Managing MAVA's Outcome Action Plans adaptively

This Document

This document provides technical guidance to managers and partners of MAVA's Outcome Action Plans (OAP) for practising Adaptive Management on OAP-level. It is available in English, French and Portuguese.

The document consists of two main parts and a glossary in the back:

INTRODUCTION
page

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Introduction to Adaptive OAP Management. This part is meant to provide clarity on what we mean with Adaptive Management of the OAP and what is expected from partners.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDANCE
page

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Step-by-step Guidance. This part provides guidance on how to practice Adaptive Management. It is meant to be helpful rather than prescriptive.

This guide is part of an emerging series of How-to Guides, consisting of:

#1 Designing
MAVA's OAPs

#2 Managing MAVA's
OAPs Adaptively

#3 Mid-Term Evaluation
of MAVA's OAPs

All guidance is developed on the basis of the CMP Open Standards. It is being improved on the basis of feedback from users. Please send us your input using mava@fosonline.org.

Guidance and formats can be downloaded from the Resources section of MAVA's website.

Part 1: Introduction to adaptive OAP Management

1.1 Aim

Adaptive Management (AM) is a structured, iterative process of robust decision making in the face of uncertainty, with the aim of reducing uncertainty over time via monitoring and the use of evidence. AM of OAPs refers to the process by which OAP-partners systematically assess progress and effectiveness of their collective conservation work. By doing this, they critically examine the extent to which the partnership is leveraging change at the desired scale. The ultimate aim of AM is to improve the effectiveness of the work and increase conservation impact.
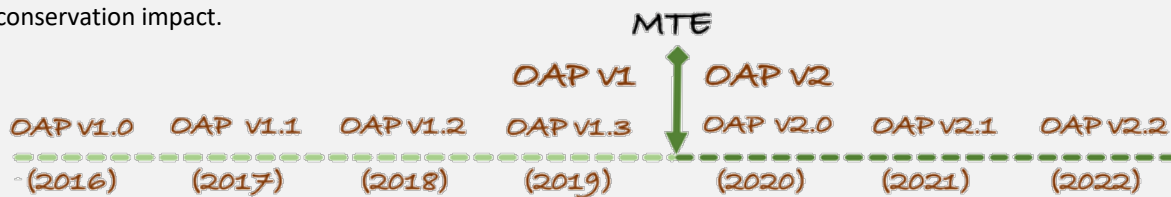

Figure 1: Adaptive Management iterations in the context of Mava's Final Strategic Cycle

Typically, partners practice AM at the OAP-level on an annual basis in the run-up and as part of their annual partners' meeting (often called a steering committee meeting). These meetings allow OAP-partners to step away from their individual projects and focus on their collective, regional ambition. During these meetings, partners discuss progress, problems and solutions. They learn from each other and agree on priorities for the coming year. Typically, major changes to the overall Theory of Change (TOC) are rare. Instead, strategies and work plans are refined to adapt to growing insights. Note in Figure 1, these yearly iterations as changing versions from V1.0 to V1.1 the next year, etcetera.

The process for the Mid-term Evaluation (MTE) is similar though much more thorough and will result in a fully iterated version of the OAP (in Figure 1, notice the shift from OAP v1 to v2 right after the MTE). OAP v2 will typically include an updated version of the TOC, with updated objectives and could theoretically encompass a completely different set of strategies. The conclusions of the MTE form the justification of changes made in the design of OAP v2. OAP v2, in turn, will form the basis for the design of the individual projects that will be contracted during the last funding phase of MAVA before closing in 2022. For more information on the MTE, please refer to the How-to Guide #3: The Mid-term Evaluation.

1.2 Approach & Roles

The AM approach is primarily that of a systematic annual review carried out by the OAP-partners. It focuses on the progress of conservation work and the impact of this work in terms of the achievement of objectives and ultimately the outcome.

MAVA believes that through regular reflection it is more likely that OAP-partners jointly find out what works and what does not and identify joint opportunities and innovations – traits that are crucial to achieving impact on a scale that matters.

Overall, OAP-partners, be it in the form of a steering committee or other form, are responsible for practising AM. The division of roles between them, as well as the specific role of the OAP-manager, is negotiated and tailored to the specific OAP (see How-to Guide #1 Design of MAVA's OAPs).

MAVA has tasked FOS Europe to provide OAP-partners with the support needed to practice AM. This includes methodological guidance, capacity building, coaching, and facilitation. The level of support required is dependent on the needs of the OAP.

1.3 Process

There are 4 main steps OAP-partners jointly take in order to operationalize the AM process in annual iterations:

1 **Project-level reporting on progress and effectiveness:** OAP-partners document progress on planned strategies & activities and achievement of results of their respective projects as part of the progress reporting to MAVA. Please note that ideally, partners submit the final report to MAVA after the partners' meeting in order to be able to adjust the work plan in line with the main conclusions of the meeting.

2 **Updating monitoring data and rating progress and effectiveness on OAP-level:** Partners access their OAP-level scorecard (usually in the form of a web-based matrix) and enter monitoring data for objectives and indicators. Monitoring data are interpreted and progress and effectiveness ratings are assigned.

3 **Processing ratings on the OAP Theory of Change (TOC)**: Ratings are processed on the TOC, creating a visualisation of progress and effectiveness of the OAP.

4 **Reflecting, adapting & prioritizing**: Partners meet to jointly validate and discuss the implications of the above analysis. Key questions about strategic focus and work plan priorities are discussed especially with an eye on interdependencies of different projects and differences between geographies. Cross-project learning takes place. Overall conclusions are the basis for adaptations on OAP-level and work plans of individual partners.

> *Tip #1:*
> *Defining the adaptive management process & roles*
>
> *OAP-partners should agree on the adaptive management process and separation of roles of different partners at the start-up of the OAP. A good common understanding is essential to ensure the smooth running of the adaptive management process.*
>
> *For details, please refer to How-to Guide #1: Designing MAVA's OAPs.*

1.4 Deliverables

After the annual partners' meeting (as of implementing OAP v2), partners will need to compile and submit a OAP-Report. This report is important for MAVA – but also serves as an important reference document to partners. It is relatively simple as it contains a 1-page high-level summary of the main conclusions of the partner meeting on the basis of the scorecards. As annexes, the OAP is asked to submit downloaded PDFs (probably easiest in A3 format) of: (1) the OAP Progress Scorecard; (2) the OAP Effectiveness Scorecard; and (3) the annotated TOC.
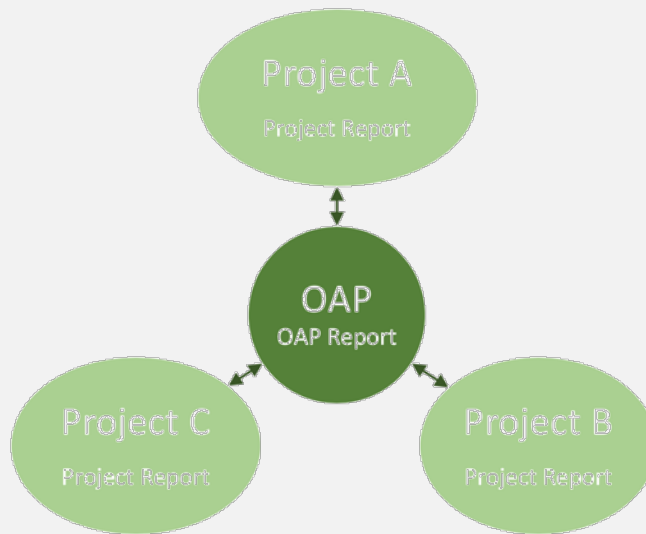

Figure 2: Overview of deliverables on OAP-level and Project-level

Ideally, individual partners will also submit their annual Project Reports to MAVA right after the partnership meeting. This report summarizes the progress made on project-level and includes information of changes to and priorities in next year's work plan.

Part 2: Step-by-Step Guidance

STEP 1: PROJECT-LEVEL REPORTING

Project partners report on project progress and effectiveness once a year. Ideally, the legwork for this project reporting happens well in advance of partners' meeting. The Project-level reporting format is in line with OAP-level reporting format. This means that reporting on project-level should easily flow into the OAP-level reporting efforts.

It helps if each partner understands fully how their own project fits in the OAP in a project-to-programme relationship and how work and results are aligned. It is also helpful to have a clear agreement on who takes responsibility for updating specific parts of the scorecard. Having a web-based scorecard means that partners can update the scorecard simultaneously and share responsibility for this. This makes the job of the overall coordinator considerably lighter.

To help partners understand their relation to the overall OAP it might help to distinguish two types of projects:

(1) *Geography-specific project:* Typically, a project focuses on the implementation of some or all of the OAP-strategies in a particular site, country or sub-region. Many OAPs have various geography-specific projects, making cross-site learning worth considering. Many scorecards allow for geography-specific reporting.

(2) *Regional or cross-cutting project:* OAPs often include an overarching or cross-cutting project. In such cases, the responsibility for implementing one or more strategies are subsumed under a particular project and implemented/coordinated by one partner. Many scorecards have a separate column for reporting on this overarching work. Overarching work often has implications for many of the other projects in an OAP.

STEP 2: UPDATING MONITORING DATA & RATING PROGRESS AND EFFECTIVENESS ON OAP-LEVEL

All OAPs have scorecards in place that are fully aligned to the overall TOC and capture the agreed overarching objectives, indicators and strategies. Ideally, partners use these scorecards to document and process monitoring data across its constituent projects. (Please refer to MAVA Guide #1: OAP Design for more details).

Progress
Progress scoring allows OAP-partners to create an overview of the progress made per strategy, per project, and per partner. Figure 3 shows a simplified example of a progress scorecard.

A progress scorecard helps partners and MAVA to identify differences between projects, geographies and scales. Ideally, OAP-partners report their progress well in advance of the partnership meeting, allowing the identification of issues prior to the meeting. These issues should be included in the agenda and help the partners zoom in on things that are worth discussing without drowning each other with details of individual projects. It might be needed to convene one or more virtual preparation meetings. Important questions to regularly revisit are: Are there serious delays in work that is crucial for other partners and if so, how to deal with this? Are there big differences between geographies and/or partners? Why? Can partners help each other deliver by sharing resources, tricks and tips? Are the right partners intervening in the right strategies? Should we step-up or prioritize work related to specific strategies in order to be more effective?

Project	Partner	Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3
Project A	Partner 1	On Track	Some Adjustments Needed	Off Track / Not delivered
Project A	Partner 2	Major Adjustments Needed	On Track	Some Adjustments Needed
Project B	Partner 2	On Track	On Track	Major Adjustments Needed
Overall Strategy Rating		Some Adjustments Needed	On Track	Major Adjustments Needed

Figure 3: Simplified example of a progress scorecard

Effectiveness

Just like for the progress data, it is ideal if OAP-partners report on their effectiveness well in advance of the partnership meeting, again allowing the identification of issues prior to the meeting. Figure 4 shows a simplified example of an effectiveness scorecard. Partners are typically asked to fill in specific columns - depending on their contribution to the overall scorecard. In the example below, a particular partner could be tasked to report on the indicator # of hydropower plants in priority rivers (column E), but entering real numbers into column H and assigning a colour rating. Scorecards often have additional columns to report on specific geographies and cross-cutting work.

If possible, the OAP-partners then process these monitoring data and agree on ratings for objectives (column D) and results (column B). This process ensures a common understanding of the effectiveness of the partnership in achieving desired results. Please note that all these conclusions need to be validated by partners during the meeting.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Result	2018	Objective	2018	Indicator	Rating Scale	Baseline	2018
Hydropower avoided in priority rivers		Obj 1: Until 2019 no new hydropower plants in priority rivers		# hydropower plants in priority rivers	0 / 1-2 / 3-4 / >5	0	0
Sustainable hydropower production		Obj 2: By 2019 at least ¾ of the counties have residual water use systems in place		Share of counties with proper residual water use systems in place	75-100% / 50-74% / 25-49% / 0-24%	35%	75%
		Obj 3: By 2019 80% riverine corridors are declared around agricultural areas		Share of counties with legally binding designations of riverine corridors in agri areas	75-100% / 50-74% / 25-49% / 0-24%	23%	36%

Figure 4: Simplified example of a OAP Scorecard on Effectiveness.

STEP 3: PROCESSING RATINGS ON THE OAP THEORY OF CHANGE

The scorecards themselves are powerful overviews. In addition, the information can be visualised simply by including high-level ratings as colour-coded bubbles in an annotated version of the TOC. Figure 5 shows a simplified example of such an annotated TOC.

The annotated TOC helps partners to question assumed correlations between results and strategies. Producing an annotated TOC is simple: save the results chain as a picture and add progress markers using powerpoint or other tools.

Please refer to Figure 5, for a simplified example TOC. Note the markers on outcomes (purple boxes), results (blue boxes) and strategies (yellow hexagons). The colour coding of the markers is aligned to ratings in the progress scorecard (Figure 3) and the effectiveness scorecard (Figure 4). You might want to consider adding markers for different geographies to highlight differences. In the example below this is expressed in the abbreviations P1 & P2 to depict different priority rivers. GT is used to indicate Grand Total i.e., the summary rating.
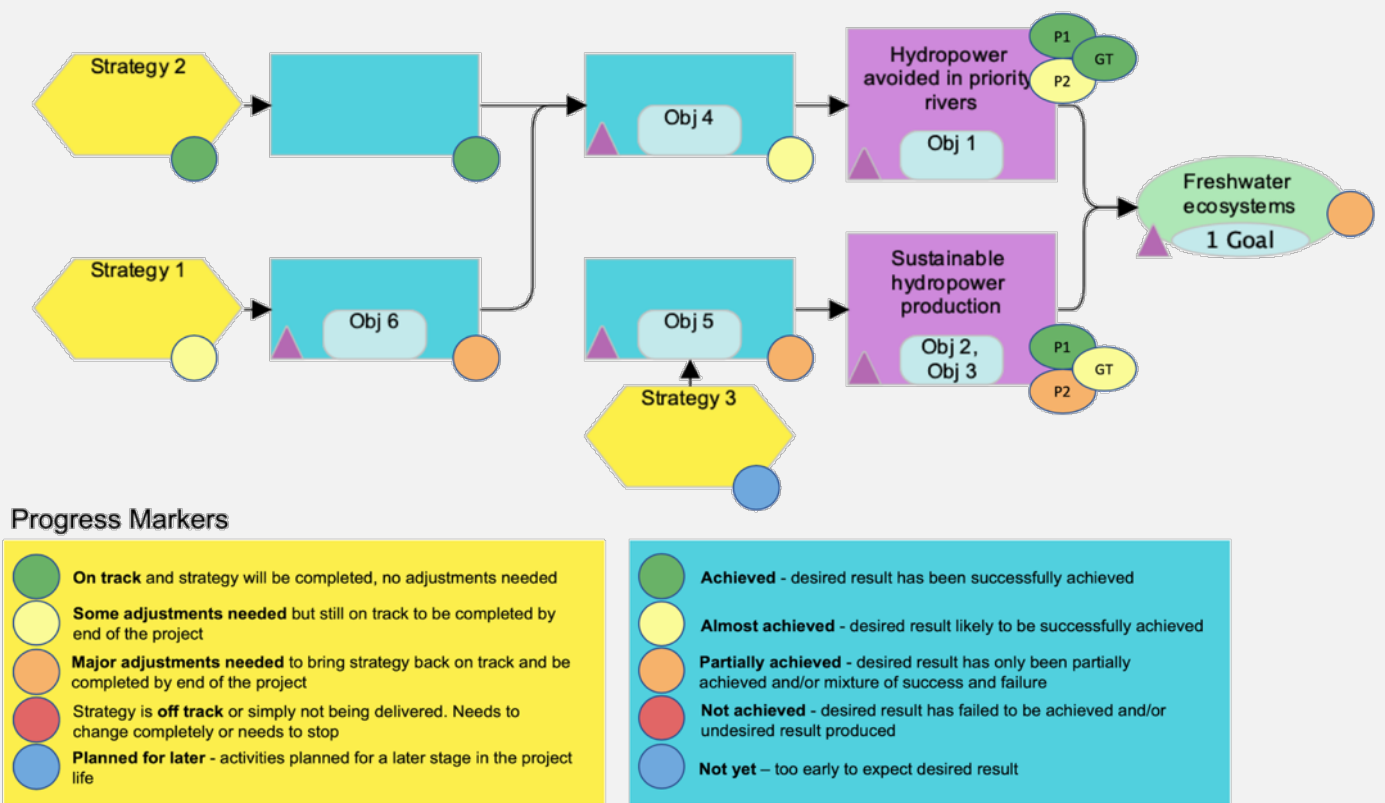

Figure 5: Simplified example of an annotated TOC.

STEP 4: REFLECTING, ADAPTING & PRIORITIZING

Preparing for the partners' meeting

Now that the reporting and progressing of data is done, it is time to start preparing in more detail for the upcoming partners' meeting. Often, partners meet once a year for 1,5 - 2 days. The exact duration of the meeting depends on the size and complexity of the OAP. Part of the meeting will be used to jointly digest findings and discuss issues that need further reflection.

Typical preparation work includes:

⇒ As much as possible conclude on steps 2 and 3 as described above to avoid using valuable time on filling in scorecards and drawing the more obvious conclusions. Instead, partners need time to focus on the identified issues;

⇒ Ensure that the meeting agenda includes sessions to (1) jointly validate and refine main findings on progress and effectiveness, (2) zoom in on particular issues as identified in steps 2 and 3 described above. Perhaps reserve at least half of the meeting for this specific purpose. Note that it is crucial to reserve the other half of the meeting to discuss and share experiences in a more technical way.

⇒ Design of individual sessions, specifying the aim and output of the session, the process to be followed, the materials needed, how the output is captured and who facilitates the session;

⇒ The logistical arrangements, including the availability of materials, access to wifi if needed and enough working space for break out groups;

⇒ Compilation of (A3) PDF versions of the annotated TOC & Scorecards to be sent to partners prior to the meeting together with the agenda.

The partners' meeting (SCM)

The challenge during the meeting is to help partners move beyond mechanically validating the scorecard and progress markers and instead focus on the real issues. It is fundamental to realise that the design of OAP v1 is based on the best available knowledge partners had back then. This knowledge has since then expanded. The TOC and the scorecards are just decision-support tools, meant to support partners in reflecting on their assumptions and helping to adapt the focus of their work to increase conservation impact.

Typically, the following are useful topics for discussion during a partners' meeting:

⇒ It pays off to realise what work is completed and what delays there are and to jointly discuss consequences and solutions. The art is to find those issues that are relevant to the entire partnership because for example, the work is overarching or because other geographies might learn from it.

⇒ The meeting is also suitable to jointly reflect on what we know about the effects of our work. Figure 6 below provides some guidance for thinking about this. The described routes are considerations only and are not meant to be directive.

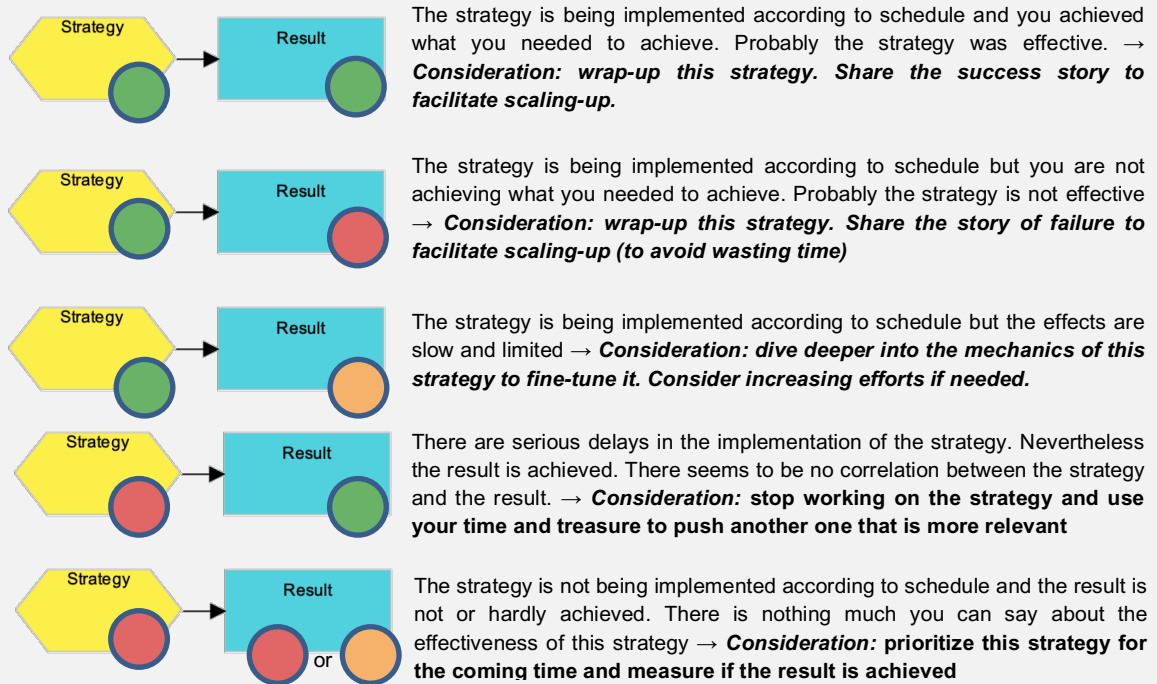|	
Strategy → Result	The strategy is being implemented according to schedule and you achieved what you needed to achieve. Probably the strategy was effective. → ***Consideration: wrap-up this strategy. Share the success story to facilitate scaling-up.***
Strategy → Result	The strategy is being implemented according to schedule but you are not achieving what you needed to achieve. Probably the strategy is not effective → ***Consideration: wrap-up this strategy. Share the story of failure to facilitate scaling-up (to avoid wasting time)***
Strategy → Result	The strategy is being implemented according to schedule but the effects are slow and limited → ***Consideration: dive deeper into the mechanics of this strategy to fine-tune it. Consider increasing efforts if needed.***
Strategy → Result	There are serious delays in the implementation of the strategy. Nevertheless the result is achieved. There seems to be no correlation between the strategy and the result. → ***Consideration:*** **stop working on the strategy and use your time and treasure to push another one that is more relevant**
Strategy → Result or	The strategy is not being implemented according to schedule and the result is not or hardly achieved. There is nothing much you can say about the effectiveness of this strategy → ***Consideration:*** **prioritize this strategy for the coming time and measure if the result is achieved**

Figure 6: Is our work making a difference?

⇒ Zooming in on differences between geographies can further deepen the knowledge. Why is it working in site A and not in site B? What seems to be a critical success factor? Can the other sites adapt to incorporate these factors?

⇒ Zooming out to OAP-level and putting a spotlight on the "leaps of faith" is also important. Typically, the further you move towards the outcome-statement of the OAP, the more leaps of faith there are. A partnership might, for example, theoretically understand what it takes to pilot something successfully, but how to take the lessons learned from the pilot to a regional scale is often less well understood. To give another typical example; we often understand how to raise awareness of people, but don't always understand leads to actual behavioural change. These gaps in our understanding pose risks to the success of our strategies and by systematically discussing them, partners can try to push for break-throughs. Figure 7 below provides some guidance for thinking about this. The described routes are considerations only and are not meant to be directive.
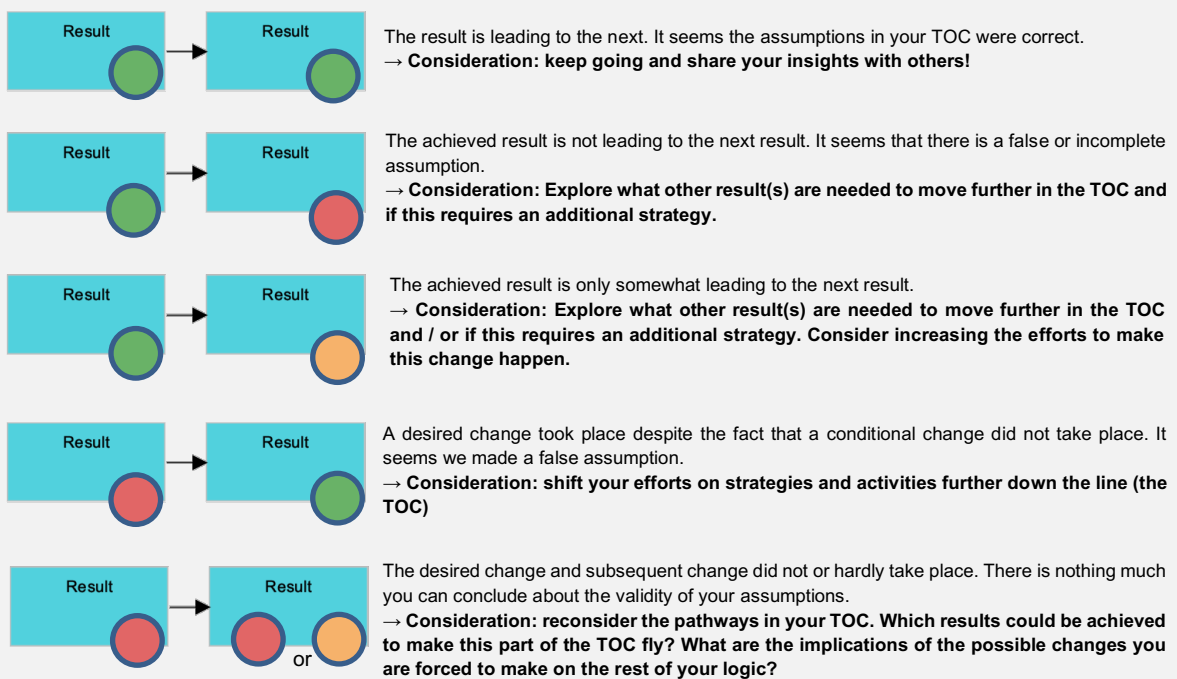
Result → Result	The result is leading to the next. It seems the assumptions in your TOC were correct. → **Consideration: keep going and share your insights with others!**
Result → Result	The achieved result is not leading to the next result. It seems that there is a false or incomplete assumption. → **Consideration: Explore what other result(s) are needed to move further in the TOC and if this requires an additional strategy.**
Result → Result	The achieved result is only somewhat leading to the next result. → **Consideration: Explore what other result(s) are needed to move further in the TOC and / or if this requires an additional strategy. Consider increasing the efforts to make this change happen.**
Result → Result	A desired change took place despite the fact that a conditional change did not take place. It seems we made a false assumption. → **Consideration: shift your efforts on strategies and activities further down the line (the TOC)**
Result → Result or	The desired change and subsequent change did not or hardly take place. There is nothing much you can conclude about the validity of your assumptions. → **Consideration: reconsider the pathways in your TOC. Which results could be achieved to make this part of the TOC fly? What are the implications of the possible changes you are forced to make on the rest of your logic?**

Figure 7: Are we making the right assumptions?

OAP-level Adaptation of Conclusions & implications for projects

These discussions might lead to tweaks in the overall design (e.g. the wording of results, direction of arrows, change in strategy etc.), which need to be processed in the TOC and scorecards. It is also important that at the end of the partnership meeting the main conclusions are summarized and the consequences for the individual projects agreed on. The conclusions, the annotated TOC and a download of the filled-in scorecards together form the OAP-report.

Project-level Adaptation of Conclusions & the Work plans

There are often implications of the overall conclusions for the work plans of individual projects: cross-site learning might lead to revamping approaches; strategy effectiveness reviews might lead to shifts in the emphasis placed on certain work packages etc. Individual partners now need to plough these insights back into their work plans for the coming year. Ideally, the project-level progress report, the conclusions (both on project-level enriched with the conclusions from the partners' meeting) and the adapted work plans are submitted to MAVA. That said, agreed reporting cycles might not always allow for such alignment in which case it is wise to agree on a sensible approach with MAVA.

Glossary

Adaptive Management (AM)	A structured, iterative process of robust decision making in the face of uncertainty, with the aim of reducing uncertainty over time via monitoring.
Effectiveness	The extent to which partners are achieving the results & objectives. On OAP-level, effectiveness is tracked in the effectiveness scorecard.
Mid-term Evaluation (MTE)	In this document, the term is used to describe a guided and systematic self-reflection focused on assessing the progress of conservation work and impact of this work in terms of the achievement of objectives and ultimately the outcome.
Outcome Action Plan (OAP)	A term used by MAVA to describe a programme level partnership. A OAP encompasses one or more projects.
Partner	An organisation that is involved in the implementation of the OAP. Direct partners have contracts with MAVA. Indirect partners have contracts with direct partners.
Progress	The extent to which partners have implemented the strategies. Progress is related to the work plan. On OAP-level progress is tracked in the progress scorecard.
Steering Committee Meeting (SCM)	Typically, an annual meeting of OAP-partners
Scorecard	A tool -in the case of OAPs in the form of a web-based spreadsheet - to capture effectiveness and progress data and interpret these data along predefined scales. Scorecards support AM and increase transparency of data across projects, scales and between different partners.
Theory of Change (TOC)	An explanation of how a strategy is assumed to lead via various results to achieving the outcome. In the case of our OAPs, it is presented in the form of a results chain.

Acknowledgement