

Designing MAVA's Outcome Action Plans



How-to Guide #1 (v1.0)

This Document

This document provides technical guidance to managers and partners on the design of MAVA's Outcome Action Plans (OAPs). It is available in English, French and Portuguese.

The document consists of three main parts and has a glossary in the back.



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Introduction to the OAP. Providing clarity on what we mean with OAP and what is expected from partners.



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Design of the OAP including guidance on the development of Theories of Change and Scorecards.



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The OAP Steering Committee, its core functions and role in adaptive management of the OAP.

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 the OAP

An Outcome Action Plan (OAP) is a high-level strategic plan that binds a set of partners in a joint mission towards achieving a specific ‘outcome.’ The term ‘outcome’ refers to the reduction of one or more particular threats to one or more specified conservation targets. Often they are focused on a specific geographical context. For example: Reducing by-catch of marine turtles in priority areas in the Mediterranean. OAPs encompass one or more projects.

The main principle guiding the design of an OAP is that the whole should be more than the sum of its constituent parts. The aim is to jointly leverage conservation impact at a scale that wouldn’t be feasible for individual partners. The centre-piece in the design is a jointly articulated Theory of Change (TOC). The TOC describes how partners think their combined actions will ultimately lead to achieving the outcome. The OAP also contains a framework for monitoring progress and effectiveness, as well as a high-level action plan. [Part 2](#) of this document provides further guidance on the development of the OAP. Please note that this document does not guide the subsequent design of individual projects.

A OAP is designed, monitored and managed by its participating partners. For that, partners come together in steering committees (SCs) or an equivalent forum or setting. [Part 3](#) of this document guides the setting-up of SCs.

For more information about the management and the Mid-Term Evaluation of OAPs, please refer to ‘[How-to Guide #2: Managing MAVA’s OAPs Adaptively](#)’ and ‘[How-to Guide #3: Mid-Term-Evaluation of MAVA’s OAPs](#)’.



Part 2: Design of the OAP

At the heart of each OAP is a TOC and an accompanying Scorecard. The TOC constitutes the hypothesis of how partners assume their collective work will lead to achieving the desired outcome. Partners use the data collected in the scorecards to test their hypothesis and adapt their TOC and work plans according to new insights. We call this ‘practicing adaptive management’.

2.1 Developing a Theory of Change

Key elements of the TOC

A TOC is a powerful tool for the planning and adaptive management of a conservation initiative. A TOC helps OAP-partners gain focus, be explicit about desired outcomes and assumptions, visualise synergies, and communicate with stakeholders and donors.

TOCs can be visualised using Results Chains that contain the following key elements:

- One or more conservation **Strategies** (yellow hexagons), i.e. broad areas of work with a common focus, carrying specific activities (yellow squares)
- One or more **Results** (blue boxes), i.e. changes in the outside world that lead to one or more Threat Reduction Results.
- **Threat Reduction Results** (purple boxes) constitute a reduction in Direct Threats to Conservation Targets, i.e. positive changes to human behaviour or natural phenomena that threaten one or more conservation targets
- **Conservation Targets** (green ovals) represent elements of biodiversity (ecosystems, species, or ecological processes) that the OAP has chosen to focus its efforts on

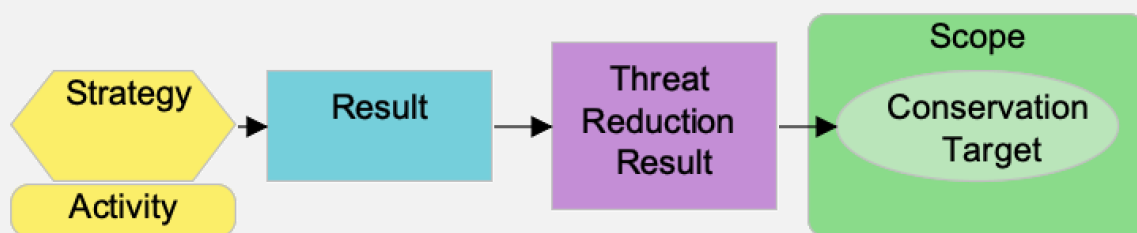


Figure 1. Key elements of a Theory of Change (TOC) visualised in a Results Chain

Tip #1: Develop the first version of the TOC jointly in a facilitated workshop

A TOC has the most meaning when developed jointly. This requires hard work, requiring a meeting of sometimes quite different minds. Having a skilled facilitator can help partners navigate tricky discussions. A jointly developed TOC can later be refined in remote sessions. Using screen-sharing functions of Zoom or Skype help partners to ‘stay on the same page’.

Defining Outcomes in TOCs

All MAVA funded OAP are anchored in clear outcomes. The term ‘outcome’ refers to the reduction of a particular threats affecting one or more conservation targets.

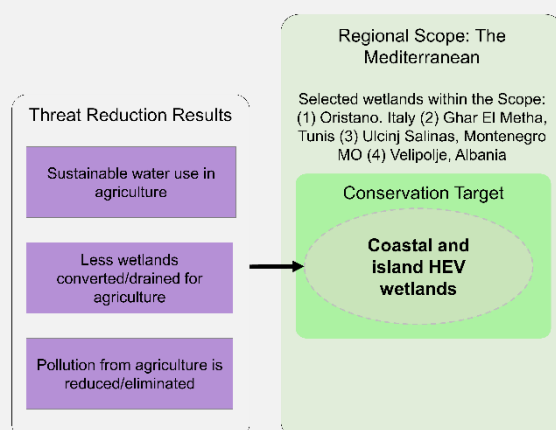


Figure 2: Example of the “outcome” of OAP M3 Wetlands - several Threat Reduction Results linked to a particular Conservation Target in a defined geography

Strategies, Results & Activities

In the design of an OAP, partners develop a set of strategies assumed to lead to desired results and ultimately, the achievement of the outcome.

- A **Strategy** is a combination of **activities** logically working together to intervene at specific points along the TOC. Specifying relationships between strategies, activities and results in a TOC diagram enables partners to fully understand their role in the overall plan, identify synergies and take ownership for delivering key results. Later in the process, it helps them assess the effectiveness of work. For example: To what extent is our policy work paying off, in terms of the existence of particular incentives?
- **Results** represent changes in the socio-economic context of an OAP that the partnership assumes are required to achieve the outcome. These can be changes in awareness, the legal framework, the availability of resources or knowledge and skills, among others. Results are causally linked and together form a results chain that can be tested against its effectiveness.

In the context of MAVA's OAPs, individual projects constitute grants that the foundation is providing to implementing partners of the OAP. Projects tailor their specific activities to the context of the overall OAP. This can play out in different ways: (1) projects apply the whole or substantial parts of the OAP-level TOC at a specific site. That is often the case with pilot projects that test the programme TOC as an archetype in different contexts. (2) Projects implement a particular subset of OAP strategies and results. In that model, the sum of various projects forms the total programme. (3) Projects perform one or more OAP-strategies that are cross-cutting and relevant for the delivery of other projects and the programme as a whole. Depending on the context of OAPs, either one of these options or a combination of them can apply. Mapping the projects and/or main activities along the Theory of Change, helps partners understand the cohesion between projects.

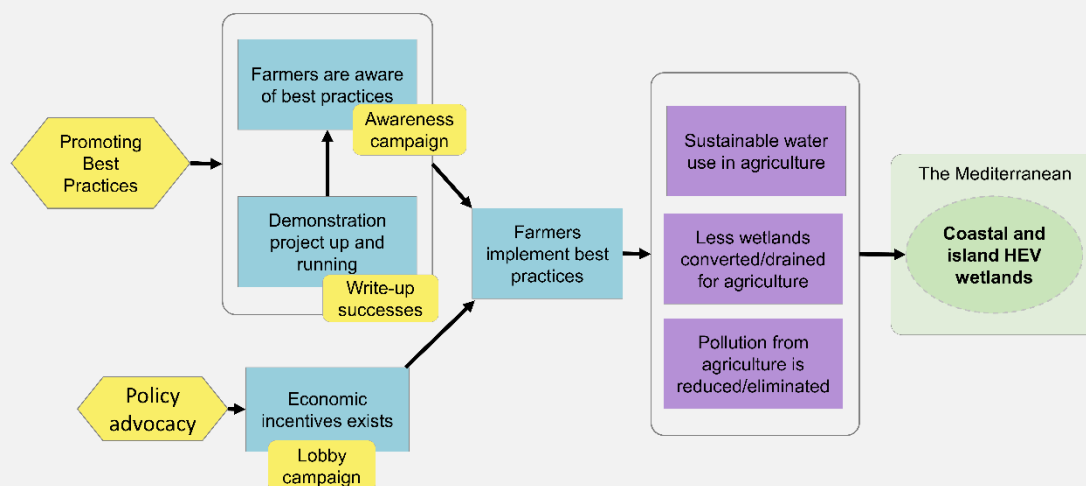


Figure 3: Simplified TOC example based on OAP M3 Wetlands

Tip #2: Clarify where and by which partner, strategies are implemented

It helps to make an overview table of the strategies and activities that individual projects (and partners) are implementing. If applicable, this overview should also clarify the different geographies in the OAP and which strategies apply there. It also helps to specify strategies that are not implemented at site/country level, but instead are more overarching and contribute to all the site-specific work (e.g. building the capacity of all partners to do a particular analysis or a regional policy campaign)

Goals, Objectives and Indicators

Specifying certain key results in the TOC, help partners focus on achievable objectives, be realistic, and monitor their joint progress, etc. A well-articulated TOC forms a solid basis for to define more concrete goals, objectives and indicators:

- **Goals and objectives** are formal statements that specify a particular result, threat reduction result or desired status of a conservation target. Objectives are focused on results and goals on targets. It is essential to set objectives on OAP-level, i.e. on the level corresponding with the overall outcome. Please note that individual projects might need to define more specific objectives for their particular geography or context.
- Partners formulate **indicators** to assess if they are achieving objectives and goals. An Indicator is a measurable entity associated with an objective or goal. It is crucial to limit the number of indicators, so monitoring is feasible. However, the set of indicators has to inform a meaningful discussion about the effectiveness of the OAP.

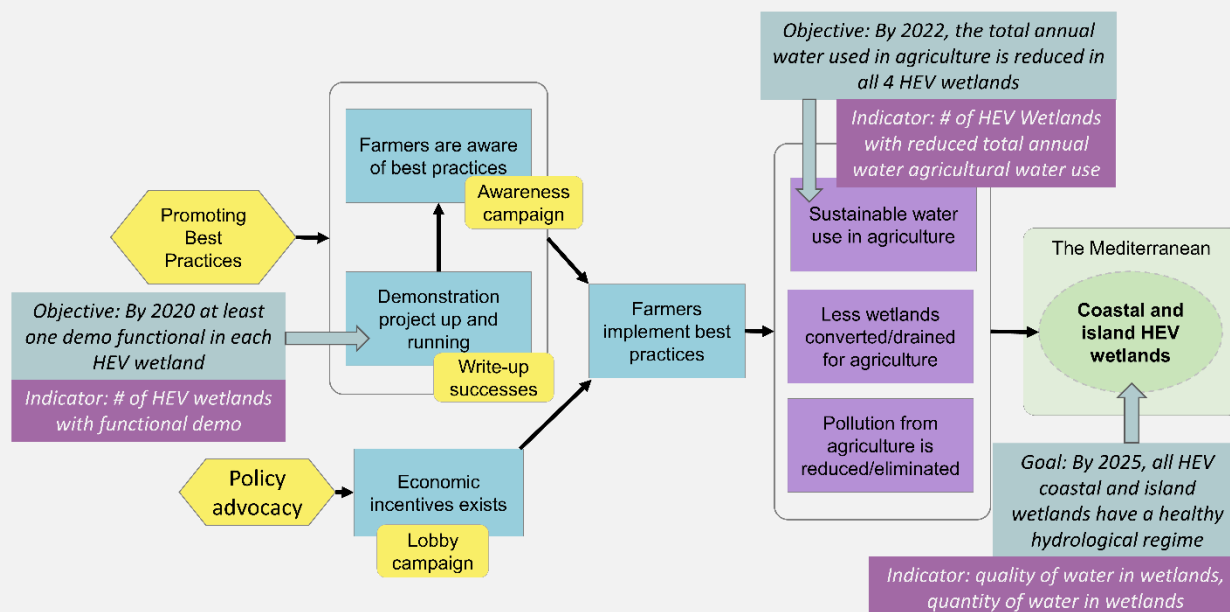


Figure 4: Simplified TOC example based on OAP M3 Wetlands with Objectives, Goals and Indicators



2.2 Developing Scorecards

For the assessment of progress and the validity of the TOC, partners are encouraged to use their monitoring data. In order for the monitoring data to be accessible and transparent to all partners, we recommend using on-line scorecards. Once developed, partners can easily enter their data in these scorecards without complex reporting templates. All data together, allow assessments on OAP-level. These assessments support informed discussions.

There are two types of Scorecards:

- **Progress Scorecard** to monitor the implementation of strategies and activities. The Progress Scorecard helps partners to understand if they are collectively doing what they planned to do.
- **Effectiveness Scorecard** to monitor the achievement of Objectives and Goals, i.e. the effectiveness of the TOC.

[How-To Guide #2: Managing MAVA's OAPs Adaptively](#) provides details on the use of Scorecards.

The Progress Scorecard allows partners to monitor and assess the progress of each strategy over time, across projects and partners. It contains all strategies from the TOC, as well as project-, or partner-specific information where applicable. Follow these steps to tailor the template to the OAP:

1. Ensure you have a copy of the MAVA approved **scorecard template** and save it on the MAVA AM directory of the OAP on Google Drive
2. **Navigate** to the Progress Scorecard sheet.
3. **Enter all Strategies** from the OAP-level TOC in the respective columns
4. **Enter all Projects, Partners** (whichever is applicable) in rows

Progress Scorecard

Strategies		1. Promoting best practices			2. Policy and advocacy		
Project	Partner	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
17053 Maristanis	MEDSEA Foundation	On track	On track		On track	On track	
	IUCN ECARO	Off track / not delivered	Major adjustments needed		On track	On track	
17057 Ghar El Melah	WWF North Africa	Planned for later	On track		Planned for later	On track	
17055 Ulcinj	EuroNatur	On track	Some adjustments needed		On track	On track	

Figure 5: Mocked-up example Progress Scorecard (including colour-coded ratings)

The Effectiveness Scorecard enables partners to monitor and assess the achievement of results and objectives. They capture measurement data for agreed indicators on OAP-level over time, across sites, partners and strategies. Follow these steps to tailor the template to the OAP:

1. Ensure you have a copy of the MAVA approved **scorecard template** and save it on the MAVA AM directory of the OAP on Google Drive
2. **Navigate** to the Effectiveness Scorecard sheet
3. **Enter all Results** (column A) and associated **Objectives** (column E) and Indicators (column I) from the OAP-level TOC in the respective rows
4. **Decide** if you want to organise results per strategy by adding rows
5. Provide **Indicator Rating Definitions** for each indicator (column J). These definitions are critical, to enable an assessment of measurement values in the categories 'very good', 'good', 'fair' or 'poor'.
6. **Add columns** to enable data entry per project, site or partner (depending on the OAP) (column A-R).
7. **Provide baseline data** for each indicator (column A + O) to enable a comparison and assessment; for each geography, site or partner (whichever is applicable for the OAP).

Effectiveness Scorecard

Step 3. Enter Results, Objectives, Indicators								Step 5		Step 6. Enter Project, Site, Partner										Sources of verification		
RESULTS	R 2020	R 2021	R 2022	OBJECTIVES	OBJ 2020	OBJ 2021	OBJ 2022	INDICATORS	Indicator rating scale	Priority sites												
										Buna				Ghar El Melah								
										Baseline	2020	2021	2022	Baseline	2020	2021	2022					
Demonstration projects are up and running				CW08 By 2020 at least one demo project is functional in each wetland with high ecological value				# of HEV wetlands with functional demo projects	>5 4 2-3 <2													
Sustainable water use in agriculture				CW09 By 2022 the total annual water used by agriculture is reduced by at least 10%				Change in the total annual water use by agriculture, %	Reduction of more than 10% Reduction of 0-10% Increase of 1-5% Increase of more than 5%													
Less wetlands converted/draind for agriculture				CW10 By 2022 the total converted/draind wetland area for is stable or reduced				% of the area that is converted /drained for agriculture	Reduction of more than 5% Increase of 0-5% Increase of more than 5%													
								% of previously ed area for agriculture drain to functional wetland	>90% 51-90% 10-50% <10													
Pollution from agriculture is reduced				CW11 By 2022 the pollution from agriculture is reduced					Reduction of more than 5% Increase of 0-5% Increase of more than 5%													

Step 7. Enter Baseline data

Figure 6: Simplified example Effectiveness Scorecard

The Effectiveness Scorecard is now ready for use. Based on predefined indicator rating definitions and baseline data, the indicators are rated using indicator measurement data (column L-N + P-R). Assessments are (usually) done on an annual basis with columns for all relevant years.

Rating of indicators, objectives and results form the basis for an assessment of the OAP in the Steering Committee Meetings (SCMs) and Mid-Term Evaluation. For guidance on the use of Scorecards for adaptive management, please refer to the '[How-to Guide #2: Managing MAVA's OAPs Adaptively](#)'.

Note that an assessment of the OAP is most efficient when its projects closely align to strategies, objectives and indicators on OAP-level. Partners have to discuss and agree on how older projects relate to the overall OAP. The same applies to projects that start late, once the OAP is already in full implementation.

Part 3: The OAP Steering Committee

3.1 Defining roles of Steering Committee Members

Making a partnership function well requires dedication. MAVA recommends setting up a Steering Committee (SC) to ensure good collaboration between partners. This SC plays a vital role in the design, implementation and adaptive management of the OAP.

The SC is ideally made up of representatives from all partner organisations. Ideally, one of the partners serves as the designated OAP coordinator. In some cases this role is *ad interim* performed by MAVA's OAP manager. The exact set-up of the SC, the division of roles between partners and the particular role of the coordinator, is OAP specific. Please consider the following functions when clarifying roles and responsibilities:

- The MAVA OAP manager
- The OAP coordinator
- Project Leaders
- Coordinators of overarching OAP-level strategies
- Logical candidates to coordinate work in a specific geography

Together, members of the SC are responsible for a few main functions:

1. **Coordination of the OAP-Partnership**, i.e. bringing partners together regularly to assess and evaluate progress and effectiveness, and ongoing joint management of the programme. People with proper oversight, coordination and management skills, and good standing in the partnership are good candidates for taking that role.
2. **Adaptive management of the OAP** is practiced by the entire partnership collectively. A good definition of the adaptive management process, separation of roles and use of tools are required.
3. A functioning partnership builds on **excellent internal communication**. Partners are obliged to communicate actively, so everybody is in the loop on relevant decisions. It is recommended to regularly review the partnership functioning throughout the lifecycle of OAPs among all the involved partners.

Tip #3: Ingredients of an effective partnership

- **Maximise diversity:** unite partners from a diverse mix of entities that may include conservation NGOs, other NGOs, small grassroots organisations, local community members, aid agencies, donors, government agencies, and corporations.
- **Minimise effort:** find the right balance between enabling joint decision-making among partners on one side, and minimising the required structure and bureaucracy on the other side.
- **Be flexible and practical:** enable partners to engage at an appropriate and adequate level – ranging from merely receiving communications, to an advisory role, to a fully engaged leadership and management role in the OAP.
- **Plan for transitions:** allow for leadership changes in the programme to share the burden and get buy-in from all partners.

3.2 Steering Committee Meetings

Usually, SCs meet once a year, to systematically review progress, problems and solutions with a focus on setting priorities for the coming year. Drastic changes to the TOC are not frequent in regular SC meetings. Instead, partners step back from their projects and focus on the collective ambition of the OAP.

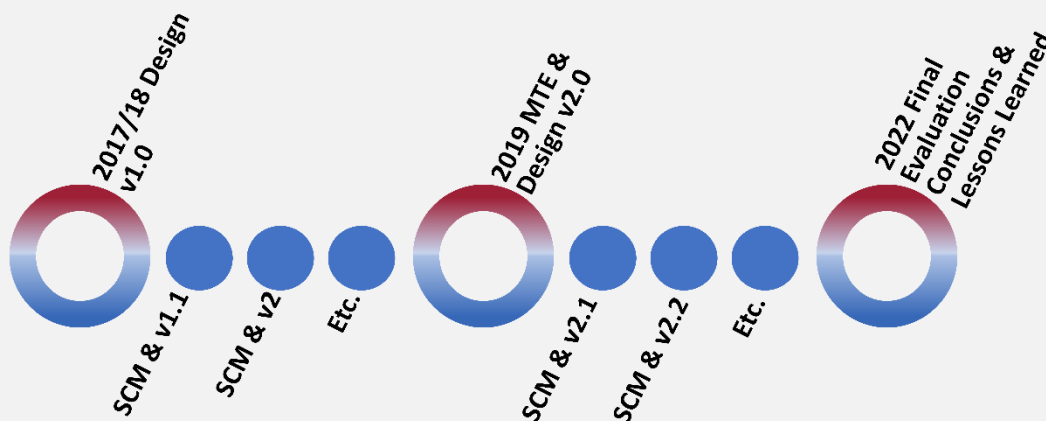


Figure 7: Process and products from OAP design version 1 through to version 2 and final evaluation

The final evaluation determines the effectiveness of the OAP and the collective impact of the partnership. Along the way, the OAP is evaluated and refined with every Steering Committee Meeting (SCM). It evolves new versions based on adaptive management decisions (moving from v1.0 to v1.1, through to v2.0 in the Mid-Term Evaluation and beyond). For SCs to hit the right level of discussion, it helps to define a clear, well-documented adaptive management protocol. A few crucial aspects should be considered:

1. **Think about smart timing for reporting.** Aligning SC meetings with reporting times of projects ensures relevant information can be made available and processed before meetings. To decrease the reporting burden of partners, it also helps to harmonise reporting times among projects.
2. **Schedule the processing and analysis of monitoring data accordingly,** with well-defined responsibilities between OAP Manager on MAVAside and OAP partners.
3. **Document the agreed adaptive management process,** for example, in a team charter or adaptive management logbook. For more information on the adaptive management iterations refer to '[How-to Guide #2: Managing MAVAs OAPs Adaptively](#)'.

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.
Conservation target	An element of biodiversity which can be a species, habitat/ ecological system, or ecological process that an OAP has chosen to focus on.
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. An 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 the transparency of data across projects, scales and between different partners.
Strategy	A group of actions with a common focus that work together to reduce threats, capitalize on opportunities, or restore natural systems. Strategies include one or more activities and are designed to achieve specific objectives and goals.
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

This guide is developed in close collaboration with [FOS Europe](#). FOS promotes good conservation practice, incorporating principles of evidence-based conservation and adaptive management. FOS helps build the capacity, processes and tools needed to adaptively plan, measure, and improve our OAPs.