



Towards continuous improvement

Performance management
in the natureandpoverty* programme

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natureandpoverty*

PMLS: a comprehensive and practical Performance Management and Learning System

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A photograph showing two men on a beach at dusk or dawn. In the foreground, a man in a dark shirt and shorts is using a long wooden pole to move a large, dead shark. In the background, another man in a light blue shirt is standing near a large pile of dead sharks on the sand. The ocean is visible in the background under a clear sky.

We face a dilemma...

01 Introduction

Monitoring direct project results is a well-established practice in the not-for-profit sector. Nevertheless, organizations are increasingly being called upon to demonstrate the wider effects and impacts of their activities; in other words, their longer term achievements. These have not always been measured as diligently as direct results. Some find it too time consuming; others refute the idea that effects and impacts can be measured, saying that it is not possible to attribute measured changes to project activities.

We face a dilemma. Development and environment organizations want to know what effect their work has on achieving overall objectives such as poverty reduction and nature conservation. So do donors. But practical methods for finding out are hard to come by. Besides, rarely are measurements made of organizational issues such as leadership, communication, collaboration or learning, so how do we know if they are improving?



The Performance Management and Learning System has been designed to help us find out. It was developed for the multi-year natureandpoverty* programme, which explored the complex links between ecosystem management and poverty alleviation. The Performance Management and Learning System (PMLS) was developed to provide all stakeholders with valuable information and insights into the performance of the natureandpoverty* programme and of the participating organizations.

The natureandpoverty* programme

Natureandpoverty* was a collaborative programme by the World Wide Fund for Nature Netherlands (WWF NL), Friends of the Earth Netherlands (FOE NL), the IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands (IUCN NL) and their international affiliates. Its main aim was to alleviate poverty through a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. The partners pursued a combination of three interrelated intervention strategies:

- Direct poverty reduction through improved ecosystem management
- Capacity building of Southern stakeholders and partner organizations
- Influencing policies and practices to improve ecosystem management and to enhance the positive effects on poverty

Natureandpoverty* was implemented in fifteen countries spanning four continents, and addressed seven themes across five sub-programmes. It was launched in 2003 with a budget of € 10 million from the Dutch development cooperation department and formally ended on 1 January 2007.

The Performance Management and Learning System (PMLS) has shown significant promise as a comprehensive and practical tool that can be used by a range of organizations for many different purposes. This booklet describes the main characteristics of the PMLS and includes several illustrative examples from the natureandpoverty* programme itself. Detailed manuals and workshop programmes are also available.¹

¹ For reference materials please contact any of the three participating organizations or AIDEnvironment, Amsterdam.

02 Getting to know the Performance Management and Learning System

Nature conservation, poverty alleviation and the link between natural resources and human development are part and parcel of the 'outer world', as depicted in Figure 1. Processes, policies and behaviour at local, national and global levels influence these linkages and put natural resources under pressure. Numerous organizations are trying to reduce these pressures and stimulate positive action in diverse projects and programmes. The Performance Management and Learning System (PMLS) can tell us if these are being successful, and if not, why not.

The PMLS supports project management and effective learning for continuous improvements in performance. The PMLS is based on existing performance management systems used in the private sector. Developed in response to a call for greater accountability and transparency towards the public and funding agencies, it meets the demand for evidence-based learning and decision-making and delivers objectively verified evidence of effectiveness.

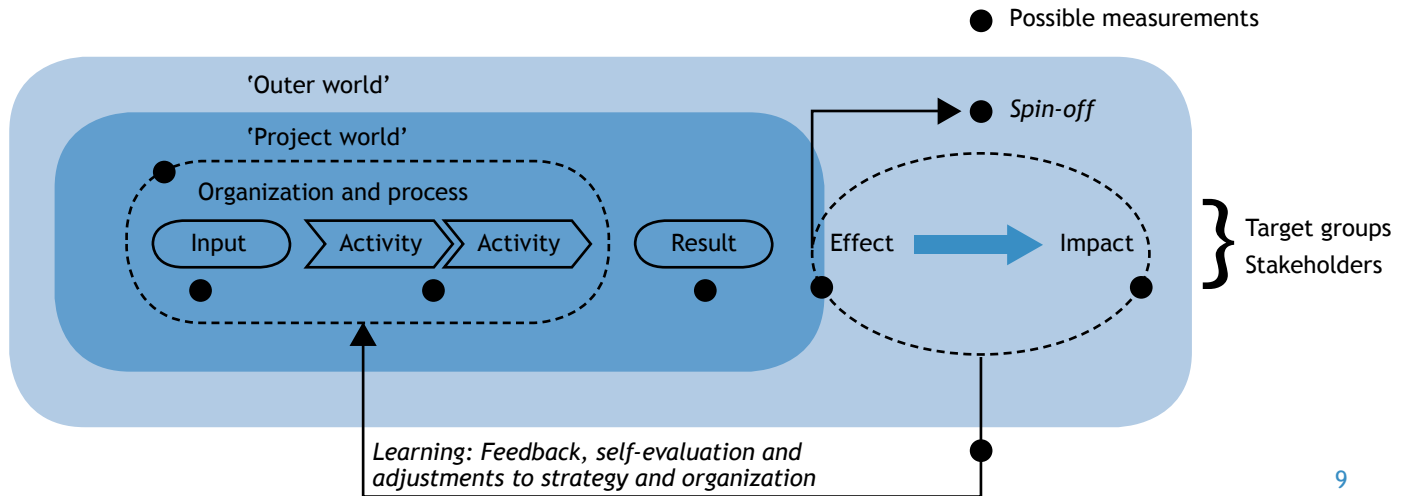
Figure 1. Performance Measurement and 'spheres of influence'.



Looking beyond direct project results

Standard monitoring systems look at inputs and results in the 'project world'; the PMLS takes the 'outer world' as its starting point. The project world is managed and controlled by the project, programme or organization; it is within its immediate sphere of influence. A well-known tool for managing the project world is the 'logical framework approach', which breaks down the project into goals, objectives, expected results and activities, with their associated indicators.

Measuring performance with the PMLS takes expected changes in the 'outer world' as starting point and examines the linkages between the project and the 'outer world', i.e. it examines effects and impacts. The aim is to understand, measure and specify the project's contributions to the observed changes in the 'outer world', the relationship between these contributions and the way the organization functions.



Linking effects and impacts to strategy and organization

The PMLS looks at performance in two mutually linked ways: in terms of 'outer world' achievements (effects and impacts) and in terms of organization and processes. The first extends project monitoring to include the assessment of longer-term achievements. The second assumes that a better functioning organization will achieve better results.

Figure 2 shows how the PMLS creates a learning cycle of 'measurement and adaptation' in multi-year conservation and development programmes. The design of such programmes begins with a vision. This vision is then translated into a strategy (a series of strategic choices), which must be supported by a well-functioning organization.

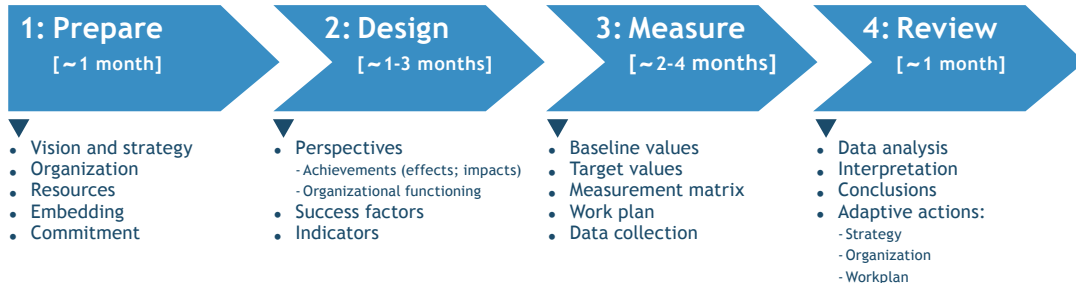
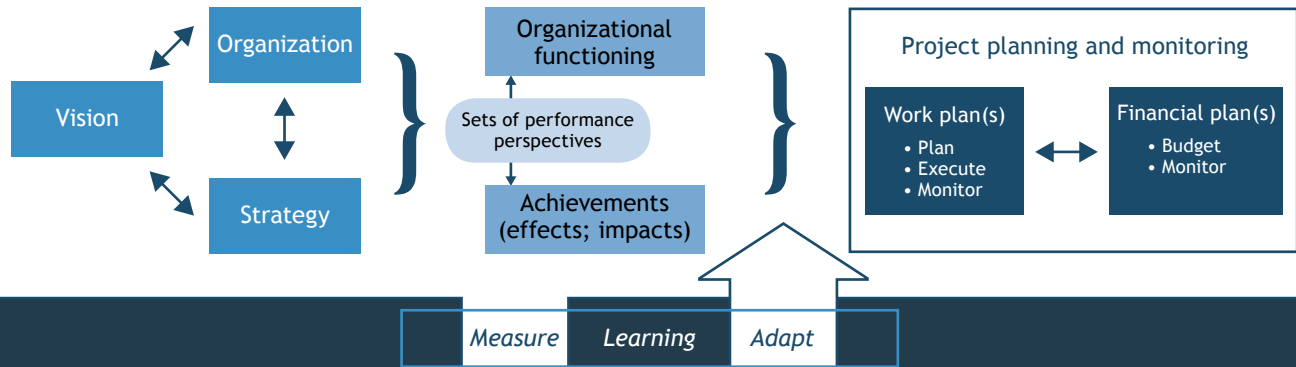
To assess the performance of such a programme, beyond the monitoring of direct results, we firstly define 'performance perspectives'. Performance perspectives cover 'achievements' – the effects and impacts in the 'outer world' – and organizational functioning. Assessments of organizational functioning vary and may include issues such as leadership, network development, collaboration, knowledge management, efficiency and accountability.

Work plans and financial plans are still required for day-to-day management and progress reporting.

Figure 2. Relationship between the design of multi-year (conservation and development) programmes and the Performance Management and Learning System.



Design of multi-year conservation and development programmes



Performance Management Learning System (PMLS)

Practical application

The natureandpoverty* programme addresses complex relations between ecosystem management and alleviating poverty. The PMLS supported the learning processes, stimulated strategic thinking and revealed complex cause-effect chains. In addition, it helped with setting realistic targets, defining good practices and measuring achievements.

The PMLS generates two types of outcomes:

1. Factual outcomes that provide tangible information:

- Baseline and regular data on achievements and organizational functioning
- Annual self-assessment reports with trends and conclusions on overall performance, and an action plan for continuous improvement
- Insight into effectiveness and potential steering mechanisms within the organization
- Inputs for annual progress reporting and work plans

2. Process-oriented outcomes that improve our understanding of relevant topics:

- The values and strategic objectives of the organizations or partners involved
- The dynamics in the 'outer world', such as relations between ecosystem management and poverty alleviation
- Critical management issues within the programme organization
- Methods for performance measurement, evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement

A frequently heard comment when starting to design a PMLS is 'this is what we do already'. But the PMLS is not a regular monitoring system for tracking the results of a project, nor does it replace existing project monitoring systems. It is a complementary tool that guides an organization-wide learning process. Its aim is continuous improvement to realize the vision and long-term objectives of an organization.

Practical challenges

Sometimes the need for long-term organizational improvements, which can be achieved through the use of the PMLS, is in conflict with the short-term priorities of the programme. A natural tendency in such cases is to delay implementing the PMLS because of these priorities. Sufficient commitment by the programme management will then be needed to get the PMLS started and make these improvements. Additional challenges are to design the PMLS so that it is relatively simple to use and not too expensive or time-consuming, while ensuring that it generates objective information that can be used for continuous improvement (see Step 2: Design, page 19).

The PMLS is an organization-wide approach that ...

- stimulates learning, strategic planning, improvement and internal evaluation
- defines and measures achievements in the 'outer world' by using a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators
- provides a link between organizational functioning and achievements
- draws conclusions on the basis of data and a structured debate
- supports logical thinking on strategic objectives and intervention strategies

A photograph of three young children in a lush green field. The child in the foreground, a boy with dark hair, is smiling and looking down at a book he is holding. Behind him, another child is partially visible, also looking at a book. To the right, a girl in a red shirt is looking intently at a book. The background is a vast, green field under bright light.

**Performance management
and learning go together!**

03 Implementing the Performance Management and Learning System

The Performance Management and Learning System is implemented in four steps: prepare, design, measure and review.

1: Prepare
[~1 month]

2: Design
[~1-3 months]

3: Measure
[~2-4 months]

4: Review
[~1 month]



- Vision and strategy
- Organization
- Resources
- Embedding
- Commitment

Step 1: Prepare

The first step is to prepare the organization for the introduction of PMLS.

Ensure the following conditions are met

- Management is committed to using the PMLS results when making decisions.
- Donors agree to use the PMLS results for review, evaluation and adjusting work plans.
- The PMLS is integrated into the organization or programme, with a work plan and sufficient human and financial resources.
- Stakeholders and partners to the programme are willing to invest time in using the PMLS.
- Investments are made in initial training in the use of the PMLS.
- Participants have some experience with project monitoring and measurement of indicators.

Check the project strategy

Ideally, a project strategy is in place before starting to design the PMLS. You should be able to answer 'yes' to the questions below. If not, the PMLS will help to expose the gaps:

- Does the programme have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve?
- Does the programme have a clear strategy for realizing the vision?
- Have objectives been defined in terms of desired effects and impact?
- Have objectives been defined regarding organizational functioning and learning?

Principal tasks and responsibilities when designing and implementing a PMLS

Who	Tasks and responsibilities
Programme management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commitment to use PMLS: planning and decision-making• Commitment to allocate sufficient financial and human resources• Commitment to involve stakeholders and programme partners where needed
PMLS facilitator (external)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitation during PMLS design workshop and self-assessment• Supervision of the appropriate application of PMLS
PMLS manager (internal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication and coordination of PMLS activities• Analysis of PMLS data, reporting and communication of results• Dialogue with management concerning PMLS
Programme staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participation in PMLS design and self-assessment workshops• Data collection for baseline and regular measurement• Participation in learning events associated with PMLS
Programme partners (in the field)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participation in PMLS activities as agreed• Delivery of data and information on issues and indicators as agreed



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Define tasks and responsibilities

Designing and implementing a PMLS involves different parties with specific tasks and responsibilities and should include management representatives, field staff and representatives of beneficiary groups, partners and other stakeholders who know the conditions in the field.

Identify existing monitoring systems and experiences

‘Do we need something new like PMLS?’ ‘Isn’t this what we are already doing?’ These were common questions during the introduction of the PMLS in the natureandpoverty* programmes. The PMLS should not be introduced as a separate tool, but as an aid to strengthening an organization or programme, its management and its internal learning process. Before introducing the PMLS, it is important to know which monitoring systems are already in place in the organization and what experience has already been gained.

Step 2: Design

Designing a PMLS is about defining relationships between the programme vision on the one hand, and indicators for achievements (i.e. effects and impacts) and organizational functioning on the other hand (Figure 2, page 11). To get everyone involved right from the start, an introduction workshop should be held that runs through the method and all elements involved in designing a PMLS.



- Perspectives
 - Achievements (effects, impacts)
 - Organizational functioning
- Success factors
- Indicators

Define perspectives based on the project strategy

A perspective is a major dimension along which the organization or programme views its own performance and opportunities to work on improvement.

Perspectives do not overlap and are of equal weight, which means that one perspective should not be subordinate to another. There are two sets of perspectives: one for external achievements related to the programme strategy, and one for those aspects of internal organizational functioning that are critical for realizing the strategy (see Figure 2, page 11).

In the natureandpoverty* programme the two sets of perspectives were the same for each geographical sub-programme because the basic strategy was the same for each sub-programme. This also allowed for easy comparison.

Performance perspectives for the natureandpoverty* programme

Performance in terms of achievements

1. Poverty alleviation
2. Improved ecosystem management
3. Capacity building of civil society organizations
4. Influencing policies and practices

Performance in terms of organizational functioning

5. Effective complementarity
6. Effective learning
7. External relations

Identify success factors

Success factors are conditions that are critical for continuity and success. They are used to chart progress on a perspective. Success factors have long-term validity, are specific to the programme and are not directly measurable. The best way to approach success factors is to look at the programme from the viewpoint of the 'outer world' and to identify links with what the programme aims to achieve. For many project participants this approach will be the opposite to

what they are used to (i.e. taking the programme as the starting point of monitoring). Success factors can also point out unexpected changes in the 'outer world' which tend to be missed when the programme is the starting point for defining success factors. On the next page an example is given of the perspectives and success factors taken from the South East Asia sub-programme, with the main objective of obtaining income from forest management.



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<i>Perspectives</i>	<i>Success Factors</i>
<i>Performance in terms of achievements</i>	
1. Poverty Alleviation	1.1. A communal business based on management of the natural resources of Leboyen Basin leads to benefits 1.2. Communities possess adequate management capacity, e.g. financial and marketing
2. Improved ecosystem management	2.1. Greater recognition for local knowledge and wisdom in natural resource management 2.2. Leboyen Basin natural resources will be managed in a sustainable manner
3. Capacity building of civil society organizations	3.1. Communities are willing and able to learn and to achieve progress in relevant fields 3.2. Collective interests in the sustainability of natural resources of Leboyen Basin
4. Influencing policies and practices	4.1. Room for community's intervention in policy making on natural resources management 4.2. Spatial planning accommodates communal management area in the Leboyen Basin 4.3. Good data and information are available to support policy influencing
<i>Performance in terms of organizational functioning</i>	
5. Effective complementarity	5.1. Consistent commitment and contribution of resources from each participating natureandpoverty* organization and their local partners
6. Effective learning	6.1. Regular communication and exchanges of lessons between participating natureandpoverty* organizations and their local partners
7. External relations	7.1. Adequate capacity and competence to bring the collaborative agenda to external parties 7.2. Adequate skills in managing key stakeholders

Perspectives and success factors for the South East Asia sub-programme

To define success factors, ask yourself the following questions:

- What activities or changes are critical for improving this perspective?
For instance, what changes are necessary in response to major threats or opportunities? What are the organizational challenges?
- Will the proposed success factor still be relevant in five years time?
- Is the success factor described as succinctly as possible?
- If two success factors are very similar, can they be merged into one?

*Good and bad examples of success factors from nature and poverty**

<i>Bad example</i>	<i>Why it is not good</i>	<i>Good example</i>
Partnership with Unilever on palm oil production in Indonesia	Too specific and not long term; it is more of an output indicator	Partnerships with the private sector in the palm oil product chain
Organizational capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs)	Too broad and not sufficiently related to the programme	Capacity of CSOs to influence policies relevant to the programme
Number of policies relevant to the programme successfully influenced by CSOs	Good indicator to measure the success factor, but not a success factor itself	Capacity of CSOs to influence policies relevant to the programme
Strategic planning capacity by local government	Not specific enough and not related to the programme organization	Strategic planning capacity of local government on poverty alleviation and environmental management

Select indicators

The next step is to define a limited number of indicators for each success factor that can be used to assess, and possibly measure, changes in the success factors. Programme staff, partners and stakeholders should all be involved in selecting the success factors and indicators. Not only does this improve the likelihood of obtaining good results, it also helps to cement a shared vision and strategy, improve collaboration and learning, and generate commitment to using the PMLS and its results.

Because the complexity of the desired changes in the 'outer world' cannot be captured by measurable indicators alone, the PMLS also makes use of qualitative indicators and descriptive information. Figure 3 shows how quantitative and qualitative indicators complement each other: while quantitative indicators provide fixed pointers to understanding what happens, qualitative indicators can provide broader information about the success factor, establish linkages and complete the overall picture.

When identifying indicators for achievements it may be useful not to think too much in terms of 'what should the programme achieve' but rather 'what are the desired changes in the 'outer world''. Although programme performance is our main interest, we need to know what is going on in the 'outer world'. Programmes are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end.

Avoid having lengthy discussions about how and what to measure, and developing long lists of indicators in an attempt to measure everything. This is unrealistic and costly. The challenge is to design PMLS using a short list of key indicators.

Indicators cannot be changed half way through a measurement period. That would make it impossible to determine trends. Defining indicators requires careful consideration and time to ensure that they meet specific criteria.

To summarize, three types of indicators can be used: Quantitative indicators can be measured directly, for example the number of trees per hectare, population density and income per family.

Qualitative indicators cannot be measured directly, for example the quality of a management plan, transparency of planning processes and forest quality. They can be measured indirectly, for example by giving scores to answers like 'good', 'bad' or 'average' in interviews or questionnaires.

Descriptive information cannot be measured at all, but may give a good overall view of a certain phenomenon. It may take the form of stories, impressions, pictures, descriptions and such like.

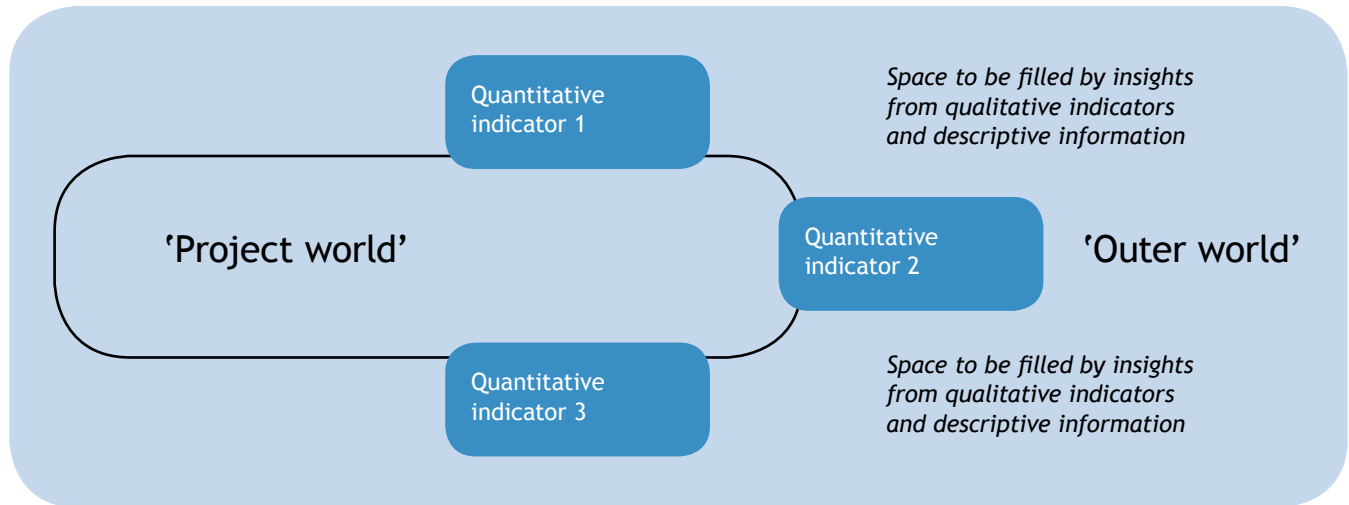


Figure 3. Indicators for success factors link the project world to the 'outer world'.

Quantitative indicators should be SMART

From experience we know that good quantitative indicators should meet the following criteria:

Specific - well defined, related to a specific success factor and appropriate for assessing progress

Measurable - quantifiable and sufficiently sensitive to record changes between two consecutive measurements

Achievable - associated with changes that can realistically be achieved in the 'outer world'

Realistic - measurable by relatively simple methods in an objective and unambiguous way

Time and place specific - defined by time and space

In practice, it will be helpful to perform an additional check using the following questions:

- Is the indicator sufficiently 'detached' from the programme activities? If necessary, move further into the 'outer world'.
- Is the indicator the best one for measuring the success factor? If not, can it be replaced?
- Will the indicator still be relevant five years from now?

Examples of quantitative indicators from the natureandpoverty* Congo Basin sub-programme are listed on pages 36 and 37.



be SMART!

The following example from natureandpoverty* illustrates the dilemmas that may arise when using quantitative indicators.

A programme aims to reduce poverty in a large region by developing income generating activities based on the exploitation of non-timber forest products. Five possible indicators are reviewed.

1. Number of people with reduced poverty status due to income generating activities

This is too broad in scope. Which people? What activities? And where?

2. Number of women and indigenous groups in region X with an income from trade in non-forest timber products

This is more specific, better related to programme achievements and can be measured well by a survey.

3. Number of women and indigenous groups in region X with income from trade in bamboo

This is a relevant focus if the programme directly or indirectly supports the bamboo trade. However, the question remains whether the level of income from bamboo is the only indicator for 'poverty reduction'. Other indicators may be needed to obtain a more complete picture of poverty alleviation, including social and cultural aspects.

4. Number of women and indigenous groups reporting an improvement in income from trade in bamboo

This is an assessment of the level of income, which may be suitably measured by focus group surveys and questionnaires.

5. Number of women and indigenous groups reporting improved income from trade in bamboo as a result of project activities

This is an elaboration of the previous indicator and specifically focuses on the relation with the project (which may lead to subjective opinions). This could also be suitably measured by focus-group surveys and questionnaires (scoring the level of satisfaction in a number of categories).

Qualitative indicators should be SPICED

Qualitative indicators are 'measured' by conducting surveys or holding structured interviews with stakeholders, key informants, households or focus groups. The larger and more varied the group of respondents, the more reliable the measurement, but obviously more resources will be required. Statistical approaches can be used to evaluate the validity of the outcomes. Good qualitative indicators should be SPICED:

Subjective - sufficiently open to reflect opinions, views and overall feelings

Participatory - developed and assessed by and with stakeholders

Interpreted - provide explanation for better understanding and context

Cross-checked - verifiable against other sources and information

Empowering - involve a representative set of stakeholders

Diverse - reflect different stakeholder views

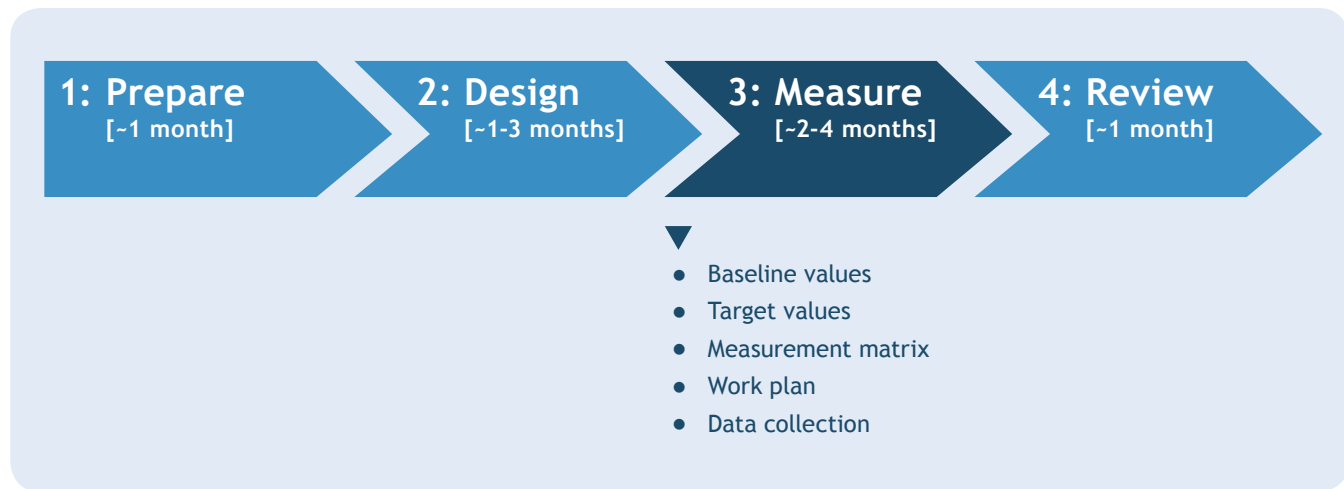
To process responses on qualitative indicators the different types of answers have to be coded and scored to produce numerical values.

A photograph of a street food stall. In the foreground, several bowls of food are displayed on a red surface. The bowls contain various types of food, including what appears to be fried rice or noodles, and some are topped with a red, spicy-looking sauce. A man in a light blue shirt is standing behind the counter, holding a black plastic bag. To his right, a woman is sitting. The background is dark and cluttered with various items hanging on the wall. The text "be SPICED!" is overlaid in large white letters across the middle of the image.

be SPICED!

Step 3: Measure

The next step is to collect the necessary data. Make sure that enough time and staff are made available and that data collection, analysis and reporting are well coordinated. Joint data collection will help to forge shared expectations of the strategy and fuel the learning process.



Measure baseline values

A baseline value is the first measurement of an indicator and the starting point against which to measure improvements in performance, such as: 'In 2005 the amount of timber logged from well managed forests was 5 m³ per person per year'. Baseline values should be measured for all defined indicators before project interventions begin. In practice, though, other activities tend to take priority during the hectic period of a project start up, and in many cases baseline values are determined in retrospect. This is obviously less accurate, and may even be unreliable. A thorough socio-economic survey may be one way of establishing a baseline measurement for poverty alleviation and may be included in the programme. It will show where major improvements are required and thus help in setting good target values.

Measurements of baseline values should be made using methods that will be applied in subsequent years. While measuring the baseline values it is useful to make an estimate of the time and costs required to measure the indicators and establish whether simplifications are possible.



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Set target values

A target value is a quantitative (operational) value which indicates how performance on a certain indicator is expected to improve, for example 'water availability in 2010 will be 25 litres per person per day'. Target values reflect changes expected in the 'outer world', or within the organization, that are caused largely by the programme. Target values should go beyond the expected direct results of the programme, and must be related to the expected effects or impacts. They should be realistic, and yet challenging and ambitious.

Complete the PMLS measurement matrix

The next step is completing the PMLS measurement matrix as shown on page 35. The matrix should be accompanied by a work plan and budgets. Note that the frequency of measurement may be annual or multi-annual; it may be useful for some indicators to be measured only once every three to four years.

Structure of the PMLS measurement matrix

Perspectives	Success factors	Indicators	Measuring method and frequency	Responsibilities for measurement	Baseline value (year X)	Actual value (year X+1, etc.)	Target value (end of project)	Analysis and comments
1. Poverty alleviation	1.1	1.1.1						
	1.2	1.1.2						
2. Improved ecosystem management	2.1	2.1.1						
		2.1.2						
	2.2	2.2.1						

The PMLS measurement matrix should be validated by asking the following questions:

- Is the number of indicators manageable, given the resources required for data collection? If not, set priorities and review selected indicators.
- Are the main expected changes in the 'outer world' covered by the indicator set?
- Are the responsibilities for data collection clear? Have the parties involved agreed on the responsibilities assigned to them, and do they have the resources to carry out these responsibilities?
- Is data processing already defined?
- Can the measurement and processing of indicators be tested? Will well-known methods be used?
- Is the frequency of measurement clearly specified?
- Will optimal use be made of the available information and data collected by others?
- Are target values both realistic and challenging?

PMLS application in the natureandpoverty⁺ programme: a fragment of the data from the Congo Basin

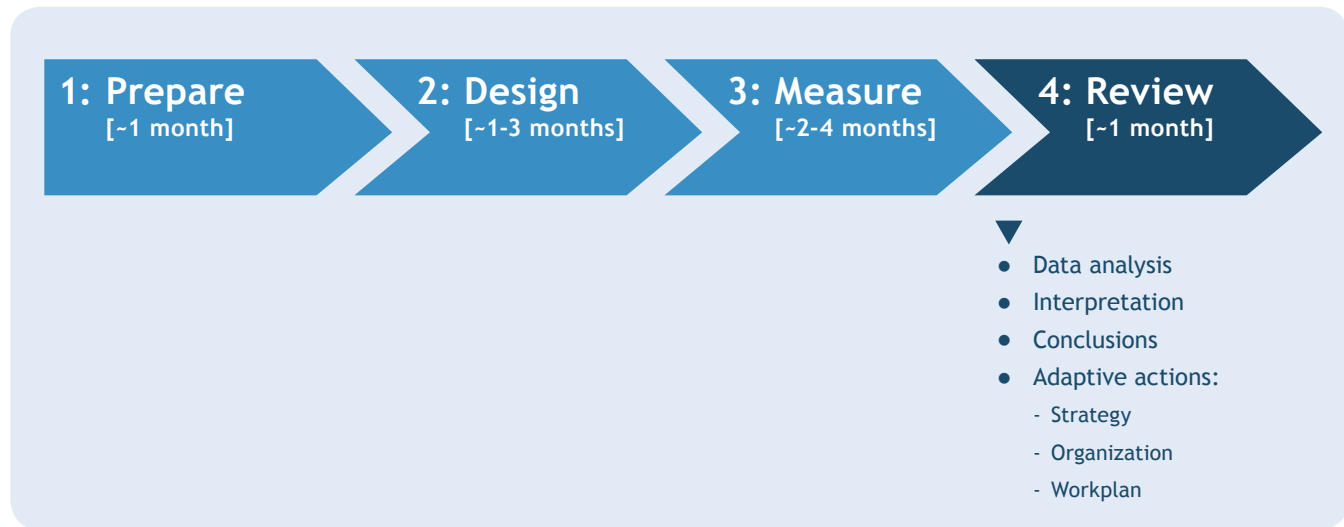
Perspective	Success factors	Indicators (all quantitative)	Measuring method
Improved ecosystem management	Quality of co-management systems	Number of formal co-management agreements among stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of reports • Field observations and market surveys • Surveys
		...	
		...	
	Threats and pressures on ecosystems	Relative density of human activities constituting ecosystem threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of reports • Ecological surveys • Observations
		Number of registered infringements of legislation governing natural resource use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of reports • Ecological surveys • Observations
		...	
		...	

sub-programme on one perspective: 'Improved ecosystem management'

Responsibilities for measurement	Baseline value (2004)	Actual value (2006)	Target value (2006)	Analysis and comments
Organization X - area A	0	3	More than 5	
Organization X - area B	0	2	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 formal co-management agreement (3 years) among community A • 1 formal agreement signed between x and y for development of artisanal fishing
Organization X - area A	Less than 10	6.2	Less than 10	Relative density of human activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foot path: 2.2 (A); 2.0 (B) • Farming: 1.5 (A); 1.5 (B) • Tree cutting: 1.3 (A); 1.0 (B) • Hunting: 1.1 (A); 1.4 (B)
Organization X - area B	Not measured	5.9	No increase	
Organization X - area A	4	21 guns and 42 poachers seized	Decline and less than 10	The growth in the number of breaches of the law is a reflection of the increased intensity of antipoaching patrols rather than an increase in illegal activities

Step 4: Review

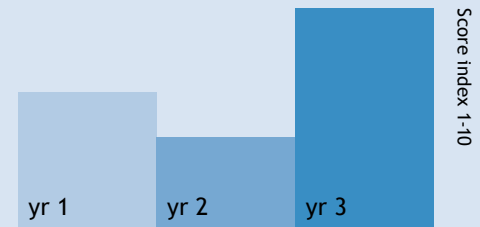
This fourth step brings together different types of knowledge, information, analyses and conclusions that can be used to bring about continuous improvement in the programme and achieve the desired impacts in the 'outer world'.



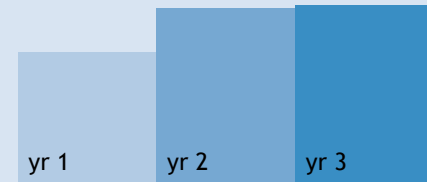
Pool and average the data

Use baseline values and specific indicator scores from different years to establish trends and understand the changes that are taking place. Because management and outsiders will usually not be interested in knowing about the changes in great detail, it is helpful to pool and average the indicator values and to present them visually, for example in bar charts. Firstly attribute scores to different quantitative and qualitative indicators on the basis of their value range and trends, for example using an index from 1 to 10. Then calculate data for success factors and perspectives by pooling and averaging (and if required, weighting) the scores. An alternative to scoring indicators is to give scores directly to success factors or perspectives, for example according to the number of indicators or success factors that show a positive change. Finally, compile bar charts for the years that the measurements were carried out. This will generate powerful overviews of progress (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Figure 4. Presentation of PMLS data in a bar chart



Perspective 1: poverty reduction



Perspective 2: ecosystem quality



Etc.

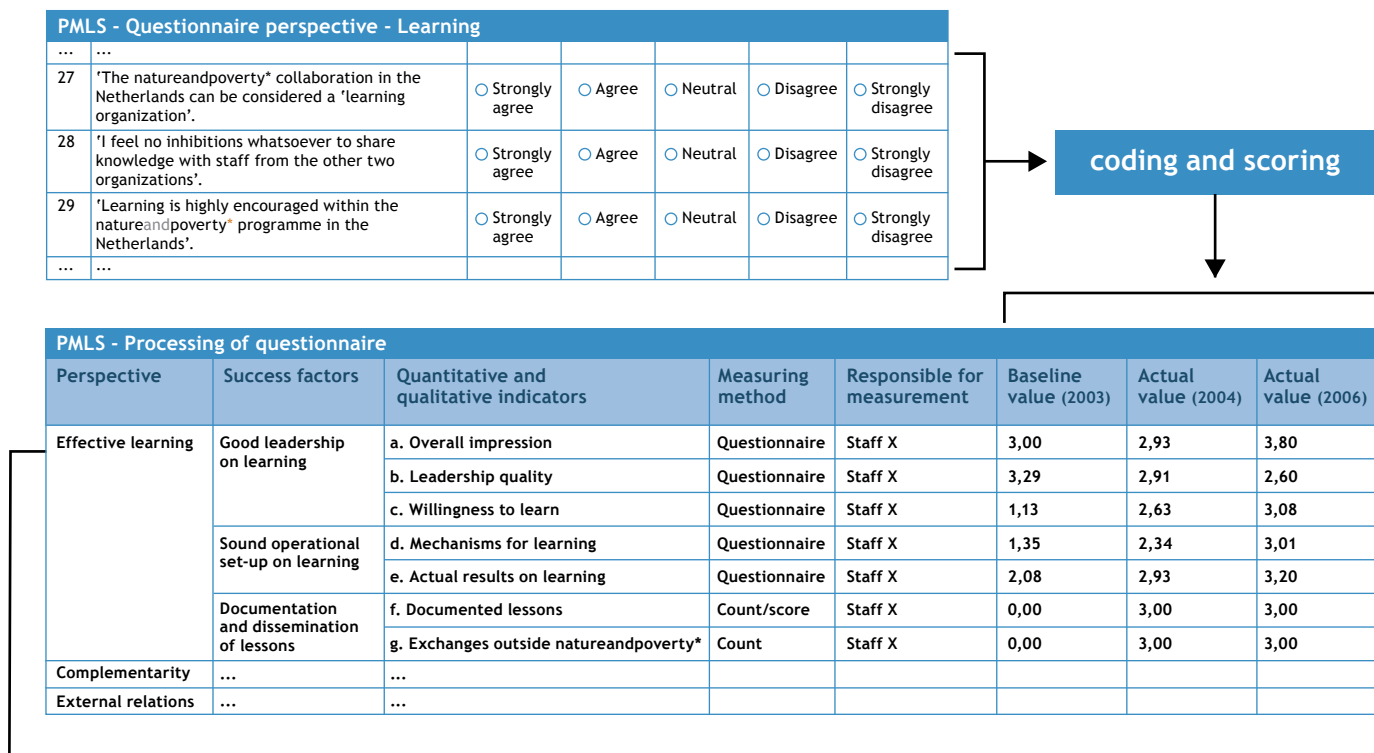
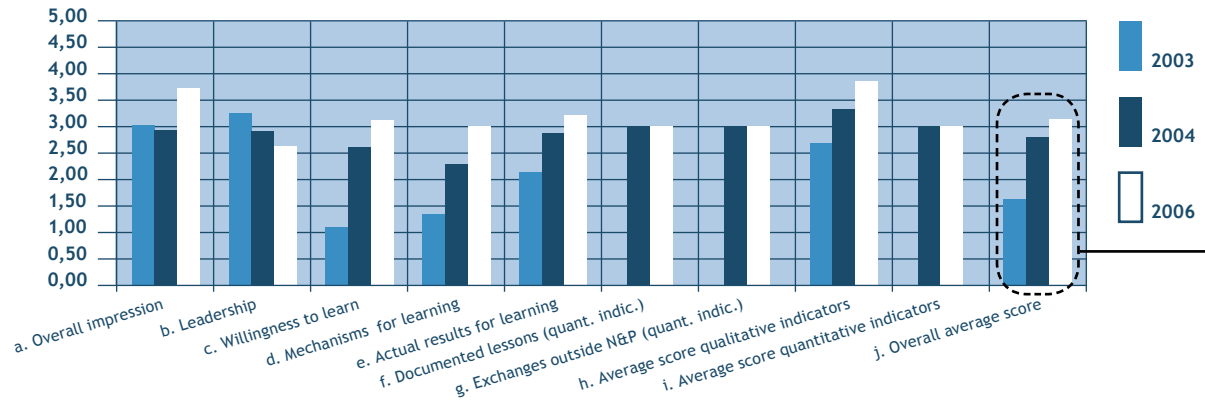


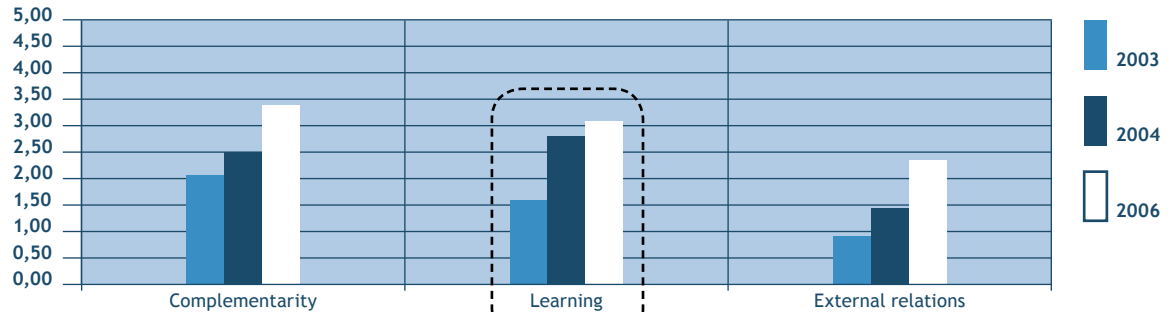
Figure 5. An example of PMLS data from the natureandpoverty* programme: Elaboration of the perspective 'effective learning' from questionnaire to overall performance trends on the three organizational perspectives.

PMLS - Presentation of overall performance trends

Indicators on learning



Performance trends on 'complementarity', 'learning' and 'external relations'



Interpretation

A number or a trend by itself does not give any information on values like good, bad, alarming or inevitable. Numbers and trends can only be validated by programme staff, stakeholders and partners in a process of interpretation and debate. This debate should be structured in a 'self-assessment workshop', during which descriptive information can also be presented and used to draw relevant conclusions.

The workshop should give answers to questions regarding the use of PMLS as a tool as well as the outcomes it generates. With respect to the PMLS as a tool, the self assessment workshop should answer the following questions:

- Is time and money spent on data collection considered appropriate?
- If not, should the selected indicators be reviewed?
- Do all indicators/perspectives have a value?
- Were any critical changes in the 'outer world' not covered by the PMLS?
- Does the data set present a coherent result?

The PMLS outcomes should be discussed and structured using the following questions:

- What conclusions can be drawn from the data about the achievements and the changes in the 'outer world'? How do these match the perceptions of participants? Are there any additional descriptive indicators to support the conclusions?
- What is the relevance of the observed changes; what do they mean in the 'outer world'?
- What can be said about the relation with the programme or organization? Have the expected target values been reached? Is the programme on track? Is the strategy being realized?
- What are the consequences for the strategy; should it be adjusted?
- What changes were observed in the selected indicators on organizational functioning?
- What crucial linkages between organizational functioning and achievements worked well; where and why did they fail?
- Has PMLS resulted in continuous improvement and learning?

Draw conclusions for the organization

In drawing conclusions on achievements and organizational functioning, it is important to remain as objective as possible. Avoid putting the measurements in the spotlight, but see them as an input to a process of continuous improvement.

A condition for PMLS is commitment by the programme management to ensure follow-up, for example by committing themselves to the self-assessment workshop. It is important not to be too ambitious and to remain realistic about what can and cannot be changed (see Figure 2, page 11):

- Adjust work plans and budgets to improve effectiveness by focusing on key issues.
- Put more emphasis on organizational issues that show no progress.
- Strengthen the linkages between different programme components.
- Update and review the overall programme or organizational strategy.
- Resolve issues regarding collaboration, such as leadership and support for operational systems.
- Strengthen the capacities of the programme participants or partner organizations.



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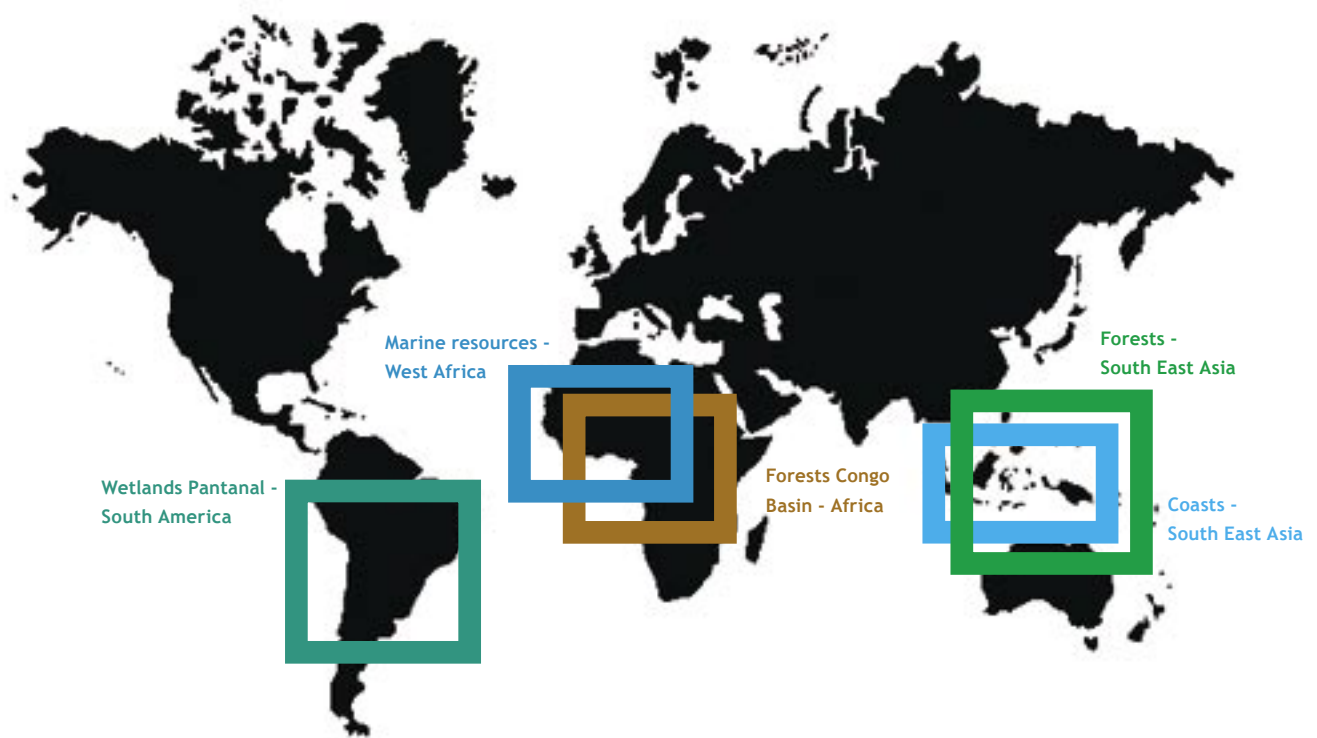


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04 Putting the Performance Management and Learning System into practice

The PMLS has been tested, evaluated and adjusted by the natureandpoverty* programme. The 'voices' from three sub-programmes illustrate how the PMLS has been used in practice.

We operate in five regions:





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Experiences from natureandpoverty*: PMLS in the South East Asia sub-programme

The natureandpoverty* approach in the South East Asia sub-programme focused on:

- Combating threats to the livelihoods of forest-dependent peoples, like illegal and destructive logging and conversion to oil palm plantations
- Promoting and facilitating direct poverty alleviation by supporting local economic development, for example alternative income from non-timber forest products like rattan, honey and cajuput oil
- Strengthening local institutions through intensive engagement at different levels, ranging from communities and NGOs to government bodies and decision makers in the plantation and logging industry
- Working on policy advocacy, better management practices and multi-stakeholder forums, for example pro-poor policies at district and village level and the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil initiative

In the early design of the PMLS, the sub-programme in South East Asia and its partners identified the following challenges:

- *Resistance* The introduction of the PMLS as a new tool met with resistance from some participants. Once the PMLS and the reasons behind it became clear, collective commitment was built.
- *Replacement of participants during the sub-programme* The participating organizations often replaced their representatives responsible for the PMLS. It takes time to create understanding of PMLS at decision-making level and to weigh short-term priorities against the long-term benefits from PMLS.
- *Gap in the levels of knowledge and experiences* Individuals not previously exposed to monitoring and evaluation should be equipped with adequate background and knowledge beforehand.
- *Unavailability of strategic plans and adequate programme documents* Strategic plans must be available and the partners must have thorough knowledge of these plans before designing the PMLS.
- *Complexity of the programme* In a complex programme, like the South East Asia sub-component, start PMLS on a pilot basis in a focal area of the sub-programme; the results may then be expanded to the entire sub-programme.
- *Complicating the simple* Participants were trapped in the complexity of defining and measuring indicators. Ensure sufficient time is spent on steps 1 and 2, so that all participants use the indicators in a consistent manner and measure them using the same methods.

Experiences from natureandpoverty: PMLS in the Pantanal sub-programme*

The natureandpoverty* approach in the Pantanal focused on:

- Developing alternative livelihoods and income generating activities for communities that depend on the natural resources of the Pantanal
- Stimulating an eco-regional, participatory and decentralized approach to land use planning of the Paraguay-Paraná River Basin
- Mainstreaming ecological criteria into the investment policies of financial institutions and the governments of Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay
- Environmental education to raise awareness of the fragility of the system and prevent its distortion and degradation

When evaluating the implementation of the PMLS, the Southern partners had the following observations:

- *Critical stance* Participants took a critical stance on the use of PMLS. Addressing and discussing these concerns resulted in useful exchanges about performance measurement, management approaches, monitoring systems and success factors for the sub-programme.
- *Different strategies* It became clear that participants had different ideas about the best way to realize their vision and what they actually wanted to achieve. The PMLS helped with identifying these differences and defining common goals.
- *Defining poverty* A controversial perspective was that of poverty reduction, because many believed it was not possible to make concrete progress on this perspective. The PMLS stimulated the partners to think about how concrete changes could be realized.

- *Playing with precision* The baseline data were incomplete because the PMLS was only introduced about a year into the sub-programme. Even without the desired precision, the information obtained from existing secondary sources was considered very useful for appreciating changes.
- *Positive about the matrix* The elaboration of the PMLS measurement matrix (with data from different years) was considered an excellent tool for exchanging information and learning about the programme results, its context, relevant concepts and approaches.





Experiences from natureandpoverty:
PMLS in the Congo Basin sub-programme*

The natureandpoverty* approach in the Congo Basin focused on:

- Field activities on land and access rights, benefit sharing arrangements and strengthening of local stakeholders in biodiversity-rich but economically 'poor' areas in Cameroon and Gabon
- Investigating and analysing 'external' threats to the ecosystems and to the livelihoods of local communities – especially from logging – and using the results in national and international lobbying



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Experience with using the PMLS involved several ups and downs:

- **Positive start** The first workshop to introduce the PMLS method was a success. Many participants were enthusiastic and saw the PMLS as a tool that their organization should apply. An initial set of success factors and indicators was established and agreements were made about who should monitor what.
- **Lack of follow-up** During the subsequent year follow-up was delayed for a number of typical reasons: lack of clarity about resources and responsibilities, other urgent short-term issues, and a low priority given to PMLS by management within the sub-programme.
- **Renewed enthusiasm after first results** After baseline data were brought together and useful conclusions were drawn, participants expressed satisfaction. They agreed on the need to fill in the remaining gaps to get a complete picture of the 'outer world'.
- **External facilitator** An external facilitator helped to implement the PMLS (data collection, organizing workshops, drawing relevant conclusions and defining recommendations). This is not an uncommon situation and is worth considering when implementing the PMLS.

A young girl with dark hair and bangs, wearing a blue school uniform, sits at a desk in a classroom. She is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. In front of her is an open notebook and a yellow and blue pen. Other children are visible in the background, also in a classroom setting.

The PMLS induced partner organizations to share information about the effectiveness of their activities

05 Performance management and learning go together!

Designing and applying the PMLS took more time than initially anticipated because of the complexity of the natureandpoverty* programme: implementation by thirty local partners in fifteen countries spanning four continents, and addressing seven themes across five sub-programmes. In most cases using the PMLS has been helpful in strengthening visions and strategies within the programme and in making it clear to everyone involved how the programme should be implemented to be effective. The PMLS induced partner organizations to share information about the effectiveness of their activities. It was instrumental in stimulating collaboration and the sharing of views, values and knowledge in a structured way.

notes



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