



# Contribution Assessment Methodological Guidelines

Alejandro A. Imbach and Florian Reinhard



# Contribution Assessment Methodological Guidelines

Alejandro A. Imbach and Florian Reinhard

The designation of geographical entities in this book, and the presentation of the material, do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IUCN or other participating organisations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of IUCN or other participating organisations. IUCN is pleased to acknowledge the support of its Framework Partners who provide core funding: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland; Government of France and the French Development Agency (AFD); the Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea; the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad); the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida); the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the United States Department of State. This publication has been made possible by funding from Norad, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

Published by: IUCN, Gland, Switzerland

Produced by: IUCN Centre for Conservation Action – Ocean Team

Copyright: © 2022 IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

Reproduction of this publication for educational or other non-commercial purposes is authorised without prior written permission from the copyright holder provided the source is fully acknowledged. Reproduction of this publication for resale or other commercial purposes is prohibited without prior written permission of the copyright holder.

Recommended citation: Imbach, A., and Reinhard, F. (2022). *Contribution Assessment Methodological Guidelines*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

Cover photo: Pexels image credit to Quang Nguyen Vinh

Photo page 10: "[Forest Path - Tikal Archaeological Site - Peten - Guatemala - 02](#)" by [Adam Jones, Ph.D. - Global Photo Archive](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

Photo page 18: "[Community discussions about violence against women, White Ribbon Day, PNG, 2011. Photo: AusAID](#)" by [DFAT photo library](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

Photo page 20: "[Swapping aid for trade in northern Uganda](#)" by [DFID - UK Department for International Development](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

Editor: Scott Xavi Gudrich

Layout by: Scott Xavi Gudrich

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	5
2. When to use Contribution Analysis? .....	6
2.1 Prerequisites for conducting a Contribution Assessment .....	6
3 Methodological Steps .....	7
Step 1: Building a Timeline .....	8
Step 2: Presenting the Results .....	9
Step 3: Reconstructing a Theory of Change (ToC) .....	10
Step 4: Analysing Contribution .....	11
Step 4.1: Validation of the draft timeline, selection and weighting of main milestones ...	12
Step 4.2: Identification of key actors per milestone .....	13
Step 4.3: Identification of contribution types per milestone .....	14
Step 4.4: Quantification of the types of contribution per milestone .....	15
Step 4.5: Quantification of the types of contribution per actor per milestone .....	16
Step 4.6: Data processing, generation, and validation of results .....	18
Step 5: Distilling an overall Narrative .....	22
4 Data Sources, Tools, and Methods .....	23
5 Engagement with Stakeholders: on-site or online? .....	24
6 Final Considerations and Lessons Learned .....	26
7 References .....	28
Annex 1: Actor contribution to policy processes in Guatemala, El Salvador, Uganda, Viet Nam .....	30
Annex 2: IUCN main contribution type to policy processes in Guatemala, El Salvador, Uganda, and Viet Nam .....	31

## 1. Introduction

---

Assessing complexity, such as societal change processes, is one of the most notable methodological challenges for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practitioners. Methods to evaluate policy processes and outcomes are especially underdeveloped, yet are needed to optimise the influence of research on policy for addressing complex issues. *“Contribution analysis (CA), a theory-based approach to evaluation, holds promise under these conditions of complexity. Yet applications of CA for this purpose are limited, and methods are needed to strengthen contribution claims and ensure CA is practical to implement”* (Riley, 2018).

The purpose of these methodological guidelines is to provide M&E practitioners with a set of simple steps that serve as a guide for a process of qualitative analysis that seeks to identify, describe, and weigh the various contributions made by key stakeholders involved in a given process of social change. *“Contribution analysis is a methodology used to identify the contribution a development intervention has made to a change or set of changes. The aim is to produce a credible, evidence-based narrative of contribution that a reasonable person would be likely to agree with, rather than to produce conclusive proof. Contribution analysis can be used during a development intervention, at the end, or afterwards”* (INTRAC, 2017). However, it is important to stress that these methodological guidelines were not developed to compare stakeholders with each other. The main reason being that information that feeds into this methodology comes from a qualitative source (i.e., participants' perception) which comes with the risk of personal biases. Practitioners willing to apply this methodology should thus be cautious not to infer conclusions beyond what this methodology was designed for. In the opinion of the authors, staying away from comparing actors will facilitate the adoption and use of the methodology by multi-stakeholder platforms. Finally, it is recommended to use this methodology in combination with other types of assessments which would allow users to triangulate the findings.

These methodological guidelines are drawing on the experience gained through the successful implementation of four CAs conducted by IUCN in Guatemala, El Salvador, Uganda, and Viet Nam (see Annexes 1 and 2). The CA methodology described herein was used to qualitatively assess and quantify the contribution of IUCN and other key stakeholders to cases of policy advocacy, formulation, and approval in the forestry and fisheries sectors (but other uses are likely possible). CA can be run as a standalone assessment or as a complement of other analyses, such as: value for money assessment, project evaluations, systematizations, case studies, etc.

The main objectives of Contribution Analysis are:

- To provide a rich narrative of the change process and the contributions made by the key stakeholders
- To characterise the main contribution types made by the stakeholders
- To weight the overall contribution made by each stakeholder

## 2. When to use Contribution Analysis?

---

CA can be considered when there is a clear indication that an organisation/ programme/ intervention wants to better understand its specific contribution to a given change process together with other actors. The methodology presented in this guide can be applied to various complex change processes, such as policy advocacy and formulation, where a specific change has taken place (such as policy approval). These guidelines can, however, be applied to or adapted for other scenarios or situations. The main common elements in the cases in which these guidelines were used are:

- Cases of change processes that led to a clear outcome (e.g., policy approval)
- Multiple types of contributions (e.g., technical support, convening, funding, etc.) were needed for achieving the desired outcome (e.g., policy approval)
- The change process took place during a known and limited period (e.g., 1-12 years)
- Diverse social actors participated in the process

### 2.1 Prerequisites for conducting a Contribution Assessment

Before conducting a CA using the steps described in these guidelines, there are some minimum requirements that should be considered to assess the feasibility of the process:

- The objective of the CA is clearly identified. This means the organisation(s) willing to conduct a CA have identified a clear END POINT (the main outcome) for the change process against which they want to assess their contribution.
- There is a group of qualified participants (with experience and knowledge of the process) that is willing to participate with their time and knowledge in the assessment (from beginning to end). The identification of the participants is key, as it is their perception that will ultimately inform the CA analysis. Ideally, these participants should be representative of the key actors involved in the change process being assessed.
- There are other sources of information about the change process (e.g., white papers, project evaluations, news) that can be used to substantiate the preliminary findings.

### 3. Methodological steps

To carry out a full Contribution Assessment, 5 steps need to be conducted:

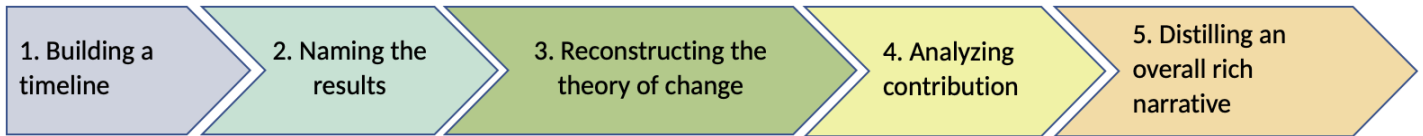


Figure 1. Contribution Assessment methodological steps

#### STEP 1. Building a timeline

A timeline is a useful tool to map how processes evolved through time, it can be a versatile instrument to tell a story in a simple way. By identifying key milestones, it is possible to reconstruct the sequence of relevant events that shaped the processes under review. Timelines usually combine milestones of different nature (activities/outputs/outcomes) with the purpose of communicating a compelling change story. Once the milestones are mapped, it is possible to substantiate them (i.e., provide evidence to support them) and validate the timeline with subject-matter experts.

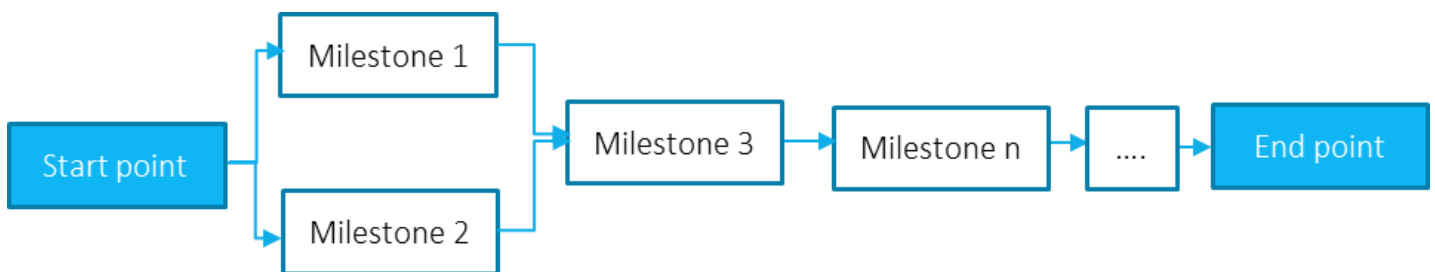


Figure 2. Graphical representation of a timeline

#### Purpose of this step:

Address the question “**what happened?**”: to tell a descriptive evidence-based story of the change process.

#### Process

- a. Define a clear END POINT for the timeline (e.g., policy approval, launch of a new action plan)
- b. Define a STARTING POINT for the sequence of milestones under review (e.g., a significant date, event, or milestone)





 **Tips**

- This step can be run as a complement or parallel to the previous step. Desktop review and interviews can be designed to accomplish the purposes of both steps.
- Remember that you are still working on a draft version of the timeline that will be validated later.
- The timeline should include only the most relevant milestones. As a rule of thumb try to stay between 12-20 milestones.



### STEP 3. Reconstructing a Theory of Change (ToC)

Using the timeline elements combined with a more profound understanding of what was achieved (outcomes/outputs), a theory of change can be reconstructed. Here timeline milestones are categorised as activities/outputs/outcomes and then organised in a logical way that illustrates the causal links explaining how the changes were attained. This identifies gaps and inconsistencies in the process description. Inferential elements are introduced, then need to be validated by appropriate audiences. ToC can be graphically presented in a diagram, for example using a chain of results:

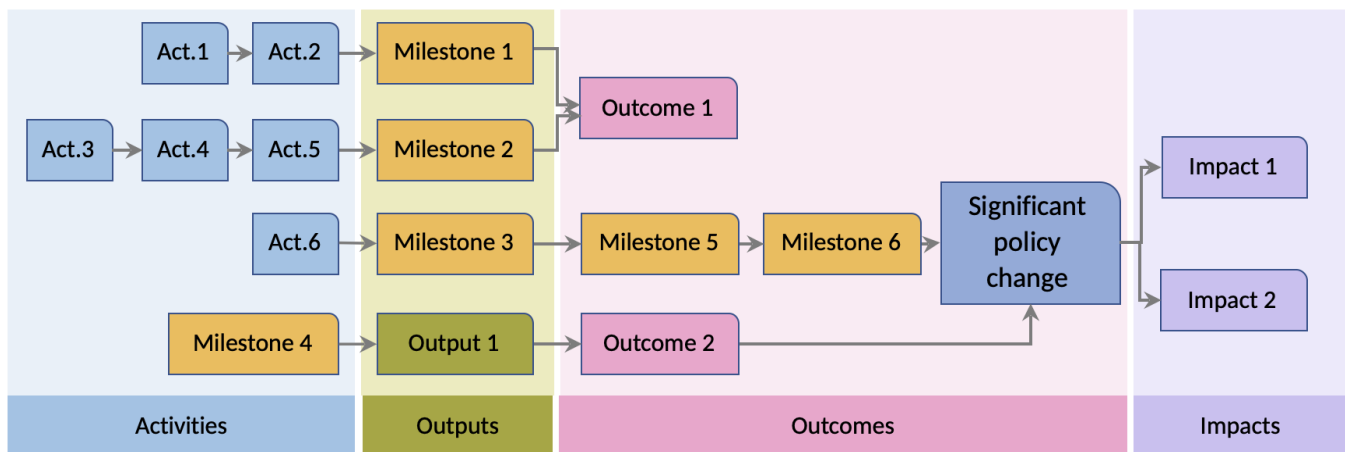


Figure 4. Graphical representation of Theory of Change

**Purpose of this step:** Address the question of “**How did it happen?**”: to support the descriptive story with a set of inferred causal links that explain how the elements relate to each other and uncover the internal logic of the change process.

#### Process

- a. Classify the MILESTONES from the timeline in terms of ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS, OUTCOMES, and IMPACTS
- b. Group similar milestones together
- c. For each group of similar milestones, develop a statement that summarises the milestones in the group (i.e., one box in the ToC that represents them)
- d. Develop the missing links (boxes) needed to connect the different items of the ToC in coherent way
- e. Write a short narrative that explains the ToC diagram: clarify the sequential and causal relationships between the elements

 **Tips**

- Keep it simple and focus on the process being assessed.
- The timeline END POINT should be one of the main outcomes.
- To complete the ToC, you will need to infer or propose the impact (actual or potential) of the timeline END POINT (this will be the final box of the ToC diagram).
- There are different methodologies for building ToC (van Es et al, 2015), you may use or adapt any other method if you prefer to.
- To get you started with this process, a quick review of existing ToC for similar processes and/or ToC patterns (Stachowiak, 2013) can be helpful.

#### **STEP 4. Analysing contribution**

Once the previous steps are completed, it is time for validation with key stakeholders, particularly concerning the timeline and the ToC. This is also an opportunity to present to the group the next steps that will be conducted in order to carry on the quantification aspects of the CA, which can be conducted in a single workshop or through a series of asynchronous consultations (see Section 4. Data sources, tools, and methods):

- Step 4.1 Validation of the draft timeline, selection and weighting of key milestones
- Step 4.2 Identification of key actors per milestone
- Step 4.3 Identification of contribution types per milestone
- Step 4.4 Quantification of the types of contribution per milestone
- Step 4.5 Quantification of the types of contribution per actor per milestone
- Step 4.6 Data processing, generation, and validation of results

**Purpose of this step:** Address the question “**How did the main actors contribute to the change process?**”: to offer a detailed categorisation of the main types of contributions (overall and by actor) involved in the change story.

## Step 4.1 Validation of the draft timeline, selection and weighting of main milestones

### Process

a. Share with the participants the draft timeline and discuss the accuracy and sufficiency of the timeline. Some guiding questions that can help for this are:

- **MISSING MILESTONES:** Are all the relevant milestones included in the timeline?
- **RELEVANCE OF THE MILESTONES:** Are all the included milestones relevant? Maybe some can be grouped together or deleted from the timeline?
- **ACCURACY OF THE MILESTONES:** Is the information presented in the timeline accurate? Any adjustments or clarifications needed?

b. Identify the milestones that most influenced or contributed to the change process in the validated timeline. Usually, the total number of milestones need to be reduced to a manageable number for the next steps presented in these guidelines. Weighting the milestones is a simple way of doing this. For example, you can ask participants to vote on the most important milestones/processes or to allocate a weight (from 0-100) according to their importance with regards to the change process being assessed and the timeline END POINT.

*Table 1. Template table for weighting milestones according to their importance*

Milestone	Assigned weight (0-100)
START POINT	
M1. ....	
M2. ....	
M3. ....	
....	
M(n). ....	
END POINT	

Note: this last step is not always necessary, in the Guatemala case study, for example, the validated timeline had 43 milestones but through the selection and weighting process, this number was reduced to 8 main milestones, which were used in the next step of the CA. In the case of Viet Nam, the validated timeline only had 14 milestones, so further prioritisation was not needed.

If you are planning to include prioritisation in your process, it is recommended to spend sufficient time discussing and agreeing with the participants a shared definition of “important” within the assessment being conducted. For some people, importance may be related to the catalytic role of a milestone, for others it may be about it being indispensable, or its innovative value. Experience shows that participants’ notion of “importance” often differs while thinking their interpretation is shared by others.

 **Tips**

- The main source for validating the timeline are the participants’ opinions (i.e., experts’ opinions). Therefore, participant selection is key. Make sure that the persons participating were actively involved in the change process and have personal knowledge about how the final outcome (timeline END POINT) was achieved.
- The information needed to complete this step is based on the experience of each person individually (not organisational). As such, it is recommended to not include participants if they were not directly involved in the change process; even if they represent an important actor (i.e., Government, organisations, etc.).
- As a general recommendation, try to keep the main milestones to a manageable number. These are the milestones that are going to be taken into consideration for the contribution assessment steps that follow. Based on previous experiences, between 12-20 main milestones seem to work well. What proves manageable will depend on the amount of time, participants, and the resources available for conducting the contribution process.

**Step 4.2 Identification of key actors per milestone**

 **Process**

a. Map the key ACTORS that contributed to each of the SELECTED MILESTONES:

*Table 2. Template table for identifying key actors per milestone*

Milestone	Key actors that contributed to the milestone
START POINT	Actor 1, Actor 2, Actor 3
M1. ....	Actor 1, Actor 4, Actor 5
M2. ....	Actor 1, Actor 2, Actor 4
M3. ....	Actor 2, Actor 4
....	
M(n). ....	Actor 2, Actor 3, Actor 4
END POINT	Actor 1, Actor 2, Actor 3

 **Tips**

- Focus your attention on the main actors. Sometimes it can help to group together similar actors that played a minor role in the process (e.g. different media outlets that reported news about the change process).
- Ideally you will have a group of actors that contributed to several (or all) milestones.
- Remember to include the timeline START POINT and END POINT in this analysis.

**Step 4.3 Identification of contribution types per milestone**

 **Process**

a. Identify the most significant TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION for each of the SELECTED MILESTONES. This guide suggests using the following types of contribution:

1. **Political leadership:** carry the torch, champion a cause, enable action, an institutional mandate;
2. **Advocacy:** communicating, awareness raising, lobbying;
3. **Technical support:** performing research, developing knowledge, specialist input, building capacity;
4. **Funding:** financial support (in-kind contributions were not included in this category); and
5. **Convening:** bringing different actors together, creating and promoting dialogue, resolving conflict.

Note: This typology was developed for assessing the contribution of different actors to policy formulation/adoption processes. Users may want to adapt the list above depending on the process they want to assess and/or the mission of the organisation they are working for.

*Table 3. Template table for identifying types of contribution per milestone*

Milestone	Types of contribution				
	Political leadership	Advocacy	Technical support	Funding	Convening
START POINT	✓		✓	✓	
M1. ....	✓	✓		✓	
M2. ....		✓	✓		✓
M3. ....		✓		✓	
....					
M(n). .....		✓		✓	✓
END POINT	✓			✓	

 **Tips**

- Make sure participants have a clear and shared understanding of the different TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION.
- Provide concrete examples for each TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION.
- For any given milestone you will have a mix of TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION. Experience show that it is uncommon for only one TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION to be needed for achieving a milestone. It is also uncommon for all 5 TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION to be required. Most milestones are the result of a combination of 2-3 types of contribution.
- Remember to include the timeline START POINT and END POINT in this analysis.

**Step 4.4 Quantification of the types of contribution per milestone**

 **Process**

- For each milestone in the validated timeline, and for each of the TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION per milestone, quantify the weight (importance) of each CONTRIBUTION TYPE per milestone.
- For every milestone, the weight distributed between the TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION must add up to 100.

*Table 4. Template table for quantifying the types of contribution per milestone*

Milestone	Types of contribution					TOTAL
	Political leadership	Advocacy	Technical support	Funding	Convening	
START POINT	20		40	40		100
M1. ....	60	20		20		100
M2. ....		30	40		30	100
M3. ....		70		30		100
....						...
M(n). ....		50		10	40	100
END POINT	80			20		100

 **Tips**

- In some cases, it can be practical to merge this step with the previous one. For each milestone first identify the main TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION and then weigh their importance.

#	Milestone	Political leadership	Advocacy	Technical support	Funding	Convening
35	National Forest Restoration Strategy (ENRPF)	25%	--	40%	10%	25%
42	Regulation of ProBosque law	40%	20%	--	20%	20%
36	Approval of the ProBosque law	40%	35%	--	10%	15%
28	Conformation of the technical committee for the formulation of the Probosque law	25%	25%	15%	10%	25%
26	Creation of the National FRL Roundtable	15%	30%	30%	10%	15%
18	Interagency Coordination Group	50%	--	25%	--	25%
30	Consultations in rural areas at sectorial level for Probosque law	25%	25%	--	10%	40%
12	Sectorial studies (evaluations, studies, mapping of actors)	25%	5%	40%	30%	--

Milestones
Contribution types

Figure 5. Example of weighting of the different types of contribution for milestones in the case study from Guatemala

**Step 4.5 Quantification of the types of contribution per actor per milestone**

 **Process**

- For each milestone in the validated timeline and for each of the TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION per milestone, quantify the weight (importance) of each CONTRIBUTION TYPE per actor.
- For every actor, the weight distributed between the TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION must add up to 100.



Table 5. Template table for quantifying the types of contribution per actor per milestone


Milestone	Types of contribution					TOTAL
	Political leadership	Advocacy	Technical support	Funding	Convening	
<b>START POINT</b>						
Actor 1	20		80			100
Actor 2			20	80		100
Actor 3	90			10		100
<b>M1. ....</b>						
Actor 1		30		60		100
Actor 4	50	50				100
Actor 5	30			70		100
<b>M2. ....</b>						
Actor 1		10	70		20	100
Actor 2		20			80	100
Actor 4			50		50	100
<b>M(n). ....</b>						
Actor 2				80	20	100
Actor 3		60			40	100
Actor 4		30			70	100
<b>END POINT</b>						
Actor 1				100		100
Actor 2	100					100
Actor 3	50			50		100

 **Tips**


- Different actors often have different profiles and ways in which they contributed to the overall process. Therefore, it is normal (and expected) to assign a value of 0 to some TYPES OF CONTRIBUTIONS for a given actor.




#	Milestone	Contribution type	Government	IUCN	FAO	Gremial Forestal	Other
35	National Forest Restoration Strategy (ENRPF)	1 - Political leadership	80%	10%	0%	0%	10%
35	National Forest Restoration Strategy (ENRPF)	3 - Technical support	38%	28%	0%	3%	31%
35	National Forest Restoration Strategy (ENRPF)	4 - Funding	23%	36%	10%	1%	30%
35	National Forest Restoration Strategy (ENRPF)	5 - Convening	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
42	Regulation of ProBosque law	1 - Political leadership	45%	7%	1%	15%	32%
42	Regulation of ProBosque law	2 - Advocacy	40%	11%	3%	4%	42%
42	Regulation of ProBosque law	4 - Funding	57%	3%	1%	11%	28%
42	Regulation of ProBosque law	5 - Convening	15%	50%	20%	0%	15%



Milestones



Contribution types



Key actors' contributions

Figure 6. Example of weighting the different types of contribution per actor for the milestones in the case study from Guatemala (the layout in this example is slightly different from the example provided above: actors and types of contributions are transposed)

#### Step 4.6 Data processing, generation, and validation of results

##### Process

a. Using the collected inputs from all participants, perform the required calculations using the following formula for estimating each key actor's contribution to the change process:

$$\text{Contribution of actor } a = \sum_{m=1}^n \sum_{c=1}^5 W_m * w_{m,c} * a_{m,c}$$

Where

- W is the relative weight given to a milestone (m)
- w is the relative weight given to a contribution type (c) for a given milestone (m)
- a is the relative weight given to a contribution type (c) for an actor (a) for a given milestone (m)

b. Once the participants' inputs have been processed, different types of results can be generated (i.e., distribution per type of contribution, distribution per actor type, contribution profile per actor, etc) and presented to the participants for final review and validation. Graphics are a good way of presenting and sharing this type of information.



Table 6. Example of a spreadsheet used for estimating actors' contribution for the case study from Guatemala.

ID	(m) milestone	(W) relative weight given to a milestone m	(c) contribution type	(w) relative weight given to a contribution type c	Contribution percentage assigned to an actor (a) on a given contribution type (c) for a given milestone (m)					Contributions per actor (a) per contribution type (c) per milestone (m)				
					(g) Government	(u) IUCN	(f) FAO	(p) Gremial Forestal	(o) Other	W*w*g	W*w*u	W*w*f	W*w*p	W*w*o
35	National Forest Restoration Strategy (ENRPF)	15%	1 - Political leadership	25	80.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
35	National Forest Restoration Strategy (ENRPF)	15%	3 - Technical support	40	38.0	28.0	0.0	3.0	31.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
35	National Forest Restoration Strategy (ENRPF)	15%	4 - Funding	10	23.0	36.0	10.0	1.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
35	National Forest Restoration Strategy (ENRPF)	15%	5 - Convening	25	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
42	Regulation of ProBosque law	15%	1 - Political leadership	40	45.0	7.0	1.0	15.0	32.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
42	Regulation of ProBosque law	15%	2 - Advocacy	20	40.0	11.0	3.0	4.0	42.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
42	Regulation of ProBosque law	15%	4 - Funding	20	57.0	3.0	1.0	11.0	28.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
42	Regulation of ProBosque law	15%	5 - Convening	20	15.0	50.0	20.0	0.0	15.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
36	Approval of the ProBosque law	14%	1 - Political leadership	40	50.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	35.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
36	Approval of the ProBosque law	14%	2 - Advocacy	35	40.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	45.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
36	Approval of the ProBosque law	14%	4 - Funding	10	35.0	20.0	15.0	0.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
36	Approval of the ProBosque law	14%	5 - Convening	15	20.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	70.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
28	Conformation of the technical committee for the formulation of the ProBosque law	13%	1 - Political leadership	25	16.0	8.0	8.0	16.0	52.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
28	Conformation of the technical committee for the formulation of the ProBosque law	13%	2 - Advocacy	25	20.0	0.0	80.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
28	Conformation of the technical committee for the formulation of the ProBosque law	13%	3 - Technical support	15	0.0	0.0	75.0	0.0	25.0	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.5%
28	Conformation of the technical committee for the formulation of the ProBosque law	13%	4 - Funding	10	10.0	20.0	70.0	0.0	0.0	0.1%	0.3%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%

**Tips**

- The above formula allows a user to estimate the overall contribution of any given actor. It is recommended to perform the calculation for all key actors involved in the process.
- It is recommended to use an electronic spreadsheet for performing these calculations.

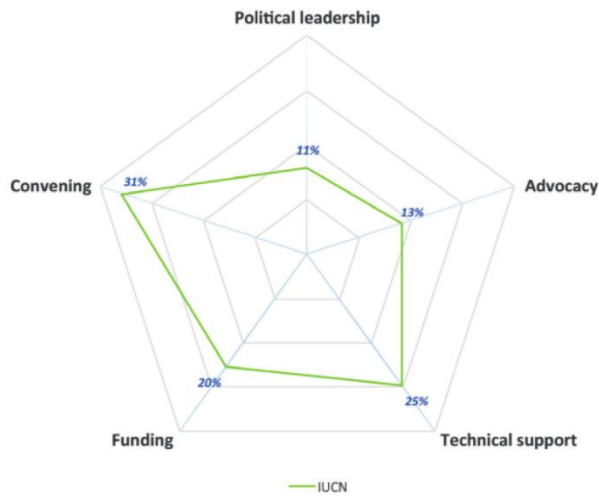
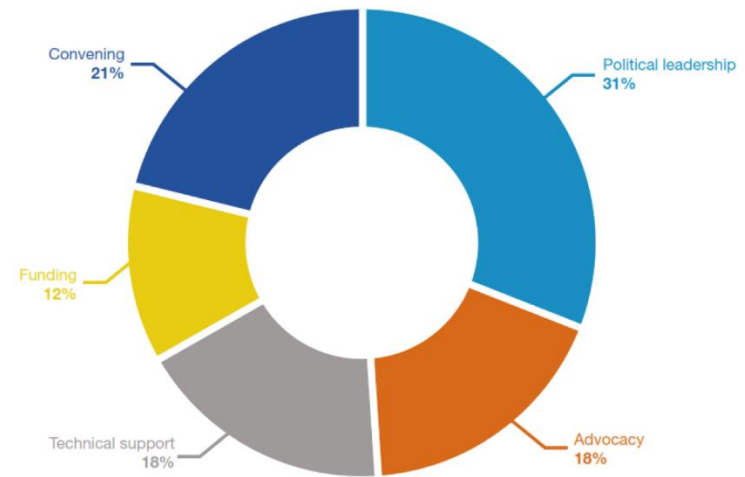
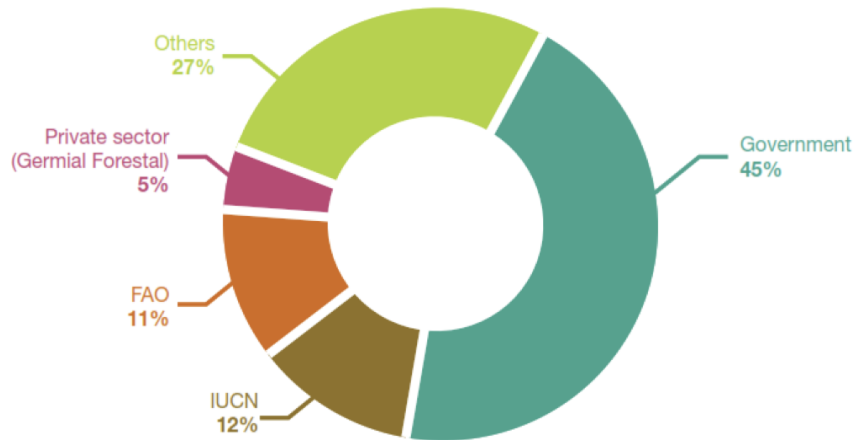


Figure 8. Three examples of graphics generated from the results of the contribution assessment conducted in Guatemala, displaying different information: (1) distribution of the overall contribution by type of contribution, (2) by type of actor and (3) distribution of the IUCN contribution by type of contribution.

## STEP 5. Distilling an overall narrative

The final step involves refining the gathered elements into a rich, compelling, evidence-based narrative that recapitulates the lessons learned, success factors, and overall effectiveness of the story change.

### Process

a. Combine the collected elements to build a short narrative that describes the change process and how the END POINT was achieved through the contribution of all the participating actors.

### Tips

- The short narrative that explains the ToC diagram can be a good place to start writing the overall narrative. Other elements from the process (e.g., milestones, actors, contributions) can be used to enrich the text.
- If time and resources allow, it can be interesting to substantiate the milestones from the validated timeline with external sources of information (e.g., news, maps, interviews with external actors, etc.).
- Another way of enriching the narrative of the change process is to include information from the projects and other initiatives that directly contributed to the change process (e.g., start date, end date, budget, objectives).

## 4. Data sources, tools, and methods

---

The steps described above cover the methodological aspects of conducting a contribution assessment. The data sources needed for conducting those steps include:

- Perspective/opinions from stakeholders (subject-matter experts) who participated in the process;
- Project documents: policies, position statements, annual technical reports, evaluation reports, and communication products;
- Policy reviews; and
- Media publications and websites - if available - to supplement the content of the narrative.

Different data collection methods can be combined to process these data sources:

- Document review
- Content analysis
- Semi-structured and open interviews
- Surveys/questionnaires
- Face-to-face and/or virtual workshops

Developing a simple methodological matrix can be useful for organising the existing data sources and data collection tools according to the 5 main steps of a CA as presented above:

*Table 7. Methodological matrix summarising the data sources and data collection methods.*

Methodological step	Purpose of the step	Data sources	Data collection methods
<b>1. Building a timeline</b>	Address the question “ <b>What happened?</b> ”: to tell a descriptive evidence-based story of the change process.	- Project documents - Policy reviews - Perspective/opinions from stakeholders	- Document review - Stakeholder interviews
<b>2. Presenting the results</b>	Address the question “ <b>What has been accomplished?</b> ”: to complement the descriptive story by clearly identifying the big “wins” and thus providing an intentionality to the story told.	- Project documents - Policy reviews - Media publications and websites - Perspective/opinions from stakeholders	- Content analysis - Expert opinions - Stakeholder interviews
<b>3. Reconstructing a theory of change</b>	Address the question of “ <b>How did it happen?</b> ”: to provide the descriptive story with a set of inferred causal links that explain how the elements relate to each other.	- Perspective/opinions from stakeholders	- Document reviews - Expert opinions
<b>4. Analysing contribution</b>	Address the question “ <b>How did the main actors contributed to the change process?</b> ”: to offer a detailed categorization of the main types of contributions.	- Subject-matter experts	- Validation workshop - Surveys and questionnaires
<b>5. Distilling an overall narrative</b>	Refine the gathered elements into a “ <b>compelling, rich, evidence-based narrative</b> ” that recapitulates the lessons learned, success factors and overall performance of the story change.	- Timeline, main results, theory of change and contribution analysis - Subject-matter experts	- Content analysis - Expert opinions

## 5. Engagement with stakeholders: on-site or online

The steps for the contribution assessment described above can be run through a series of on-site face-to-face meetings and/or online virtual meetings, combined with individual consultations. The following table provides a general guideline of recommended tools and spaces for engaging with the stakeholders:

Table 8. General guideline of recommended tools and spaces for engaging with the stakeholders.

Steps	Responsible	Stakeholders involvement	Interaction modality
<b>STEP 1. Building a timeline</b>	Small workgroup or consultants	Inputs for identifying milestones, results and elements of the ToC	Interviews or workshop <sup>1</sup>
<b>STEP 2. Presenting the results</b>			
<b>STEP 3. Reconstructing a theory of change</b>			
<b>STEP 4. Analysing contribution</b>			
<b>Step 4.1 Validation of the draft timeline</b>	Process facilitator	Validate the draft timeline (missing milestones, relevance, and accuracy)	Workshop <sup>2</sup>
<b>Step 4.2 Identification of key actors per milestone</b>		Contribute with their knowledge and experience based on their participation in the process	Workshop or individual consultations <sup>3</sup>
<b>Step 4.3 Identification of contribution types per milestone</b>			
<b>Step 4.4 Quantification of the types of contribution per milestone</b>			
<b>Step 4.5 Quantification of the types of contribution per actor per milestone</b>			
<b>Step 4.6 Data processing and generation of preliminary results</b>	Small workgroup or consultants	Validation and making sense of the preliminary results	Workshop
<b>STEP 5. Distilling an overall narrative</b>	Small workgroup or consultants	Validation of the narrative	Individual consultations

Table 9 below presents a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of conducting a contribution assessment during on site or online workshops:

<sup>1</sup> A launching workshop can help to kick-start the process, present the methodology, and cover the first steps.

<sup>2</sup> This can be run virtually or as a face-to-face meeting. The latter facilitates greater dialogue and exchange between the participants.

<sup>3</sup> Online consultations can be arranged by email and online surveys such as Google Forms, Spreadsheets or Excel templates.



Table 9. Advantages and disadvantages of conducting a contribution assessment during on site or online workshops

Aspects	On site	Online
<b>Number of participants</b>	Can accommodate a medium group (up to 20-25 participants).	Better when done with smaller group (between 10-15 participants).
<b>Logistics</b>	Light to heavy - depending on the number and provenance of the participants.	Light – Ongoing planning through the process is required to find slots that accommodate participants. Also requires that all participants have a good internet connection
<b>Planning</b>	A well-defined agenda is needed to kick off the workshop, but changes and adaptations can be made along the way.	A very precise methodological design is needed, including the complementary online tools to be used (surveys, shared files, spreadsheets, etc.)
<b>Cost</b>	Can go from almost no cost (if done with a small group in one of the organisation offices) to something that is expensive if participants need to travel. If travel is required also need to consider participants time and <i>per diem</i> , lodging, etc.	\$ - cost limited to software licences for digital workspace and participants time to participate in the workshops.
<b>Duration</b>	Short and intensive – the contribution assessment can be fully developed in one whole day workshop (6-8 hours).	Long and moderate – Might take several weeks to go through the entire process as only short sessions of 1-2 hours can generally be organised. Also need to take into consideration the time zone differences.
<b>Necessary skills to participate</b>	No specific skills are required.	Some skills required - Participants need to familiarise themselves with the digital workspace. Time needed at the beginning of the first session to explain how the workspace works.
<b>Space for visualisation</b>	Medium to Large - Depends very much on the room arrangement but normally locations will offer enough space for good visualisation.	Large – Digital workspace is unlimited, but visualisation can become difficult when there is a lot of information. It requires participants to be comfortable navigating within the workspace (zoom in – out, dragging post it, moving arrows, etc)
<b>Space for collaboration and brainstorming</b>	Optimal	Limited to optimal - depending on the number of participants and on the platform supporting the call (breakout group option)
<b>Post workshop work required</b>	Limited – Participants will need to validate the final report but most of the results are attained during in the workshop.	More extensive – participants need to put in time and work between sessions to complete the corresponding steps. At the end they will also need to review and validate the final report.
<b>Access to contribution analysis results information</b>	Immediate – The calculations can be performed in real time so results can be shared during the workshop.	Partial – Participants need to participate in several work session. Analysis results can be made available to them during the process, but final results will only be available at the end of the process.

## 6. Final considerations and lessons learned

---

This CA process relies heavily on stakeholders' involvement, therefore a careful assessment of their likelihood to participate in the entire process is highly recommended. Here are some questions that may assist in assessing the feasibility of the process:

- How open/participatory can this process be?
- What can we expect from the stakeholders' engagement?
- The active involvement of the stakeholders is needed for validation and quantification purposes. How certain is it that they will participate from beginning to the end?
- What sort of secondary information exists (e.g., project documents, reports, etc.)? Can this be used for drafting elements of the process (e.g., milestones, actors' names, actors' contributions, etc.) that can later be validated with the stakeholders?
- What resources (knowledge, experience) do we have in-house? How much do we depend on stakeholders' inputs for developing the first steps?

When running the process online (remote version) there are some key lessons learned to take into consideration:

- There may be potential language barriers between the stakeholders, facilitating team and consultants involved.
- When running the online sessions in a shared second language (e.g., English), consider that the participants' different accents may lead to difficulties when communicating only through audio. If possible, consider hiring an interpreter.
- When dealing with different time zones among participants, make sure to double check the dates/times for the online sessions, deadlines, etc.
- The level of uncertainty about the level of engagement that can be expected from the stakeholders increases in the remote modality. When participants are asked to attend several short work sessions over the period of 4-6 weeks, keeping them engaged and motivated is critical. Having a contact person who knows the participants personally can help to keep the momentum alive between the sessions.

- Do not assume that all participants have the required digital skills for using online tools/platforms (e.g. email, surveys, google forms, zoom, etc.). Check with them if they need assistance with the methodological and technologic aspects of the process every time a new step is introduced.

Most people who participated in the Contribution Assessment process using the methodology described here showed a high degree of satisfaction and appreciation for both the process and the results. They were inspired by the reconstruction of their journey and by what they were able to achieve together. Also, they found the results of the analysis and the dissection of the specific roles and contributions of the different actors along the process illuminating. With most groups, important reflections and lessons learned from the change process itself tended to emerge towards the end of the analysis, as part of the sense-making and interpretation of the results.

As mentioned before, this methodology has so far been applied to four case studies. After each experience, adjustments and improvements to the methodology were made. Therefore, these guidelines should be considered as a work in progress. Any feedback, adaptations, and/or improvements originating from other cases are greatly appreciated.

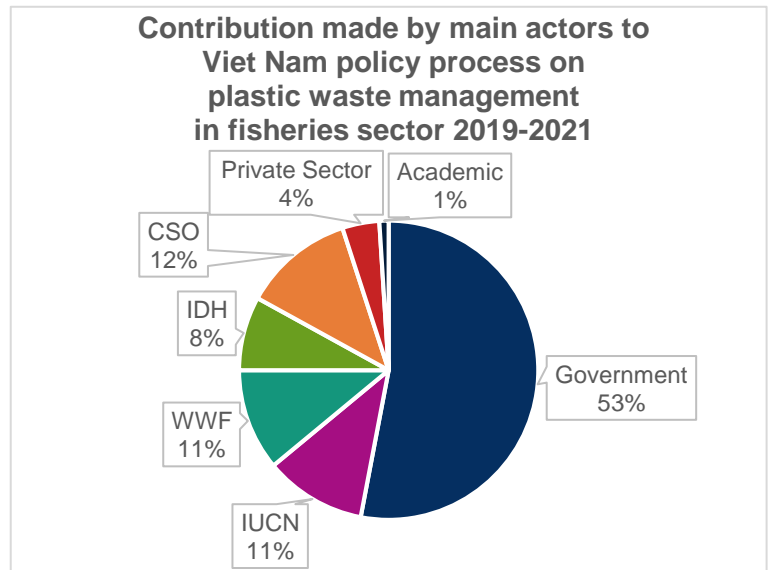
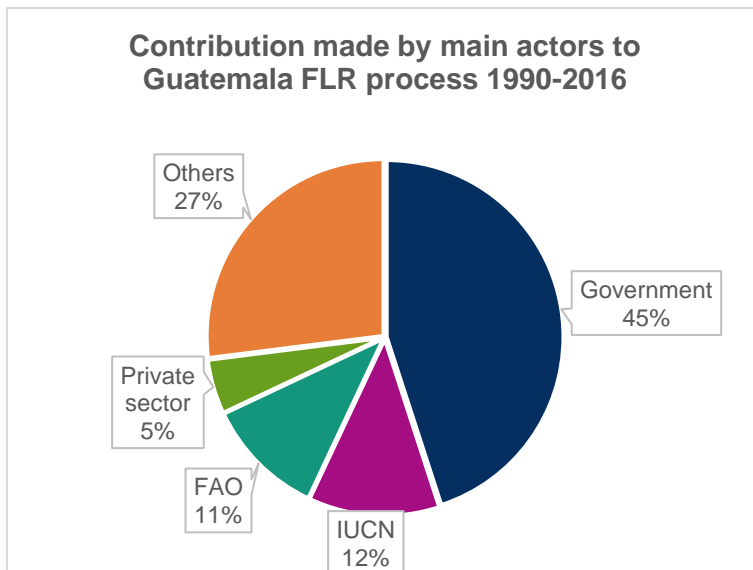
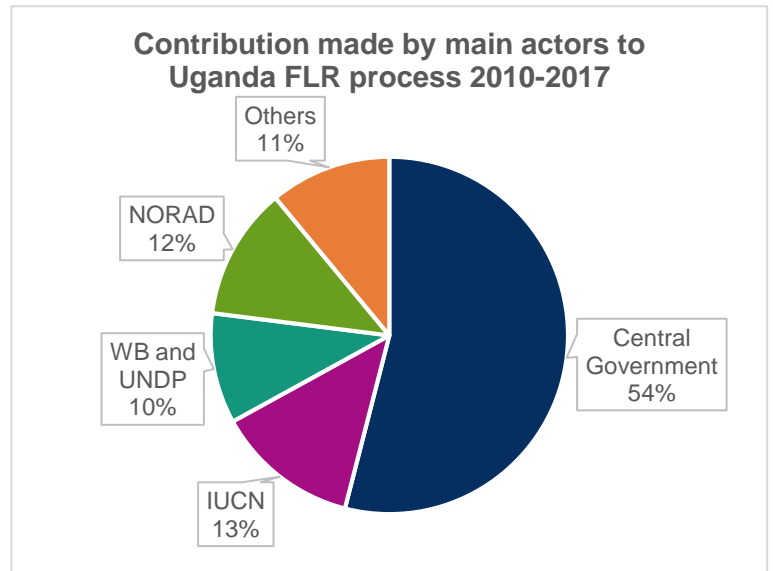
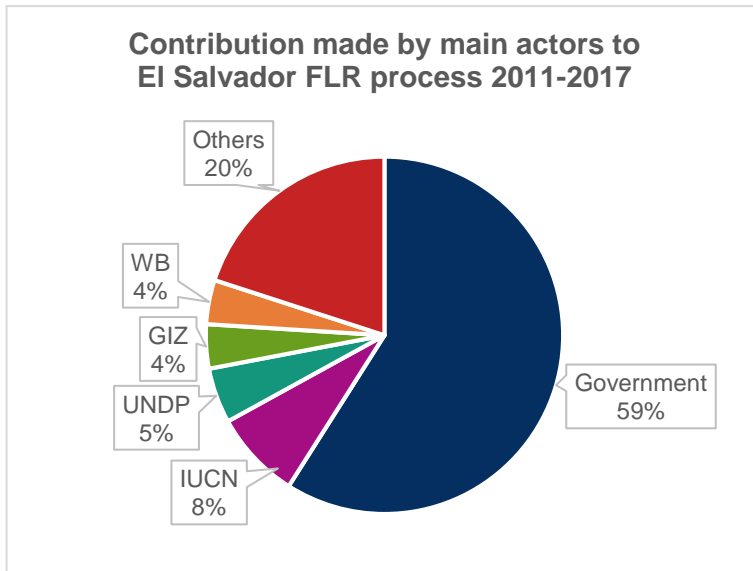
## 7. References

---

- Colomer, J. (2018). *Value for Money: Guatemala's Forest Landscape Restoration*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
- Earl, S., Carden, F., and Smutylo, T. (2001). *Outcome mapping: building learning and reflection into development programs*. International Development Research Centre.
- Ddamulira, R., and Imbach, A. (2018). *Assessing IUCN contribution to Uganda's FLR processes*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
- Imbach, A. (2021). *Assessing IUCN contribution to the Viet Nam Action Plan on Plastic Waste Management in the Fisheries Sector*. (unpublished).
- IUCN. (2019). *El Salvador's Forest Landscape Restoration: A Value for Money assessment* (unpublished).
- Patton, M.Q., 2010. *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. Guilford press.
- Riley, B.L., Kernoghan, A., Stockton, L., Montague, S., Yessis, J., and Willis, C.D. (2018). *Using contribution analysis to evaluate the impacts of research on policy: Getting to 'good enough'*. *Research Evaluation*, Volume 27, Issue 1, Pages 16–27. <https://doi.org/10.1093/reseval/rvx037>
- Stachowiak, S. (2013). *Pathways for Change: 10 Theories to Inform Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts*. Center for Evaluation Innovation.
- van Es, M., Guijt, I. and Vogel, I. (2015). *Theory of change thinking in practice*. HIVOS.
- Wilson-Grau, R. (2018). *Outcome Harvesting: Principles, Steps, and Evaluation Applications*. Evaluation and Society.

## Annex 1: Actor contribution to policy processes in Guatemala, El Salvador, Uganda, and Viet Nam

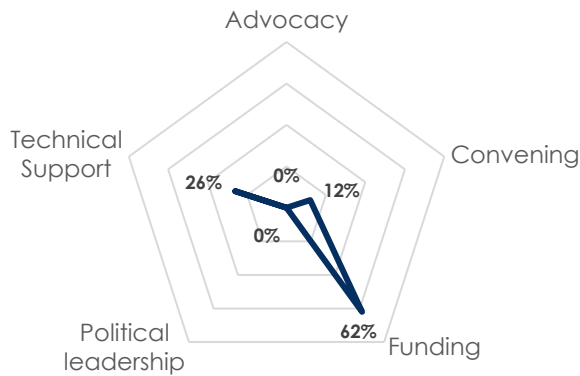
The graphics below presents the quantitative estimates for the contributions made by different actors in four different policy processes.



## Annex 2: IUCN main contribution type to policy processes in Guatemala, El Salvador, Uganda, and Viet Nam

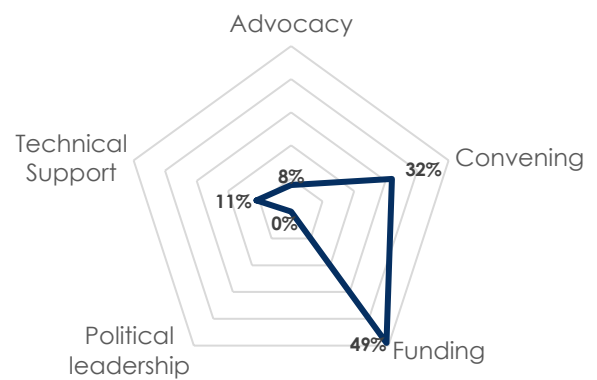
The graphics below presents IUCN's specific niche of intervention in four different policy processes.

**IUCN main contribution type to El Salvador FLR process 2011 -2017 (normalised values)**



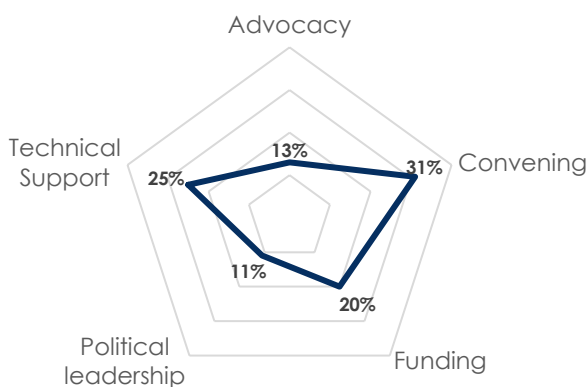
IUCN's role in El Salvador FLR processes is dominated by funding (62%), followed by technical support (26%) and convening (12%)

**IUCN main contribution type to Uganda FLR process 2010 -2017 (normalised values)**



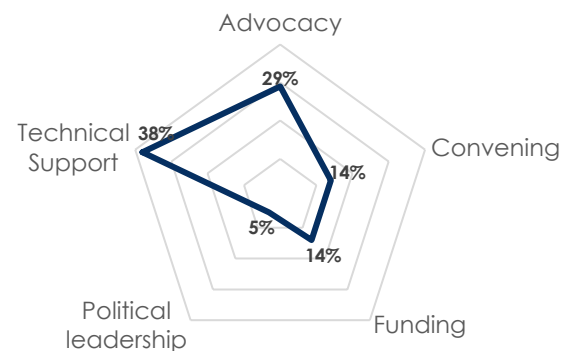
IUCN's role in Uganda FLR processes is dominated by funding (49%) and convening (32%), followed by technical support (11%) and advocacy (8%).

**IUCN main contribution type to Guatemala FLR process 1996 -2016 (normalised values)**



IUCN's role in Guatemala FLR processes is dominated by convening (31%) and technical support (25%), followed by funding (20%), advocacy (13%) and political leadership (11%).

**IUCN main contribution type to the Viet Nam policy process on Waste Management in the Fisheries sector 2019-2021 (normalised values)**



IUCN's role in Viet Nam policy process is dominated by technical support (38%) and advocacy (29%), followed by convening (14%) funding (14%) and political leadership (5%).



**INTERNATIONAL UNION  
FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE**

WORLD HEADQUARTERS  
Rue Mauverney 28  
1196 Gland, Switzerland  
Tel +41 22 999 0000  
Fax +41 22 999 0002  
[www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)

