



# Writing for the IUCN website

August 2016 - Version 3.0



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A guide to producing content for the IUCN website

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### Version control and history

Title	Writing for the IUCN website
Version	3.0 released August 2016
Source language	English
Published in French under the title	N/A
Published in Spanish under the title	N/A
Responsible Unit	Global Communications Unit
Developed by	Global Communications Unit
Date approved	10 August 2016
Approved by	Director of Global Communications
Purpose	These guidelines should be used by any staff member writing or approving content for the IUCN website. They offer guidance on writing style and quality control of web content.
Distribution	Sent to all IUCN Secretariat communication staff. Available on the Union Portal (All IUCN Secretariat area) and available on request from the Global Communications Unit.
Cover photo credit	IUCN Photo Library/Tokiniaina Rasolofoarimanana

### Document history

Version 1.0	2009
Version 2.0	October 2015
Version 3.0	August 2016

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# 1 Introduction

This guide should be used by any IUCN staff member writing or approving content for the IUCN website. It aims to promote a coherent and professional image of IUCN in its frontline communications.

It provides guidance on selecting content for blogs, articles and press releases, as well as their structure and style, including answers to commonly asked questions about house style and grammar.

Care must be taken that any content published on the IUCN website has been written concisely and properly edited and proofread. This guide will help to ensure that your content meets the required standard.

If you are not writing in your native language, please have your text checked and proofread by someone who is a native speaker.

The new IUCN website provides a great opportunity to take a fresh look at the content we produce and how we present the organisation to external audiences.

## **Important note regarding IUCN website versus Union Portal:**

A clear distinction needs to be made between content that is suitable for publishing on the public website and content that should be posted on the [Union Portal](#).

The Union Portal is the place to post any material that is internal to IUCN. This includes draft documents for consultation, staff policies and guidelines, donor reports, etc. Only content that is written for public consumption may be published on the website.

Position announcements should appear only on the Jobs page managed under the [Human Resources Management System](#).

## 1.1 Useful references and resources

[IUCN Style Manual](#) – a comprehensive guide to IUCN’s house style for all published content – print and online

[IUCN Glossary of Definitions](#) – a useful resource to help explain technical terms

[IUCN Glossary of Translated Terms](#) for staff writing content in French and Spanish

[Lists of freelance writers and editors and approved translators](#), available on the Union Portal

Excellent examples of how to write clearly and concisely are the [BBC news website](#) and [The Economist](#) news magazine.

## 2 News article, press release or blog?

If you think you have a story, the following sections will help you decide whether it should be a news article, a potential press release or a blog, and provide tips relevant to each category.

Most of our time-bound content can be categorised into:

- **news articles:** news stories published online
- **press releases:** particularly newsworthy stories suitable for diffusion to the media
- **blogs:** can offer an insider's view of conservation or provide comment and analysis

An 'event' category exists for notices of upcoming events such as conferences and workshops that IUCN is involved in, or outcomes of past events. The 'project' category should be used for progress updates on ongoing projects, outcomes of completed projects, etc.

### 2.1 News articles

An issue with the previous website (2007-2016) was that much of the content was incorrectly presented as news. A news article should be exactly that – news! It should have a strong angle, be clear, concise, and short – preferably no more than 400 words. News stories are not a 'catch-all' for project updates, workshop reports, donor reports, or position statements.

For example, a **news article could focus on:**

- main findings of a new IUCN report
- announcement of a major new conservation initiative
- results of a major conservation project

#### 2.1.1 How to structure a news article

The 'news' must be conveyed in the intro, with the first four paragraphs giving the essence of the story. Here is a suggested structure:

- **Headline**
- **First paragraph** – outline the essence of the story
- **Second paragraph** – develop the main idea
- **Third paragraph** – add a quote to back up the main idea
- **Fourth paragraph** – include background and context
- **Fifth paragraph** – add a second quote if needed
- **Sixth paragraph** – develop the larger perspective, for example, vision for the future, action needed, outline IUCN's solutions
- **Links to related websites or documents;** hyperlink words rather than paste the URL. Links can also be presented in the 'links box' to the side of the page.
- **At least one photo** with a clear, meaningful caption and accurate credit information. Ensure you have permission to use the photo.

#### Headline

Make it short (less than eight words), catchy but meaningful. The title must reflect the content of the story. Never use an acronym in a title, unless it is a household name such as NASA.

Always use **lower case**, for example:

Forget forests at your peril

Restoring landscapes and changing lives in Guatemala

## First paragraph, or introduction

This should be no longer than 50 words and sum up the main message of the story.

**Headline:** Species on climate change hit list named

**Introduction:** The Arctic fox, leatherback turtle and koala are among the species destined to be hardest hit by climate change, according to a new IUCN report.

## Second paragraph

Expand on the main idea. For example, the Government of Kenya is financing a major forest restoration effort to be implemented by IUCN. Why is this needed? What impact will it have?

**Concrete examples** are key to any article and help to illustrate a point. If you say a project has helped improve the livelihoods of local people, explain how exactly. For example, 'The annual income of households in the village has tripled in three years'. If an area is rich in biodiversity, name some of the species found there.

Always address the **so what?** element. Why is your story important? If it's about deforestation in a region, explain what the impacts are on people and the local environment.

Much of IUCN's work involves running workshops and meetings. If you have to write about them, don't focus on the uninteresting details such as 'Fifty experts gathered in Paris and listened to five key presentations on forest conservation'. Rather, focus on what is being discussed – the challenges and solutions that emerged.

## Third paragraph

**Quotes.** These add a personal angle to the story and readers like to hear directly from the experts. For example, if a conservation project has received a major donation, ask the relevant IUCN expert to describe what impact this will have. For clarity, write quotes in a separate paragraph and put the name and title of the person being quoted in bold. Double quotation marks should be used. Do not use italics as these are difficult to read on-screen.

**Dr Sally Hunter of IUCN's Marine and Polar Programme** said that delicate coral reefs were under threat from deep-sea trawling.

"All but one of the reefs I've looked at have been very badly damaged by bottom trawling – where a fishing net is dragged along the sea floor," she said. "Bottom trawling bulldozes through reef habitats that are thousands of years old."

**Facts and figures** are always interesting for a reader. For example:

More than 70,000 plant species are used in traditional and modern medicine.

Figures should be put in perspective, where possible, by including phrases such as 'which is equivalent to xxx'.

## Acknowledging donors and IUCN Members

Details about the event and who supported it should appear at the end of the article. News articles are not the place to add long lists of donor organisations. If several have to be acknowledged, do this at the end of the story in a separate paragraph in bold. Keep it business-like: 'This work is supported by the Government of Thailand and Conservation International' rather than 'IUCN gratefully acknowledges the generous support of...'

Take care to acknowledge the involvement or support of IUCN Members and partner organisations where appropriate.

## Links to related sites for further information

Always add links for further information, especially to the relevant IUCN Programme, Commission, Region or Member. When linking to related information use descriptive names that an outsider can understand rather than official institutional names. For example, say 'IUCN's work on ecosystem management', rather than the institutional acronym EMP or CEM.

## Photos

Make sure these are relevant to the story and have a meaningful caption. Always add the photo credit and ensure you have permission to use the image on the website. Avoid using photos of people in a meeting room; instead choose images that illustrate the issues being discussed.

More guidance: see the **IUCN Image Policy** and **Guide to Image Use at IUCN** (forthcoming).

**Lastly, make sure you have proofread your text.**

## 2.2 Press releases

If you have a particularly newsworthy story, there is potential to develop it as a press release. A press release should be structured and written similarly to a news article (see 2.1 above).

The Global Communications Unit is responsible for compiling and distributing press releases that are sent to the global media list and that feature on the IUCN home page and press section.

If you have a particularly newsworthy story that has global appeal and relevance, please contact our Media and Communications Manager.

IUCN regional offices are free to produce press releases that are relevant to a particular country or region, or to a specific section of the media. These can be published on the related web section using the 'press release' category.

More information: **IUCN Media Policy** and **Guide to Working with the Media** (forthcoming).

## 2.3 Blogs

Stories that comment on an issue or tell a personal story, without necessarily including a strong news angle, can be presented as blogs. Blogs can provide comment and analysis, or a behind-the-scenes look at the world of nature conservation and sustainable development. They should be **500 – 800 words** in length, giving more room to explore issues in depth and set the scene where appropriate.

Blogs put a human face on the sometimes complicated issues that we work on and link IUCN's work to the global sustainability agenda through the personal perspectives of a broad range of people in the IUCN network.

Blog posts written by people within IUCN should reflect one or more of the following:

- IUCN's *impact* and *influence* – how our knowledge and tools are being used to generate positive change
- the *insight* of IUCN experts into a range of issues – a candid look at the challenges and successes of conservation
- stories or insights that highlight *concrete action* on the ground to safeguard biodiversity and the livelihoods of people who depend on it
- the *relevance of the issues* being discussed at policy events such as meetings of the World Heritage Convention or the Convention on Biological Diversity

While news stories and press releases must be kept objective, blogs can include personal opinion. Anything potentially contentious should be reviewed by your line manager and final editorial decisions rest with the Director of Global Communications.

## 3 Style tips

Write **simply and clearly**. We want to capture and hold the attention of readers and encourage them to find out more about conservation and IUCN. Our language should be non-technical and we should aim for a light, 'conversational' style.

### Avoid long, convoluted sentences and paragraphs

Try to include no more than two ideas in a sentence. Take a look at the [BBC news website](#) for examples of how to write in short, concise paragraphs.

Remember that for many of our readers, English is not their native language, so avoid colloquial expressions such as 'he could not see the wood for the trees' or 'they are keeping the project under wraps for now'.

The mark of a clear, easy-to-read text is one that requires minimal punctuation. Do not assume prior knowledge of an issue. If using terms such as 'ecosystem goods and services', 'ecosystem approach', 'alien invasive species', 'access and benefit sharing', explain them and give an example.

### Stick to the facts

Avoid the use of subjective language such as 'human greed', 'stunning images', the 'heroic efforts of field officers' or 'tragically, five elephants were poached'. Stick to the facts and let the readers decide how they feel.

### If in doubt, leave it out

If you are not sure that a sentence adds anything meaningful to your story or you are struggling to find a clear way of saying something, simply leave it out.

Read your story aloud to see if it flows well. Ask a colleague to check it for clarity.

### Be thorough

Always proofread your story before you publish it on the website or ask a colleague to do it. Check the formatting once the story is online. It is unprofessional to publish text that is littered with spelling and grammar mistakes, extra spaces, inconsistent font sizes and broken links.



## 4 Common pitfalls

### 4.1 Using technical jargon

The IUCN website is a wealth of knowledge about conservation and sustainable development. However, we often use language that is overly complicated and laden with institutional jargon that can alienate the reader. Content published on the website should allow readers to quickly understand the issues IUCN works on and see what impact the organisation is having. It is our job to translate jargon into language that is easily understood by a broad audience.

Examples of jargon that frequently appears in web content:

- synergies
- leverage
- catalyse
- incentive mechanisms
- policy processes
- policy interventions
- policy instruments
- governance arrangements
- capacity building
- multi-stakeholder processes
- externalities

For a fuller list of jargon that should be avoided or explained see Annex II, p 18.

### 4.2 Too many acronyms

All acronyms must be spelled out the first time they are used. There is no need to add an acronym after the organisation's name if the organisation is mentioned only once in the story.

### 4.3 Redundant wording and expressions

Using **unnecessary words** or using multiple words that mean the same thing. For example, 'in close proximity to' – simply use 'close to'. Use 'work programme' instead of 'programme of work'; 'biodiversity conservation' instead of 'the conservation of biodiversity'; 'these species depend on intact habitat' instead of 'these species are highly dependent on intact habitat'.

'floods eroded the land' instead of 'there was erosion of the land from floods'  
'the programme must start immediately' instead of 'it is essential that the programme starts immediately'  
'the study reviewed regional development' instead of 'there was a review of the development of the region'

Don't clutter your text with redundant expressions like 'it is generally accepted that', 'in fact', etc.

Examples of redundancy:

- × mutual cooperation
- × broad consensus
- × future prospects
- × future forecast
- × desired objective

- × is currently
- × join together
- × acute crisis
- × estimated at about

Always choose concrete, simpler words.

Avoid	Use
actively engaged	engaged or involved
Assist	Help
thus	So
very unique (something is either unique or it isn't)	Unique
Hence	So
in order to	To
outside of Barcelona	outside Barcelona
Utilise	Use
Linkages	Links
submit an application for	apply for
perform an assessment of	Assess
conduct a review of	review
carry out an evaluation of	Evaluate
implement an investigation of	Investigate
in view of the fact that	as
a certain number of	some
the majority of	most
within the framework of	under; as part of
accordingly, consequently	so
for the purpose of	to
with reference to	About
in the event of	if
if this is not the case	if not
if this is the case	if so
concerning, regarding	about
with reference to, with regard to, in relation to, with respect to	about
emphasise	highlight
orient	steer
eliminate	cut out; remove
objective	goal, target
employment opportunities	jobs
to be of the opinion that	to believe
to be indicative of	to indicate
to come to an agreement on	to agree
to be in possession of	to own
to make an appearance	to appear
to raise some doubts about	to question
to hold an investigation	to investigate
to make a discovery	to discover

Always try to use the **active tense** as it tends to be shorter, clearer and presents the important information upfront:

IUCN is tackling the problem of over-fishing in Thailand.

Rather than:

The problem of overfishing in Thailand has been addressed by IUCN.

## 4.4 Dangling modifiers

A **dangling modifier** is a phrase or clause which says something different from what is meant because words are left out, or are in the wrong order. The meaning of the sentence, therefore, is left 'dangling' or ambiguous.

**Incorrect:** Not having studied the project manual carefully, the project delivery was a failure.  
*This is wrong because it bizarrely implies that the project delivery did not read the manual.*

**Correct:** Not having studied the project manual carefully, the conservationists failed in their project delivery.  
*Here it is clear that the conservationists are the subject.*

## 4.5 Other guidance

**Footnotes and references** should not be used – web articles are not scientific papers.

Avoid **using too many bullet points** in news stories; use running text instead.

**Exclamation marks** should be used sparingly, if at all.

You can avoid offending half your readers by replacing **gender-specific words** (replace 'layman' by 'lay person'; 'salesgirl' by 'sales assistant'; 'workman' by 'worker').

Avoid 'he/she', 'his/her' by using 'they/their' instead.

## 5 Key points from Style Manual

For more detail on grammar and language issues, refer to the [IUCN Style Manual](#).

### 5.1 UK English versus American English

IUCN uses British English, as opposed to American English, in its written materials. Where alternative spelling exists for the same word, the British spelling should be used.

For example, 'colour' should be written in preference to the American spelling 'color', and 'programme' in preference to 'program', 'labour' instead of 'labor', 'centre' instead of 'center'.

Some words have alternative spellings, e.g. focused and focussed. When in doubt, use the first spelling proposed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

An exception to this rule is the spelling of words ending in ise/ize. Although both forms are correct, in IUCN texts the 'ise' should be used.

Use	Organise	<i>not</i>	Organize
	Liberalisation		liberalization
	Emphasised		emphasized

However, if an organisation uses 'z' in its title, for example, the World Health Organization, use its official spelling, i.e. with the 'z'.

### 5.2 Specific style issues relating to IUCN's work

#### 5.2.1 Species names

Use a species' common name first followed by the scientific name. The scientific name must always be **in brackets and italics**:

great white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*)  
[Note the use of lower case for the common name.]

But common names which include proper nouns are written with just the proper noun capitalised:

Humboldt squid (*Dosidicus gigas*)

#### 5.2.2 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is one of IUCN's flagship products. Care should be taken to refer to it correctly. The first mention of The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ should be written in full with the trademark symbol; thereafter it is acceptable to refer to it as The IUCN Red List or the Red List.

When referring to IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria, a capital letter should be used for categories, e.g. Endangered, Extinct in the Wild, Vulnerable. Capital letters should also be used for their abbreviations, e.g. EN, EW, etc. Take care to make a distinction between the category and other parts of speech:

The black rhino is threatened with extinction (*used as a verb*)

But

The African elephant is listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List (*used as the category*)

### 5.2.3 Publication titles

Titles of IUCN publications should be written in lower case (i.e. first letter capitalised followed by lower case and in italics). Names and proper nouns should of course be capitalised. In titles with a subtitle, the subtitle begins with a capital letter followed by lower case.

Business and biodiversity  
Conservation on private lands: The Australian experience

Titles of journals, newspapers, etc. should also be written in italics.

She was a reporter for *The Bangkok Post*.  
He submitted a paper to the journal *Science*.

When mentioning a publication (book, journal, paper titles, etc.) use italics, not quotation marks.

A landmark publication by the IUCN Species Programme was *Wildlife in a changing world: An analysis of the 2008 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*.

### 5.2.4 Geographical information

Caution should be exercised when referring to country names, territories or national boundaries. Refer to Appendix 4 of the [IUCN Style Manual](#).

## 5.3 Grammar points

### 5.3.1 Apostrophes

The use of 'it's' to denote possession is one of the most common errors in the English language. The word 'it' followed by an apostrophe 's' is a contraction of 'it is', e.g.

It's usual for the animal to leave its burrow during the mating season.

### 5.3.2 Quotation marks and punctuation

Double quotation marks should be used for quotes and punctuation should fall within the quotation mark, except when a quote is embedded in a sentence.

"Fog prevents water loss from redwoods in summer and is very important for the tree and the forest," says the paper's co-author Professor Todd Dawson.

But:

According to Dr Janewski, packs of hyenas are "a big threat in the wild".

### 5.3.3 Single quotation marks

Use these to indicate a quote within a quote:

Isabelle Dubois, who works on the restoration project, says: "It will take many years for the wetland to be fully restored, but my colleagues reassure me that 'there are definite signs of recovery' so I am hopeful."

Or to indicate jargon or buzzwords:

The report discussed 'grey markets' in central and eastern Europe.

### 5.3.4 Brackets

Avoid using too many brackets as they can interrupt the flow of a sentence or paragraph.

### 5.3.5 Abbreviations (and common Latin)

The abbreviations e.g. and i.e. should normally not be used in running text. Instead use 'for example' or 'including' or 'that is' or 'that means'.

Avoid using Latin and scientific abbreviations such as *inter alia*. They should be restricted to tables and graphics.

### 5.3.6 Slashes

Avoid using forward slashes between words in running text as this can appear lazy or indecisive, e.g. 'the number of people/organisations involved' – use 'and' instead.

### 5.3.7 Hyphens

An often overlooked rule for hyphens: The adverb *very* and adverbs ending in *-ly* are **not** hyphenated.

**Incorrect:** *the very-elegant watch*

**Incorrect:** *the finely-tuned watch*

**Correct:** In a rapidly growing economy

This rule applies only to adverbs. The following two sentences are correct because the *-ly* words are not adverbs:

**Correct:** *the friendly-looking dog*

**Correct:** *a family-owned business*

For other clarification including the use of hyphenation, dashes (en dash and em dash) and punctuation in vertical lists see the [IUCN Style Manual](#).

## 5.4 More IUCN style conventions

### 5.4.1 Dates

When written in full, use the following structure: day/month/year (e.g. 11 January 2005, not January 11, 2005 or 11th January, or any other variation).

Date ranges should either be written as 'from 1900 to 2006', or '1900–2006', and never as 'from 1900–2006'.

### 5.4.2 Numbers

Numbers between one and nine are written in full (e.g. one, two, three, etc.). Numbers above nine are represented numerically (e.g. 10; 100; 500).

When starting a sentence with a number, write it in full, for example:

Fifteen grouse were spotted outside the reserve.

Numbers with four or more numerals are written with commas separating the hundreds (e.g. 1,000; 150,000; 1,000,000)

Numbers greater than 1,000,000 are usually written with the numeral followed by the words 'million' or 'billion', etc. (e.g. 2.4 million; 100 million; 27 billion; etc.)

### 5.4.3 Currencies

Write currencies as figures preceded by the relevant International Organization for Standardization (ISO) currency code or the accepted symbol. There should always be a space between the currency code and the figure, but a space is not necessary when using the currency symbol, e.g.



## Annex I: Some common style clarifications

A fuller list is available in the [IUCN Style Manual](#).

Incorrect	Correct
	IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature in the first instance; thereafter, the Union or IUCN, or the organisation
the IUCN	IUCN
1 <sup>st</sup> May 2005 May 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2005	1 May 2005
1980's	1980s
NGO's	NGOs
nineteenth century	19th century
web-site	website
600kg 500km	600 kg 500 km
<10m >10m	less than greater than
outside of Cape Town	outside Cape Town
co-ordinate	coordinate
world-wide	worldwide
co-operate	cooperate
wellbeing	well-being
overexploitation	over-exploitation
reestablish	re-establish
rain forest	rainforest
underway	under way
the book comprises of several chapters	the book comprises several chapters
an up to date fact; a fact which is well-known; a well known fact	an up-to-date fact; a fact which is well known; a well-known fact
listed as endangered or vulnerable	listed as Endangered or Vulnerable
re-introduction	reintroduction
e-mail	email
fund-raising	fundraising
in the island	on the island
on-line	online



Convention on Biodiversity	Convention on Biological Diversity
Specialist Groups who are trying to fundraise	Specialist Groups which are trying to fundraise
We will be looking at the long term impacts of harvesting	We will be looking at the long-term impacts of harvesting We are not sure what the effects will be in the long term
He lead the group for 50 years	He led the group for 50 years
The work by it's very nature was interesting	The work by its very nature was interesting
c. 70 species	Approximately, or around, 70 species
Found in 90+ countries	Found in more than 90 countries
The meeting took place between 10-14 April	The meeting took place between 10 and 14 April, or the meeting took place 10-14 April
should of would of could of	should have would have could have
The largest protected areas on earth	The largest protected areas on Earth
The waste material was buried in the Earth	The waste material was buried in the earth

## Annex II: Jargon to avoid, with some suggested explanations

**Access and benefit sharing** (in relation to the Convention on Biological Diversity) – fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources

**Adaptation strategies (in relation to climate change)** – using nature to adapt to the impacts of climate change, for example restoring mangroves to protect coastlines from storms

**Capacity building** – increasing the ability of someone, a community or an organisation to do something

**Capacity-building initiative** – a project that helps people/organisations to...

**Catalyse** – set in motion/stimulate/boost/generate

**Community empowerment** – helping a community to act on something/have a say in decisions

**Conservation tool** – conservation project/approach/product/guidelines

**Dialogue** – talks, discussion, meeting

**Disaster preparedness** – being prepared for natural disasters; preparation for disasters; coping with disasters

**Ecosystem-based adaptation (in relation to climate change)** – working with (using) nature to adapt to the impacts of climate change

**Ecosystem services/functions** – services or benefits that nature provides (clean water, climate regulation) OR a service/benefit people obtain from the environment

**Ecosystem management** – managing natural resources, using nature to...

**Externalities** – costs to the environment, negative impacts on the environment from production and consumption that are not accounted for like air pollution from burning fossil fuels, climate change

**Facilitate** – help, enable, make something easier, make possible

**Gender equality** – equality between men and women, equal treatment of men and women

**Governance arrangements** – policies, laws or institutions established to manage/control something

**Incentive mechanisms** – incentives, encouragement, motivation, methods to encourage particular action

**Integrated water resources management** – managing water in a way that takes into account all of its users; making sure that water is managed so that all of its users have access to it/can benefit from it

**Leverage** – to influence authority; a power to influence or change

**Locally controlled forestry** – people and communities living within or close to forests having the right to make decisions about and manage their forest resources

**Mainstreaming** – including or integrating something into widespread policy, practice, or belief

**Mitigation** – reduction, decrease. In relation to climate change it refers to reducing greenhouse gas emissions either by reducing their sources or increasing their absorption/reducing the impacts of climate change

**Multilateral environmental agreement** – a legally binding agreement between more than two countries relating to the environment; mostly produced by the United Nations

**Multi-stakeholder processes** – initiatives or projects that bring together a diversity of people, organisations and interests

**Policy framework** – laws and regulations, a plan of action

**Policy instruments** – policies, laws, regulations

**Policy interventions** – policies, laws, regulations, proposed action

**Policy processes** – a meeting/work on policy/developing new policies/the political process

**Pro-poor approach** – conservation actions or policies that support those with limited or no income; helping them to be involved in and benefit from conservation

**REDD readiness** – lands or communities that are ripe for reforestation/a country being ready (with the institutions, laws etc.) to receive REDD funding/a country's capacity to take part in (a future) REDD activity.

**Synergies** – increased efficiency resulting from working together/joining efforts

**Toolkit** – selection of products/policies/guidelines

**Transformational change** – significant change in the way something is valued and managed, or in the way people or communities act