Planning 2 Act: How do we best support those charged with getting things done?

Participants

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Aim

The aim of this working group was to elicit information around three core questions from separate sub-working groups within a World Café format: 1) What are the barriers to implementation?; 2) What role can individuals play in driving plan implementation, what qualities do they possess and what skills can we help them acquire and what additional support to increase their effectiveness as 'species champions'?; and 3) when multiple organizations need to deliver on a plan, what elements can influence the relative success or failure of the relationship associated with project governance?

Process

Table 1. In your experience –

- What stops plans from being implemented?
- Why do some plans get implemented while others do not?

Blue text = Positive things that can be done

Summary of key messages

One process connecting planning to implementing

- Planning should never be uncoupled from implementation.
- It should always be done to meet a clearly identified need.
- The drive for or initiation of planning should be by those doing the implementation, or to support them.

Clear plan ownership and drivers

- A government agency or organization should own the plan and be accountable for it.
- Identifying "Species champions" – who will lead/drive implementation, should be an integral part of the planning process.
- Appropriate Institutional point people should be clearly identified.
- Recommendations must be communicated to all of the people involved in implementation – it is important to have a process for communicating recommendations to people on the ground

Stakeholder inclusivity

- All stakeholders should be included in the wider planning process – i.e. communicated/consulted with even if they are not in the workshop itself.
- Success must be clearly defined and acceptable to those likely to be affected by it (e.g. reintroducing large carnivores etc.)

Realistic and achievable plans

- Action plans can be out of date as soon as they are written. A clear vision for the longer-term can support shorter-term plans that can be revised often. A clear vision can also carry a project through financial low-points.
- Consider financial viability – include within the planning process consideration of how the plan will be funded. Write the plan in a way that will support this.
- Don't have too many goals
- Include contingency plans to allow for changing conditions.
- Include a regular cycle of reviewing and revising the plan adaptively.
- Think about how to incentivize the plan
    o Define short-term successes as well as long-term ones to provide a sense of forward movement.
    o Provide rewards for those who have given up things to support plan implementation.
    o Rewards could be for individuals vs. organizations/communities (e.g., hit abundance targets to reduce restrictions on fishing)

Culturally appropriate plans

- Consider who is writing the plan – think about how to make sure the plan is written for the intended audience – may be important that it is written by local people who can take account of the local context and perspectives. In particular, think about:
    o Language (i.e. plans should not always be written in English)
    o Perspective (e.g., level of technicality)

Details:
Round 1 discussion:

- **Politics (a process within and between national governments)**
    o Governments blocking permits, etc.
    o Political instability
- **Budget**
- **People turn-over/ leadership changes within the program**
- Management system – no permanent head, no leader
- Language
    o Plans are often written in English and too technical
- **Inability to address conflict in the program**
- Actions are written by individuals and may not represent commitments of institution
    o Is Process backward? Recipe for failure?
        ▪ The plan is not written by the people who will be implementing it (e.g., hire a consultant).

- Not the plan's fault it sits on the shelf. Symptoms of a larger problem. If you have a motivated person, they do not need a plan written by someone else; this competent person will know what to do and find funding.
        - **Planning delinked from implementation**
- **Do not separate planning and implementation**
- **Find the right person to implement the plan – maybe will be the same person to write the plan and implement but maybe not; depends on the person and their skills.**
- **Include specific timelines into actions.**
    - **Include specific reasons for why a timeline is attached or are we just doing it to do it?**
- **Be realistic about the timeline for the plan.**
    - **Are most plans too long when the world is changing quickly?**
    - **Vision is important but also need flexibility, but we accept that some financial planning may be necessary.**
        - **However, you need to plan for financial stability and sustainability; this requires balancing constraints related to the plan.**
        - **Maybe this should be discussed in an early meeting. Talk about short, medium, and long-term goals.**
        - **Should we have longer projects and shorter plans?**
- **Nothing is included in the plan about how to find the species champions** who should or could implement necessary actions.
- **Regular follow-up/monitoring is not always included in the plan and during implementation.**
    - Sometimes the plan becomes the goal in itself and larger vision is lost.
    - **Review goals regularly to see if they are still realistic or relevant?**
        - **Could relate to turnover**
        - **Have an exit strategy**
- Lack of demand (from world bank, e.g.) for the plan being those who would implement it
- Missing important stakeholders from the meeting
- **Lack of commitment from people implementing the plans (at all levels)**
- **Structured enthusiasm (grounded within clear goals and framework) – the "magic" that comes with having a good champion**

Round 2 discussion:

Negatives	Positives
- Written in a way that makes them not implementable - Too much background information **Not written with implementation in mind** – not specific enough on how (e.g., funding) or who - Not including input from all stakeholders and implementers - Normally know what needs to be done, but we need to be better about how to get the resources to do it → **plan for fundraising (e.g., write it into your**	**Connect plans to stakeholders on the ground level** **Choose the "low hanging fruit" first to get credit and build credibility quickly?** **How the plan is written**/ Write the plan not as a biologist but as a business plan - Maybe include development, business, public relations, etc. people in to help guide writing - Initial action plan doesn't need to include all of the details to use it as a way to go and get the funding and then implement? - However, can work the other way

action plan as a chapter)
  - Sometimes funders are already acquired and may even attend, but usually, you use the plan as a fundraising tool
- Some plans are government funding, making funding not an issue. However, implementation doesn't happen still, because **people commit to actions that they do not have the authority to implement.**
  - In that sense, it is not a national plan (i.e. does not have national approval); it is just the result of a workshop.
- Some plans to **take so long to get approved and written, that the situation has changed** and some actions may no longer apply or require reordering priorities.
- **Poor organization or implementer reputation** (e.g., last time didn't follow through, so now there is a lack of trust).
- Sometimes **not realistic about the number of goals set (relates to being realistic about time).**
- Plans not always written by people from the range country and may not have good **knowledge of what will work culturally.**

around → e.g., some plans written by people in the field and biologists or others have a difficult time understanding
- Find **correct species champion or government structure** to push the plan and hold people accountable (someone to "own" it who has the authority and ability to push it).
- **Have neutral facilitators to mitigate**
- **Process for communicating outcomes** and recommended actions to all stakeholders, including **those who were not able to attend the meeting**.
- **Define what progress looks like** and communicate clearly what success means and consider if it is socially acceptable.

Round 3 discussion:

Negatives	Positives
- No institutional ownership - Plans are all prioritized equally – not implemented or created with a holistic, integrated view - Sometimes plans at a national level conflict with plans written at a local level (conflicting jurisdictional goals/objectives) - Human needs are not being considered in a larger context - Sometimes recommendations may not trickle down to the people on the ground	- Assign someone to coordinate (not necessarily do) actions and follow up/monitor - Find a way to include the human dimension/ socioeconomic factors into quantitative analyses and models - Have a contingency plan for situations that may arise and change priorities - Plans are written by locals - Make plans helpful to the species champion - Adaptive management – reviewing and revising plans regularly throughout the timeframe

Table 2. In your head, picture a person that you consider to be an effective driver of conservation action.

- Describe the qualities of that person.
- Which qualities do you think are innate? Which are trainable? What support could we provide?

Summary

The essential characteristics for a Species Champion were identified as having a genuine passion for both the species and the country and culture where conservation is occurring, being a good communicator, being good at collaboration - both in being able to bring people together as well as working with others and having integrity. Ideas for how Species Champions can be supported better- included mentorship, financial stability, endorsement, encouragement, and access to opportunities such as training, networks and internships.

Next steps: ASAP! will use these outcomes to identify new Species Champions, and look at how ASAP! and others can best offer support to new and existing individuals.

Introduction

A key part of conservation are the individuals who are responsible for carrying out, coordinating or driving forward species-specific action. In some instances, one individual is the catalyst for creating action, bringing funding, attention, and resources to a species that was otherwise neglected. Other times, many groups of people are working on conservation for a species, and one individual is able to bring them together to collaborate on an agreed common goal.

ASAP wants to identify these individuals for ASAP species, as a means to catalyze and drive forward conservation of that species. These individuals may be more effective in their roles where they have access to particular kinds of support, including further training and provision of other tools. This working group explored what types of characteristics are typical in successful Species Champions and what kinds of support would further empower these individuals to achieve impactful species conservation.

Process

Everyone in the group was asked to think of someone they would consider a species champion. As a group, characteristics associated with being a successful species champion were listed. This resulted in a long list seen in image 1. The identified characteristics were prioritized by pulling out those which were considered to be essential, the results of which can be seen in image 2.

Finally, we discussed factors that impact whether such individuals are successful and the support that could be provided to enable individuals to be successful and ongoing Species Champions (images 3 & 4).

Outcome

The top essential characteristics that were repeatedly identified included:

- Passion for the species and the culture of the range country/countries
- Being a good communicator with the ability to inspire, motivate and influence
- Collaboration – being both someone who can instigate collaboration and someone who is good at collaborating with others
- Someone with integrity who others trust

There was also an interesting discussion about how some of the most successful species champions would be considered non-careerists. They are focused on achieving successful conservation of the species rather than moving up the career ladder.
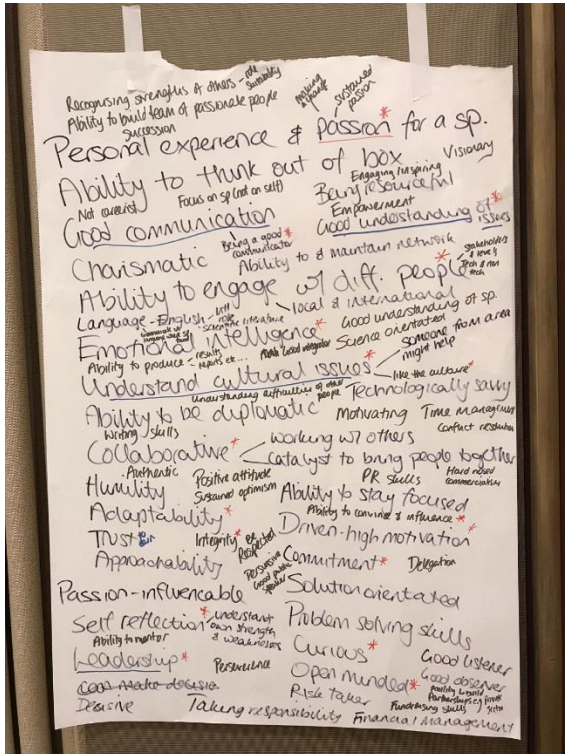
1- Every characteristic named as being useful in a species champion
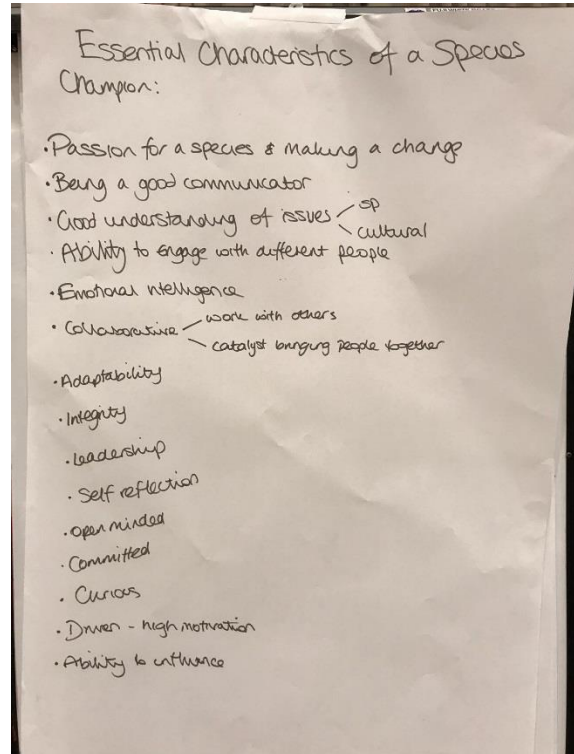
2 - The characteristics considered essential for a species champion

Considering what support species champions might require, key themes were:

- Mentorship, both for technical advice, moral support and a general sounding board.
- Financial security came up frequently and the risk of losing Species Champions due to the lack of funding available to support them. This was discussed both as a means of supporting budding Species Champions, salary costs, helping them to set up their own national NGOs and to enable further studies such as PhDs, and also ensuring that funding gaps don't lead to the work collapsing.
- The group also thought that added credibility through endorsement from an organization like ASAP would be beneficial.
- More general support around encouragement of Species Champions, like appreciation of their efforts and trust from the community was identified as being valuable.
- Access to opportunities such as introductions to networks, exposure such as internships, and platforms to share information, ideas etc. as well as access to higher level decision makers.
- Access to training – there was much discussion around the benefits of longer term training versus short term training courses. Although this was seen as useful, the need for ongoing support and follow-up from training initiatives is often lacking from the shorter term training opportunities.
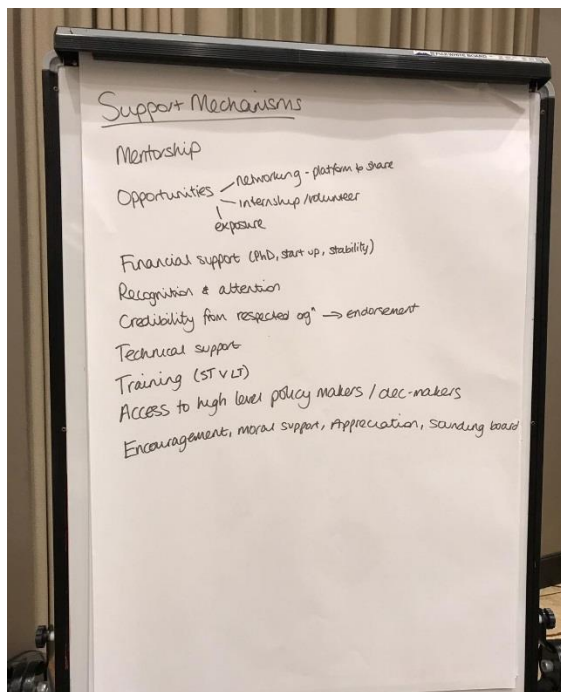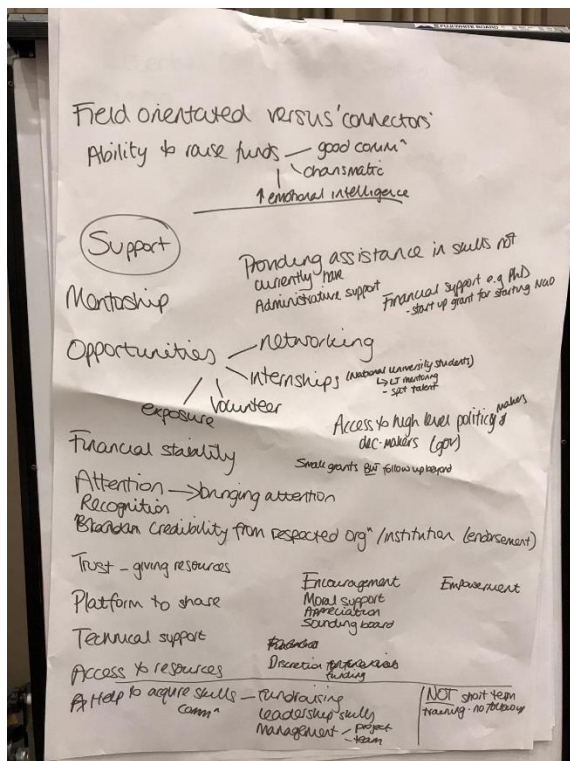
3 - What support a species champion might require (1)

4- Support a species champion might require (2)

Next steps and actions

- ASAP will use the identified characteristics as a means of identifying potential species champions for ASAP species as well as looking at the characteristics which can be developed through training or other means of support.
- ASAP will look at the identified support mechanisms and see which items ASAP could provide. For those that we don't feel ASAP can offer, we will look at working with other groups/organizations that might be able to do this.

Table 3. In your experience:

- What is required to enable two or more organizations to work together effectively?
- When is a coordinating body required? What qualities should it have?
- How important are role clarity and decision-making processes?

Summary:

A brainstorming session focusing on the three questions revealed common key points:

- **Trust and transparency** throughout the entire process of forming a partnership as well as throughout the collaboration process are important for building relationships, understanding where funding is coming from and where it is going, sharing information, and diffusing ego-related issues.

- **Complimentary goals** so both get what they require. There does not need to be one single goal for all the organizations involved, but rather they can each have individual goals that complement each other.
- **Complimentary skills -** having a diverse skill set throughout the entire partnership and recognizing their value.
- **Understanding the value of each organization**. The larger the size of the organization does not automatically assume the most important role within the partnership/consortium. It's important to recognize (and appreciate) the value (great or small) each organization brings to the table.
- **Respect or understanding of decision-making processes of organizations.** Having a more robust understanding of the decision making processes of each organization and respecting such processes is hugely important. Especially when taking into consideration cultural norms and differences, hierarchy within the organization, and time (how long the decision needs to be thought about and how long the full process of decision making will take).
- **Listening skills.** Effectively listening to each other and being respectful.
- **Keep partnership as simple as possible.** Overcomplicating the process to join and be a part of the partnership/consortium may deter others from wanting to take part.
- **Institutionalizing what perhaps started as individual relationships.** Having a succession plan for when people change organizations or roles so you don't lose the established trust or encounter setbacks.