

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *World Heritage Leadership Programme: Mid-Term Evaluation*

The World Heritage Leadership Programme (2016-2022) aims to take a new approach in capacity development to support the World Heritage Convention by strengthening the inseparable links between people, nature and culture. It is being delivered by IUCN and ICCROM in collaboration with ICOMOS and WH Centre and a large array of partner institutions. The Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment as the main donor of the Programme co-initiated the Programme. Other donors that have come on board are the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea and the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment.

### *Framework of the evaluation*

As it entered its fourth year of implementation, the Programme commissioned an external mid-term evaluation covering the activities undertaken by IUCN and ICCROM from October 2016 to December 2019. The evaluation focuses on: (i) the current progress of the WHL Programme towards its intended goals and objectives, and the likelihood of achieving the overall targets; and (ii) suggesting improvements, drawing lessons learnt and providing actionable recommendations. The report at hand summarises the findings of the mid-term evaluation carried out between March and July 2020 in the fourth year of the Programme. The report is based on a review of relevant WHL documents, several (virtual) key stakeholder meetings, 25 key informant interviews and an online survey (N=56).

### *Background of the Programme*

The aim of the World Heritage Leadership Programme is to improve conservation and management practices for culture and nature through the work of the World Heritage Convention, as an integral component of the contribution made by World Heritage Sites to sustainable development.

The World Heritage Leadership Programme integrates aspects of previous programmes, such as the World Heritage Capacity Building Programme. It represents the most comprehensive capacity building

programme for WH Management, and is considered a main programme for the implementation of the World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy.

The Programme has adopted a new and transformative approach by taking a fully integrated approach to nature and culture, as well as a people-centred perspective on conservation. The Programme focuses on the most pressing challenges in managing World Heritage Sites and aims to:

- Set and test leading standards for conserving sites and ensuring their contribution to communities and sustainable development.
- Provide documented guidance to policy makers and practitioners on managing cultural and natural values in a holistic manner, through the provision of a single publication that integrates the ICCROM-led Managing Cultural World Heritage Manual and the IUCN-led Managing Natural World Heritage Manual.
- Establish a network of internationally recognised leadership sites to demonstrate leading practice and to provide platforms for learning and capacity building.
- Build international networks between nature and culture practitioners and institutions, that link on-the-ground practice with leadership at international, regional, national and local levels.
- Provide diverse training events, exchanges, and other capacity-building activities to support the work of site managers, stakeholders, and national heritage services in States Parties.

The key target groups and beneficiaries of the Programme encompass site managers and National Focal Points.

The Programme is organised into five thematic modules (Management Effectiveness, Resilience, Impact Assessment, Learning Sites, Leadership Networks) and one core activity (Programme Management).

The Programme operates in a highly complex institutional environment encompassing the Advisory Bodies, the World Heritage Centre, Category 2 Centres, and other partner institutions, NFPs, and site managers, as well as the WH Statutory Regulations.

## ***Key findings and conclusions***

### **Relevance**

The Programme is highly relevant from a strategic and beneficiary point of view. It directly contributes to the espoused paradigm shift of bringing nature and culture together and of taking a people-centred approach to capacity building at all levels. It is in line with and contributes to the developments in wider conservation practice (e.g. Post-CBD Framework). The Programme actively links its approach to managing World Heritage with other conservation agenda such as the CBD, environmental and sustainability issues.

As of now, the Programme has achieved the delivery of its activities with the broad involvement of the core institutions. It has also contributed to enhancing the connections between the World Heritage Committee and site managers through the Site Managers Forum as an outstanding achievement of the Programme. Although still in their pilot stages, beneficiary groups have assessed the existing draft manuals and guidelines as highly useful, and have confirmed that they address relevant issues. The full relevance of manuals/guidelines will become visible once the knowledge products have been finalised and broadly disseminated by the Programme. During the remaining time of the Programme, it should be clarified how knowledge products will be adopted, published, and made available for broad application. Once the manuals are finalised and officially endorsed by the relevant organisations, or the formal documents considered within the World Heritage Convention, they will have been granted legitimisation. This will make it easier for site managers to use them as a reference in their respective countries.

**Key aspect - Theory of Change:** The Programme has no explicitly agreed Theory of Change. However, a clear strategy, essential building blocks and elements that characterise a Theory of Change are widely agreed and available, and guide the implementation of the Programme. The Programme is implementing a wide range of activities and ensuring their level of excellence. However, some of the elements of a Theory of Change are missing, insufficiently linked to each other or not explicitly available. Thus the link between the activities, their outputs and how these contribute to the expected outcomes often remains unstated.

### **Effectiveness**

The Programme has followed a highly adaptive management approach, which is justified given its complex setting and highly innovative vision. At output and activity level, the Programme has been effective and work plans have been achieved. All the modules are generally proceeding as planned, although some modules are particularly well advanced (e.g. Impact Assessment or Management Effectiveness). However, developing an integrated nature-culture language and perspective within the Programme took more time than anticipated.

In order to fully appreciate the effectiveness at outcome level, SMART indicators are required, which have only been formulated for some of the outputs. For the final evaluation of the Programme and for targeted implementation, it would be advisable to define more specific interim goalposts clearly linking the deliverables (outputs) with the expected results (outcomes) and the objectives aspired to. This is particularly relevant for finally attributing the Programme's contribution to the overall objective of achieving improvements in conservation at site level.

It is noteworthy that at site level, site managers have reported changes in awareness, behaviour and practices as a direct result of training courses and collaboration with a community of practice in the context of the Programme. Several site managers have reported specific changes in site management and conservation practice (integration of nature-culture components in management plans, extended involvement of communities, improved cooperation with local stakeholders). This shows the importance and effectiveness of actively engaging with National Focal Points and site managers and through vibrant networks.

As of Year 4, the Programme has achieved major outcomes attributable to its activities, such as:

- An improved common understanding, cooperation and coordination between the UNESCO Advisory Bodies beyond the statutory work and between actors from the nature and culture sector.
- The Site Managers Forum within the frame of the annual meeting of the World Heritage Committee is a widely acknowledged achievement. As of 2020, it has been held three times. It has contributed substantially to increasing the visibility of site

managers, and has started a vibrant community of site managers who continue to communicate via WhatsApp groups. Furthermore, the Site Managers Forum has triggered an initiative to implement a regional subforum for Africa.

- The task groups which initially intended to work separately on the four modules have integrated themselves into a trans-modular coordination group, and aim to feed the results into a common knowledge framework.

These initial changes at site level indicate that the approach taken by the Programme is indeed effective, and has the potential to transform conservation practice in World Heritage Sites. For the remaining time of the Programme, one focus should be on delivering the training manuals and guidelines as legitimised documents to the target beneficiaries (site managers and National Focal Points).

With the establishment of excellent working relations with all Advisory Bodies and the nomination of a focal point at the World Heritage Centre, the Programme has made remarkable progress towards the legitimisation of its knowledge products.

### Impact

The Programme is starting to achieve an impact at both global and site level.

At a global level, WHL has started to influence wider conservation practice, as demonstrated by the work on the inclusion of links between nature and culture in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework of CBD.

As reported by beneficiaries, site managers now adopt a more people-centred and place-based approach to the conservation of sites, a result attributed directly to the Programme. Partner institutions have worked jointly on manuals, and have thus learned to integrate cultural and natural perspectives with each other. Site managers and National Focal Points have participated in integrated training courses and have given feedback regarding the content of manuals from the practitioners' perspective; they exchange knowledge and practice through the Site Managers Forum and informal social media channels. The courses related to the place-based approach, the linking of culture and nature,

and the people-centred approach have triggered changes in mindsets at all levels and have started to show changes on the ground.

There are several vivid success stories for these changes which have occurred at the host sites of the courses (LNC17, PNC18). These include a broader involvement of local ethnic groups in site management, or the official recognition of the cultural and spiritual importance of (natural) World Heritage Sites. Site managers have also reported that due to the course the management has started to intensively engage with local communities in the site management. These direct and short-term impacts have the potential to contribute to a long-term conservation impact. They indicate that the Programme will have a broad potential impact on conservation practice and on the way in which World Heritage will be managed in the future if it succeeds in going beyond anecdotal success stories.

The likelihood of achieving the intended impacts will depend on the level of legitimisation of knowledge products and the effectiveness of dealing with existing barriers at Programme level (communication, dissemination, reflection process), national level (institutional barriers, low awareness) and cultural level (language, geographical distribution).

Whereas the initial focus of the Programme was on revising the guidelines and manuals of the World Heritage Convention, positioning these as instruments to bring about change in the WH system in the long term would be an added impact for this phase of the Programme.

### Efficiency

In this institutional environment, the Programme has been efficiently managed at output and activity level. Work plans have widely been completed as planned. So far the Programme has amalgamated coordination, execution and implementation as well as communication, which has placed a high workload on the Programme coordinator. This environment is appropriate for the initial phase of a programme, but is limiting for broad outreach activities. In the first half of the current phase, an initial delay and some re-planning and re-adjustment occurred. This is most probably attributable to the challenge of implementing a cross-institutional programme and the time needed to identify workable programme implementation arrangements; the absence of a Theory of Change stating what should be achieved by the Programme; and an

initial disparity between the mandate for each institution involved and the mandate for a person from that institution in the Programme.

The complexity of the Programme and its thematically broad scope have required continuous adaptations of workflows and processes, which have been excellently undertaken by means of adaptive management. The Programme could become even more efficient if some gaps in its management framework were to be addressed, for example by means of an explicit Theory of Change, a coherent communication strategy, and SMART indicators to measure the achievement of outcomes and objectives.

The Programme structure has to deal with the trade-offs between the administrative complexity of having multiple implementing partners and the adequate inclusion of all partners. The two executing bodies ICCROM and IUCN have separate budgets requiring separate reporting. This leads to higher administrative complexity, which potentially affects the efficient management.

The fact that 45% of the allocated budget has been spent after three years indicates that the spending is on track. The Programme has attracted additional funding from the Swiss Federal Office of Culture, and has secured additional funding from the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) (for the EoH Toolkit) and Cultural Heritage Administrative (CHA) of Korea (for one forum and 4 courses). This additional funding is linked to specific activities. To have a broader impact and enable a potential dissemination phase, the Programme still needs to explore how to ensure financial commitment from further donors to sustaining the Programme.

**Key aspect: Communication and information:** Within three years, the Programme management has managed to create a huge professional network of different actors, institutions, the Advisory Bodies, experts, and site managers. It includes capacity building institutions such as the ARC-WH, WHITRAP or AWHF Regional Category 2 Centres, external partners such as IAIA, and all the Advisory Bodies and the WH Centre. With the Site Managers Forum, the Programme has established an outstanding link to the World Heritage Committee. The Programme's approaches are widely presented at different events, such as the ICOMOS GA or working meetings.

This wide range of contacts requires a huge effort on behalf of the

Programme management. Due to the lack of a systematic communication strategy, the Programme increasingly reaches its capacity limits in trying to maintain all these links and communicate the relevant activities and content to the corresponding institutions. The networks are gaining momentum, and the target groups are increasingly asking for results.

For its remaining time, the Programme needs to enter a phase of higher visibility and outreach, and increased interaction at national and site levels. Consequently the roll-out of the knowledge products that have been successfully tested needs to be systematically planned by means of an appropriate dissemination and communication strategy.

#### Sustainability

The Programme envisions a massive cultural change and paradigm shift with potential impacts across all levels of the World Heritage family (global, regional, national and site level). These are new and challenging concepts that will take time to be absorbed by all levels of the WH system. It is important to acknowledge that this will extend beyond the time scope of the current Programme phase.

The sustainability of the current Programme phase depends on the long-term application of the knowledge products and the permanency of the partner network achieved. The resources of the current phase are adequate to finalise these deliverables, publish consolidated results and set the ground for scaling up the training and capacity building.

Hence for the remaining time, the Programme should focus on scaling up the legitimised Programme deliverables. The experience gained should be used to come up with approaches for how the knowledge products could be institutionalised, regionalised and regularly disseminated through capacity-building measures. Several stakeholders share a similar concern: How will the Programme disseminate content, the manuals and the knowledge framework to a broader public, and what should the corresponding online platform look like? The question of how to integrate the deliverables not only at a training level, but at an institutional level (e.g. through WH Centre or C2C), has not been sufficiently addressed so far. The Programme is in the position of having all the institutions on board which have the competence, mandate and interest to sustain and use these results (World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS, IUCN, ICCROM, various Category 2 Centres).

The Programme's networks will be further consolidated, and the knowledge framework as a key instrument needs to be finalised and made accessible. The current practice of linking training activities with case studies brought in by beneficiaries has the potential to further enhance the attractiveness of the Programme, and will ensure local usability of the knowledge.

A key issue for the remaining period and for the sustainability of the Programme should thus be the consolidation, proper validation and integration of the deliverables (such as the manuals, knowledge framework, syllabuses, the embedding of the Site Managers Forum as an element of the WHC Meetings, etc.).

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The WHL Programme is following a very ambitious vision of implementing a paradigm shift at all levels (Advisory Bodies, national level and site level) by bridging the gap between nature and culture and between heritage sector practitioners, and by promoting a people-centred approach. The complexity of the overall objective is also reflected in the wide range of activities, content and stakeholders and partners involved at all levels.

Given the complex and broad scope of the Programme, there is still a need to increasingly seek to mainstream its activities, communication channels and networks. Bundling resources in the final phase of the Programme is most likely to be a key task for the remaining time.

The wide range of activities implemented by the Programme is proceeding well, and has shown concrete changes and positive impacts attributable to the activities of the Programme at a surprisingly early stage. It seems that the Programme has evolved from a mere Capacity Building Programme to a Change Programme. The guidance documents are perceived positively. The training courses have shown excellent initial results. Many target beneficiaries have emphasised the added value for site managers, many of them stating that they have already implemented the new knowledge at their sites. This indicates that the Programme addresses the right issues and is well on track. Furthermore, it underpins the fact that the Programme is indeed addressing the relevant issues on the ground.

### **Key recommendations for the current phase**

Based on the evaluation results, there are seven key recommendations for a further improvement of the Programme:

- **Recommendation 1: Fostering the big picture of the Programme.** The Programme management (IUCN – ICCROM) should foster the big picture of the Programme by introducing a fully-fledged and documented Theory of Change, including a coherent indicator system and feeding into a communication strategy.
- **Recommendation 2: Agreeing on a coherent indicator system.** The Programme management and the advisory group as well as the donors should agree on a coherent indicator system in close conjunction with the Theory of Change to define and measure programme progress and success.
- **Recommendation 3: Reconciling outputs and results with the regional or local level.** The Programme management should closely collaborate with the advisory group to focus on setting up and implementing a systematic approach for reconciling Programme outputs and results with regional specificities.
- **Recommendation 4: Legitimising and embedding results and outputs into the WH environment.** Before the end of this year, the Programme management should identify and implement a process for legitimising and embedding relevant results and outputs into the WH environment in close cooperation with relevant members of the advisory group and the WHC.
- **Recommendation 5: Strengthening partnerships and networks.** The Programme management should identify ways and resources to formalise the SFM by the end of the current phase in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders. A potential second phase should include measures for strengthening partnerships and networks on their way to more formalised settings.
- **Recommendation 6: Mainstreaming communication and dissemination.** The Programme management should elaborate a stringent communication strategy to mainstream the internal and external communication and ensure dissemination of its outputs and results during the remaining time of the Programme in close collaboration with the advisory group.

- *Recommendation 7: Adapting to new dynamics and requirements.*  
The donors and the Programme management should agree on ways and means to strengthen the resources for the management of the Programme in order to adapt it to new dynamics and requirements for the remaining time of the current phase (and a potential new phase).

### *A long-term perspective*

Based on the evaluation results and feedback from stakeholders, target beneficiaries and partners, the evaluation team sees a lot of potential for a second phase as well as justification for this. The Programme has already produced a wide range of promising materials and approaches which would benefit from being continued in a potential follow-up phase so that they can become more rooted in the World Heritage System. This could be achieved by fostering the institutional integration, the integration into existing capacity building institutions, and the wide dissemination and on-site application of the deliverables. A potential follow-up phase might consider the involvement of further donors to increase the funding basis, and might actively seek to expand its geographical scope towards Latin America.

The Programme has already started to influence wider conservation practice and might further strive to contribute to wider programming (e.g. CBD, UNESCO initiatives) to further increase its impact.