



Identifying and addressing limitations to achieving Target 12

Originally titled: Understanding and measuring progress towards the global target of halting extinctions

Participants

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Background

In 2010, the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 was agreed upon by 193 Parties at the Convention on Biological Diversity. The plan includes the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Target 12 relates to species conservation, and states that: “By 2020 the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained.”

Globally, there is a lack of progress towards Target 12. There has been no significant progress towards halting species extinctions, and we are moving away from the target of improving the conservation status of those species most in decline.

The target indicators are, however, measures of outcome, and there are many diverse processes involved in achieving the target. The initial workshop outline proposed identifying how the progress of these processes could be measured in order to better recognise countries’ achievements towards Target 12. However, as work towards 2020 developed, we recognised that a more pressing need was to identify the barriers to achieving progress. Given the complexity of processes involved in reaching the target, it is likely that barriers and constraints operate at a multitude of levels and interact to compound challenges.

Understanding barriers and constraints requires extracting knowledge from practitioners and decision-makers, and the diversity of expertise and experience within the CPSG provides an excellent resource for identifying these barriers. We have a window of opportunity to engage CBD Parties in the run up to 2020, and by identifying barriers, we hope to be able to determine where action and support would be most valuable to accelerate progress towards Target 12.

Working group objectives

Why is progress towards Target 12 limited?

Develop a problem tree by:

- Using your experience to identify ‘problems’ (limitations/constraints/difficulties); and
- Working in small groups to explore relationships between problems identified and fill in gaps.

Working group process

We first asked participants to write down as many barriers, constraints and limitations to achieving Target 12 as they could think of, based on their experience. Participants noted down one limitation per post-it note and stuck them up on the wall until all ideas were exhausted. Post-it notes were then organised into broad themes, and participants were asked for clarification and explanation of limitations that were more difficult to classify.

We then identified two broad themes – ‘Capacity’ and ‘Conceptual Issues’ – which emerged as particularly complex. We therefore split into two smaller working groups to explore these themes and obtain greater detail on the diversity of limitations within these themes.

Working group outcomes

The list of limitations identified, grouped into themes, is given at the end of the report. The more detailed notes on capacity and conceptual issues produced by each of the two smaller working groups are also included.

The limitations identified were diverse, and ranged from problems with the target itself (mechanisms are not explicit and the timeframe is unrealistic) to a lack of political will (biodiversity conservation is not a priority). Funding was identified as a constraint, not only the general lack of funding for conservation, but also the short-term nature of funding cycles and the lack of funding mechanism for implementation schemes. Related to this was the lack of funding and support for researchers, which ties in with the low priority given to conservation by governments. It was acknowledged that economic development is a competing priority, particularly in developing countries, and that weak and underfunded environmental ministries struggle to have impact and enforce environmental laws. Poor governance and a lack of interlocking governance structures were thus also identified as limitations.

The group discussing capacity described a lack of capacity as including a lack of infrastructure and tools, but also discussed capacity as being limited by a lack of stakeholder consultation, meaning that there was a poor understanding of problems and therefore poor management. Moreover, it was suggested that capacity building was not empowering, not sustained and lacked follow up. The social constraints to capacity building were also discussed, in particular bureaucratic and legislative constraints, and conservation work not being valued.

The group discussing conceptual issues suggested that the CBD is toothless and produces unclear targets. The gap between policy makers and practitioners was identified as a limitation, and the lack of clear translation of high level policy to practice. Values were also discussed, and it was suggested that as a community, conservationists are not very good at telling stories about the value of species. There was also discussion around what exactly is valued, and in particular around the polarisation between the ecosystems services concept and the intrinsic value of nature.

Both groups found themselves concluding that valuing nature was essential, and was a theme that cross-cut many (if not all) of the limitations discussed.

Next steps

The information collected during the workshop is being used to inform further research into the limitations facing countries in achieving Target 12. Based on the understanding developed from working group responses, we can ensure that quantitative work addresses the full range of limitations.

Limitations identified

For some limitations that strongly cut across multiple themes, the additional themes are noted in square brackets.

Capacity

- Lack of local conservation capacity and knowledge on ground in some developing countries
- Lack of capacity within conservation NGOs to influence events locally
- Insufficient technical knowledge to prevent extinction, e.g. St Helena olive wood
- Lack of support for researchers (by their affiliated country)
- No veterinarians in wildlife agency
- Over-reliance on charismatic individuals (e.g. Carl Jones in Mauritius)
- Donors think (?) conservation practitioner community is fragmented and lacking capability
- Lack of science
- Lack of knowledge of the diversity within protected areas
- Lack of uniform survey methods
- Lack of conservation impact evaluations – what works and what doesn't
- Faux capacity building

Governance

- Poor governance
- Countries reluctant to report on poor progress towards Target 12
- Frequent turnover in government representatives
- Not easy to 'legislate' halting species decline
- Species requiring collaboration of more than one country do not receive it – no international collaboration [also political]
- Lack of interlocking governance structures
- Lack of governance
- Advisor of government selected on good relationships not on competence
- Hard to get long term buy-in from partners through lack of clarity over actions/resources needed
- Leadership
- Active hostility to conservation action by governments = the belief that conservation holds back economic development

Communication

- Lack of effective communication between conservationists and policy makers

- Communication
- Lack of media interest in conservation
- “biodiversity”
- Lack of conservation success case studies
- How to talk to politicians/governments where support is needed and keep their interest particularly over the long term
- Disconnect between those who have technical knowledge and where it is needed (geographical and cultural dissonance)

Social constraints

- Lack of acceptance of science
- Poverty, inequalities in society or community
- Lack of opportunity to improve living conditions, under developed
- Disconnection from nature means society not pushing government to invest in conservation
- Cultural attitudes (e.g. cattle are king in Africa and Texas)
- Ineffective attitudinal and behavioural change campaigns (aimed at public)
- Racism
- Egos – humans, organisations, governments
- Benefits of nature and conservation (to society) poorly understood [awareness too]
- Increasing demand for land use conversion and habitat loss across the world
- Human population growth -> loss of habitat -> impact on target
- Socioeconomic factors overwhelm any conservation progress
- Competition among countries
- Legacy of belief (particularly in Africa) that conservation areas are colonial and ‘racist’

Displacement activity

- Lack of collaboration between researchers and conservationists, but getting better
- Conservation biology as a displacement activity

Target 12 mechanism not explicit

- Target 12 does not have its mechanisms explicit
- Lack of guidance

Timeframe

- Unrealistic timeframe -> lack of trust in the process
- Long term process (ambition of the target not aligned with the timeframe needed to achieve results)

Best practice (existence vs awareness)

- Lack of best practice available to practitioners
- Not enough expansive thinking to consider unintended consequences or novel approaches

- No adaptive management for projects
- Not enough clear planning for conservation projects (not rigorous thinking)

Global strategy

- Noise to signal ratio
- Learned helplessness vs empowerment
- Available funding drivers strategy and prioritise instead of science and evidence
- Risk averse conservation practitioners and decision-makers
- Species conservation considered in isolation not as part of system to ultimately unsuccessful

Conceptual issues

- Lack of understanding of what conservation means
- Value of biodiversity give species a price
- Limited conservation concepts and conservation tools knowledge in general
- Nature measured against financial goals (nature no value by itself)
- Disconnection of the highest targets/goals down to the boots on the ground
- General disconnection between the fine strategic goals and activities on the ground
- Outsized influence and power of the BINGOs vs IUCN SSC/SSP
- Failure to recognised effect of confirmation bias/shifting baselines on decision making, planning, resource allocations
- Limited knowledge of wildlife – taxonomy/behaviour/diseases of government officials
- Conflation of conservation issues with animal welfare ones (= if it's cute and fluffy then it wins)

Responsibility

- Ownership of implementation of Aichi target 12?
- What is mandate/responsibility of the zoo community?

Funding

- Lack of funding mechanism for implementation schemes
- Conservation funding too short term
- Lack of funds
- Limited resources for wildlife conservation
- Lack of scalable long term funding for species/recovery in the field
- Global conservation funding is order of magnitude too low (at least)
- Lack of funding support for new researchers, e.g., NSF grants rarely granted 1st round and on decline
- Poverty in core areas [social constraint]
- Competition between organisations for funding
- Lack of transparency on how protected species are chosen for funding priority – concentration on easily fundable species, often flavour of the month
- The costs of conservation (at all levels) are poorly known/not calculated

- Global biodiversity targets are not binding (no sanctions) [global strategy]

Political priority

- Lack of funding, “wrong” prioritisation of resources
- Conservation part of a political game
- Little investment by governments (any) as wider societal benefits not valued
- Trump
- Weak and poorly funded environmental ministry
- Aichi targets not communicated as priority for governments of developing nations
- Change in government priorities driving change in conservation policy – threatening species
- Over-dependence on government institutions and individuals at the cost of holistic stakeholder participation in deciding national priorities
- Agency responsible for conservation not heard or supported by other ‘profit generating’ government agencies
- Species conservation not a priority
- Short term incentives need to be clear
- Nature conservation very low on political agenda
- Copy-paste by governments of available national priorities (usually biased)
- Incessant planning in lieu of action/implementation in field [displacement activity]
- Dilution of national targets – Aichi Target 12 subsumed into combined national targets
- Lack of involvement of the government
- Inadequate/non-existing national commitments to CBD targets – few NBSAP national objectives
- Biodiversity conservation not a priority
- Failure to recognise species decline/extinction as driver of catastrophic climate change
- Lack of dynamic and participatory process into national drafts
- Adoption of protection policies in detriment of conservation and sustainable development
- Government buy-in missing
- No administration rules for wildlife conservation

Awareness

- Awareness (WTF is Aichi Target 12?)
- Lack of awareness of the intensity/speed of the crisis by governing authorities
- Lack of capacity of local authorities to enforce laws protecting areas [governance/capacity]
- Economic destitution leading to overexploitation of resources by local people (e.g. poaching) [social constraints/governance/poverty]

Capacity – more detailed discussion

Unstructured notes from initial group discussion

- Technical constraints (lack of science etc.)
- Infrastructure
- Tools
- Capacity building is not empowering
- International power structure – people do not want to hand over power
- Bureaucratic, legislative and social constraints to CB
 - Social constraints – education, value and respect
- Range work not valued – need to empower and acknowledge skills – link to social constraints
- Lack of stakeholder consultation
 - Poor understanding of problem -> poor project management
 - Need better connection between donors and actors -> lack of mechanism for funding transfer
- Corruption at local and highest levels – due to governance
- CB is not sustained and there's no follow up

Summary presented to rest of group

- Education
- Resource allocation
- Technical constraints – these need to be sustained and followed up, and link to education
 - Tools
 - Knowledge/training
 - Infrastructure
- Social constraints – the value of conservation work both social and financial
 - Education
 - Lack of empowerment
- Legislative constraints
- Bureaucratic constraints
- Lack of stakeholder consultation (linked to two above) / need mechanism for funding transfer
 - Top/bottom flows and communication
 - Lack of understanding of problem – poor resource allocation
- Awareness campaign -> value – love of nature

Conceptual issues – more detailed discussion

- Nature as a 'valued commodity' – financial & social & wellbeing &&&... - priceless or worthless
- [Jargonised language] → communication issue
- Lack of understanding of conservation complexity – dynamic system
- Silo-ed thinking about species vs system conservation

- Fear of failure preventing action (e.g. Baj')
 - Take risk – Mauritius kestrel
- Gap between policy wonks and practitioners
 - Strategy not reflected in practice
 - Compromise at policy negotiation – no clear translation of high level policy to practice
- Design of policy, targets settings and implementation poorly defined at CBD level

Values

- Concrete results – how to demonstrate to society/donors/government
- **Societal value of nature vs ecosystems service** – beaver adds \$20k to economy
- Intrinsic value vs extrinsic value
- **We are bad as a community at telling value stories around species** (jargon as opposed to poetry)
- Cultural value better linked to species/nature value
- Seats of government should have nature embedded – green/blue/animals/smells(?)/feeling
- Polarisation between intrinsic values and ecosystem services – need both
- Bad understanding of intersectionality between issues SDG & biodiversity & species & values
- **Understanding the individuals who are tasked with CBD implementation (government) – what do they value?**
- Changing the 'agenda'
 - Campaign in poetry, govern in prose – we are campaigning in prose
- CBD should go as it is framed wrong!
- Convention on biodiversity
 - Jargon
 - Barrier
 - Repeated failures at target levels

CBD

- Toothless
- Unclear targets