conservation, sustainable use, and even enhancement of biodiversity (IPBES 2019; IPBES 2022b). Sustainable land-use practices are part of many cultures, and elements such as rituals, religion, and art are closely tied to the local biodiversity, giving rise to "biocultural" diversity (Maffi & Woodley 2010; Verschuuren et al. 2014). The co-evolution of culture with the natural environment can facilitate sustainable management of local resources and specialisation in production (Gu & Subramanian 2012). Therefore, identifying human-influenced areas as candidate OECMs is tantamount to recognising the cultures that exist within them (UNU-IAS and IGES 2019).

As such, it is important for Parties to the CBD to recognise, support, and strengthen local cultures and their ties to local biodiversity in policies related to OECMs. To ensure such government action, the decision-making bodies of the CBD must ensure that targets related to sustainable land-use management are linked to and uphold the human rights of all relevant stakeholders, ensure equity, and incorporate traditional knowledge and practices, considering in particular vulnerable groups such as women, youth, minorities, and IPLCs (Keleman et al. 2022).

Biocultural diversity in landscapes and seascapes exists on a spectrum from lower to higher connectivity between biological and cultural landscape elements, and this

diversity has repercussions for management practices and governance regimes. Identifying what is most appropriate requires understanding cultural variables and factoring them into management decisions.

Policy Recommendations

1. In developing and implementing OECM-related policies, the Parties to the CBD should fully recognise cultures for their role in strengthening biodiversity and equitable human–nature relationships.

Implementation of OECMs will include recognition of areas where human–nature relationships contribute to biodiversity conservation and human well-being, and it is specific local cultures that create these relationships through long-term interactions between people and nature. Any government policy related to specific areas should be cognisant of cultural elements and their role in advancing biodiversity, and higher-level policies should be designed to promote cultural as well as biological diversity in the landscape. Recognition of culture should be a cornerstone of policies and mechanisms established to implement OECMs, and should be considered at all stages.

2. In potential OECMs with sustainable human–nature relationships, Parties to the CBD should focus on, among other tools, sustainable market mechanisms using an integrated landscape approach that includes respect for local cultures and the rights of all stakeholders.

Parties to the CBD have already adopted a decision recommending that Parties “review national visions, goals and targets to ensure that they include elements of integration of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures ... at the landscape and seascape scale” (CBD/COP/DEC/14/8). Landscape approaches have been shown to be effective because they incorporate the interests of all stakeholders, encouraging them to work together to make the landscape sustainable. This means recognition of cultural elements that make landscape approaches work. By taking a broad view of the landscape — including its long value chains and market forces — in decision-making and planning for sustainable land-use with a participatory process, stakeholders can produce landscapes and seascapes that advance environmental goals and the SDGs. Such an approach has the advantage that it relies on, and therefore empowers, local culture and community interests, and so results in improved equity for all.

3. When developing policies that promote long-term management of OECMs, Parties to the CBD should make use of existing good practices for empowering culture to enhance long-term biodiversity outcomes.

Good practices for effective management of landscapes and seascapes can be found all over the planet. Many of these are among the experiences of IPSI members. The many prominent examples include the territories of indigenous peoples, which have been recognised for providing high levels of biodiversity through their livelihood activities (IPBES 2019). These could be seen as potential OECMs or designated as a separate type of conserved area under CBD reporting mechanisms as appropriate. These kinds of management regimes are specific to local circumstances, so they may require adaptation in other areas or may only provide inspiration for appropriate practices. In all cases, efforts should be made to apply effective principles and practices in an equitable manner.

4. Parties to the CBD should arrange innovative incentives including capacity development to encourage local efforts to manage landscapes and seascapes for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

Under the approach to OECM designation and implementation outlined above, local communities will be key proponents in identifying their own landscapes and seascapes as effective social-ecological systems. Policymakers must promote understanding among stakeholders, including IPLCs, on the benefits of having OECMs recognised in their territories, and how they can contribute effectively. Direct financial incentives may be appropriate, similar to funding budgeted for PAs or in the form of payments for ecosystem services (PES) schemes. These may not necessarily be in the form of cash, but could be part of a culturally appropriate system of reciprocity (e.g., co-investment strategies as highlighted in Nyongsa & Leimona 2017). Alternative forms of financial incentives could include benefits through trade and value chains, helping to promote sustainability throughout an even broader area (Gualandi & Gualandi 2017; Chao & Lee 2015). Innovative non-financial incentives could also include capacity development, and public or official recognition of communities’ efforts, which can foster a sense of pride among local people and respect by others.

Notes

This policy brief is based on the outcomes of events held as part of a joint project of UNU-IAS and Conservation International: "Making OECMs Work: Landscape Approaches for Effective Area-Based Conservation: An online Expert Dialogue," organised in February 2022; a side event at the CBD Intersessional Meetings held in March 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland; and a side event at the 2nd Asia Parks Congress held in May 2022 in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

For the purposes of this policy brief, "recognition" encompasses the definition in guidance attached to CBD Decision 14/8 — namely "the acknowledgement of and respect for the rights and the diversity of identities, values, knowledge systems and institutions of rights holders and stakeholders" (CBD/COP/DEC/14/8) — but also the acknowledgement that these knowledge systems and institutions define human–nature relationships on the ground that often lead to sustainable outcomes (IPBES 2019; IPBES 2022a).

The International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative (IPSI) has brought together hundreds of member organisations around the world for the purpose of promoting and implementing landscape approaches to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use since its founding in 2010. The IPSI secretariat is hosted by UNU-IAS in Tokyo. More information can be found at: <https://satoyama-initiative.org>.

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