



Guidance to Advance Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in Asia



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Note:

This document builds on the recommendations from the [Status of OECMs in Asia](#) report (Sharma et al., 2023). The content in this document is also based on guidance documents produced by the IUCN WCPA, which have been peer reviewed and published by the IUCN; they are available in several languages on the IUCN WCPA OECM Specialist Group's [website](#): [Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures](#); [Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures \(OECMs\) : first edition](#). For those interested in obtaining more information about OECMs, it is recommended to consult these documents as well.

Acronyms

APAP: Asia Protected Areas Partnership

ASAP: Asian Species Action Partnership

ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations

AZE: Alliance for Zero Extinction

CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity

COP: Conference of the Parties

EBSA: Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area

FPIC: Free, prior, and informed consent

ICCA: territories and areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples and local communities or “territories of life”

IPs: Indigenous Peoples

IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature

KBA: Key Biodiversity Area

KM GBF: Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

LCs: Local communities

METT: Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool

NBSAP: National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

ODA: Official development assistance

OECD: Other effective area-based conservation measure

PA: Protected area

PCA: Protected and conserved area

PES: Payment for ecosystem services

SSC: Species Survival Commission

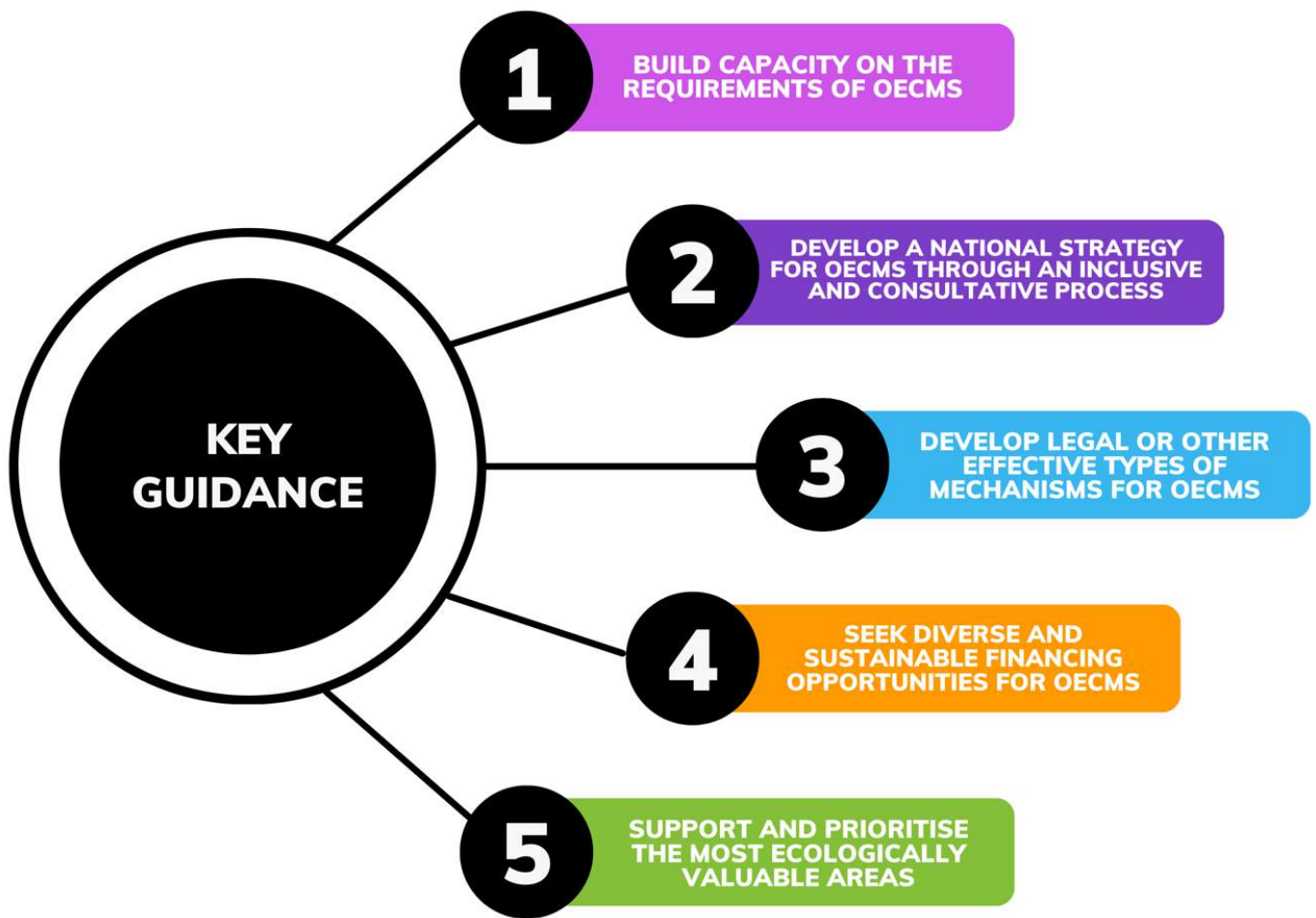
UNEP-WCMC: United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre

WCPA: World Commission on Protected Areas

WD-OECD: World Database on Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures

WDPA: World Database on Protected Areas

Graphical summary



The key actions recommended to help identify, report, monitor, and strengthen OECSMs strategically across Asia

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of OECMs and the new IUCN site-level identification tool

Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) were first introduced as a concept in 2010 as part of the Convention on Biological Diversity’s (CBD) Aichi Targets, specifically Aichi Target 11: “By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and *other effective area-based conservation measures*, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes”. The term was not formally defined under the CBD until 2018 as part of Decision 14/8, in which OECMs were defined as “A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio–economic, and other locally relevant values”. The key distinction between protected areas (PAs) and OECMs is that PAs must have conservation as their main objective, whereas OECMs need to deliver effective and long-term *in situ* conservation outcomes regardless of their objectives. Both PAs and OECMs are meant to achieve similar levels of biodiversity conservation and should be used together to build conservation networks.

To facilitate the identification and reporting of OECMs, IUCN WCPA has produced several technical guidance documents, the latest of which is the new [site-level identification tool](#) (Jonas et al., 2023). The tool guides assessors through three steps to apply the eight criteria for OECMs to determine whether a site qualifies as an OECM (Table 1 and Box 1). This tool has also been adapted by different countries based on their national contexts. Some modifications include developing nationally-relevant definitions based on the criteria, which can improve stakeholders’ understanding of OECMs nationally. A new guidance document to update the 2019 [technical report on OECMs](#) is also in progress to support the identification, reporting, monitoring, and strengthening of OECMs.

Table 1. OECM criteria from the new IUCN site-level identification tool (Jonas et al., 2023)

Screening assessment
1. The site is not a protected area (PA)
2. There is a reasonable likelihood that the site supports important biodiversity values
Full assessment
3. The site is a geographically defined area
4. The site is confirmed to support important biodiversity values
5. Institutions or mechanisms exist to govern and manage the site
6. Governance and management of the site achieve or are expected to achieve the <i>in situ</i> conservation of important biodiversity values
7. <i>In situ</i> conservation of important biodiversity values is expected to be for the long term
8. Governance and management arrangements address equity considerations

Box 1. Steps to conduct the OECM assessment (Jonas et al., 2023)

1. Screening of a proposed OECM site using the screening criteria to determine whether it is a potential OECM.

2. Obtaining consent from the governing authority, Indigenous peoples and local communities, and (as appropriate) other rights-holders for a full assessment of the potential OECM. Once these entities have given their approval for the process, the site is considered a candidate OECM.

3. Conducting the full assessment using the remaining six criteria to confirm that the site meets the requirements of an OECM. The responses to the criteria can be “Yes”, “Uncertain or Partial”, or “No”. Sites with all “yes” responses are confirmed OECMs, subject to approval and consent requirements. Sites with both “Yes” and “Uncertain or Partial” responses, or all “Uncertain or Partial” responses are still candidate OECMs until further changes enable them to become confirmed OECMs. Lastly, sites that have a “No” response cannot be considered as OECMs until sufficient changes have taken place for them to meet the criteria.

Steps 1 and 2 can be performed in any order or merged. However, it is necessary for Steps 1 and 2 to be finalised before proceeding to Step 3.

1.2. Overview of Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 3 and its relevance to OECMs

During CBD Conference of the Parties (COP) 15 in December 2022, OECMs were included under the new Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM GBF) as part of [Target 3](#): “Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 percent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and *other effective area-based conservation measures*, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories”. Although the “30 percent” objective of this target is gaining significant attention, the remaining 70 percent still needs to be considered for conservation and sustainable use under [Target 10](#) and other targets to protect biodiversity. Additionally, the qualitative aspects of Target 3 are equally as important as the quantitative element of protecting 30 percent of land, sea, and freshwater by 2030. Furthermore, Target 3 should be considered in parallel with other related targets such as [Target 1](#) on spatial planning, [Target 2](#) on restoration, [Target 4](#) on halting species extinction, and [Target 22](#) on the participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. All 23 targets are important and necessary to meet the goal of halting and reversing biodiversity loss. OECMs provide an opportunity to engage with multiple KM GBF targets if they are implemented strategically.

Land tenure and OECMs:

Land tenure encompasses the relationships between individuals or groups and land, including resources such as water and trees, with rules defining property rights, access, and responsibilities (FAO, 2002). Land tenure can be categorised into form and security—form dictates resource use, while security ensures that rights are upheld (Robinson et al., 2018). Insecure land tenure, common in developing regions due to historical legacies, can impact conservation efforts (Kelly and Peluso, 2015).

On average, securing land tenure positively impacts both human well-being and environmental outcomes (Tseng et al., 2021). Conservation organisations address tenure security through mechanisms such as land titling programmes or incorporating customary systems into statutory frameworks (Robinson et al., 2018).

The OECM framework enables diverse tenure systems that contribute to long-term, *in situ* biodiversity conservation to be identified and reported, and better monitored and strengthened. This offers a significant opportunity to equitably engage diverse governance authorities through rights-based approaches. This approach fosters local leadership, sustains existing systems, and, where suitable, can lead to their support or improvement. However, these benefits only materialise when OECMs are governed by authorities with secure tenure and/or natural resource rights and where decisions are community-led. Enhancing and respecting tenure and natural resource rights is crucial, as the effectiveness of management in OECMs is frequently dependent on these factors, enabling governance authorities to more effectively achieve conservation outcomes (WWF-US, 2022).

Spatial planning and OECMs:

Spatial planning, which is covered under CBD Target 1, can be defined as a method or process to analyse and allocate the spatial distribution of human activities to achieve social, economic, and ecological objectives (CBD, 2023). Spatial conservation planning is widely used to support the assessment and expansion of PAs across many countries. It involves identifying policy targets, relevant spatial data, and engaging stakeholders in defining protection, management, and restoration strategies using spatial planning processes and tools (UNDP, 2023). This approach can be used for OECMs as well, and it could be particularly useful for prioritising areas with important biodiversity values. It can also be used to enhance connectivity, which is crucial for biodiversity conservation, including the establishment of ecological corridors (Podda and Porporato, 2023). This also applies to degraded areas in important locations that could be restored—if they demonstrate important biodiversity values, they could become identified and reported as OECMs. Spatial planning is also important to ensure that more ecoregions are being represented, which is another aspect of Target 3. It is important to note that PAs should still be prioritised during spatial planning where possible, and OECMs should be considered where PAs cannot be established.

1.3. Context and purpose

As of February 2024, there are 857 OECMs reported in the UNEP-WCMC World Database on OECMs (WD-OECM) (Protected Planet, 2024a). There is approximately 1.18% terrestrial and inland water coverage from OECMs and 0.11% marine coverage from marine OECMs, totalling 1.29% coverage overall (Protected Planet, 2024a). In Asia, there are 178 OECMs, and all of these are in the Philippines (Protected Planet, 2024b). However, a study found that none of the Philippine OECMs have supporting documentation submitted to the WD-OECM (Claudet et al., 2022). There were other countries that had issues with documentation and meeting the criteria as well; hence, this will need to be rectified, and the actual number of OECMs that meet the criteria could be vastly different. Other countries in Asia have submitted their sites to the WD-OECM as well (Sharma et al., 2023), but these are currently not in the database. Asia has a significant opportunity to expand the number of OECMs in sites with important biodiversity values, as there are currently over 150 million hectares of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) that lack protection from either PAs or OECMs (data include “Asia”, “Central Asia”, and “Middle East” in the KBA database; KBA, 2023). Asia also has the highest number of Indigenous peoples globally (AIPP, 2019), which provides an opportunity to establish OECMs under their legally acknowledged traditional governance and management systems. This approach could significantly contribute to upholding the

rights and land ownership of the majority of Indigenous populations and local communities. Given the challenges associated with establishing new PAs, OECMs offer a complementary pathway to enhance biodiversity conservation outcomes and curb biodiversity loss.

The status of OECMs in Asia was assessed in a report (Sharma et al., 2023) that surveyed countries across Asia with a focus on national and sub-national strategies, legislation, and challenges. The report provided five key recommendations to guide countries across Asia to expand their efforts on OECMs. This technical briefing paper will build on these recommendations to help countries in Asia identify, report, monitor, and strengthen OECMs strategically.



Coron, Philippines. Photo by John Hernandez on [Unsplash](#).

2. Key recommendations for Asia

2.1. Build capacity on the requirements of OECMs

Capacity should be built for stakeholders involved in national OECM processes to ensure that any strategies developed for OECMs are aligned with international guidance and that established sites will be eligible to be submitted in the WD-OECM. These should include training measures around the following areas:

- Understanding the differences amongst OECMs, PAs, and sustainable use areas
- Understanding how to identify and prioritise sites that could be proposed OECMs
- Understanding the IUCN site-level identification tool, assessment process, and eight criteria comprehensively
- Understanding free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC)

- Understanding how to report sites to the WD-OECM following the UNEP-WCMC reporting requirements

In addition, there are four important considerations to highlight for requirements that have not always been met in the past (Sharma et al., 2023):

1. OECMs need to conserve important biodiversity values

“Important” has been defined in the new site-level identification tool as including at least one of the following categories:

- a) “Rare, threatened or endangered species and ecosystems
- b) Natural ecosystems that are under-represented in protected area networks
- c) High level of ecological integrity or intactness
- d) Significant population/extent of endemic or range-restricted species or ecosystems
- e) Important species aggregations, such as spawning, breeding or feeding areas
- f) Importance for ecological connectivity as part of a network of sites in a larger area” (Jonas et al., 2023)

2. OECMs need to have long term, not temporary, mechanisms that ensure *in situ* biodiversity conservation

For instance, temporary fishing closures that are closed for a few months a year will not qualify as an OECM. “Long term” should be considered as “permanent” where possible, as the tool mentioned “Describe any legal, official, customary, or other recognised basis for the institutions/organisations involved in the governance and management of the site that **contributes to making the governance and management arrangements permanent**” (Jonas et al., 2023). However, if it is not possible to allocate sufficient funding to establish the OECM permanently at the time of assessment, the area could be established as an OECM for a decade with plans in place to renew it after, for example. The IUCN WCPA guidance does not provide exact timeframes for this; hence, it is currently up to the discretion of national and sub-national bodies.

3. Areas managed primarily for sustainable use will not qualify as OECMs unless they have very light levels of use

Any sustainable use in OECMs should not impact the biodiversity outcomes of the site. As mentioned in the IUCN WCPA 2019 report, areas that would qualify include “Territories and areas managed by indigenous peoples and/or local communities (ICCAs, or sections of these areas) to maintain natural or near-natural ecosystems, with *low levels of use of natural resources practised on a sustainable basis and in a way that does not degrade the area’s biodiversity*” (IUCN WCPA, 2019). Hence, forests with commercial logging and intensively grazed pastures would not be considered as OECMs; these could be considered as sustainable use areas under Target 10 instead.

4. Obtaining free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) is critical for establishing OECMs in sites used, owned, or claimed by IPs and LCs

This is especially important as IPs and LCs have historically not had their rights respected when PAs were being established (Gurney et al., 2023). "Free" means that IPs and LCs have the right to make decisions without any coercion, intimidation, manipulation, threats, or bribery; "prior" means that IPs and LCs should be consulted and given sufficient time to consider and make decisions before any activities are authorised or commenced whilst respecting their time requirements and processes; "informed" means that IPs and LCs should be provided with detailed information of the proposed activity, its impacts, and more, in a language and format that can be easily understood, and "consent" means that IPs and LCs have the right to give or withhold their consent to any decision that will impact their lands, territories, resources, and livelihoods (Buppert and McKeehan, 2014). This consent should be documented in the format provided in the site-level identification tool with legitimate representatives of the group(s) (p. 6; Jonas et al., 2023).



Ooty, Tamil Nadu, India. Photo by Karthick Gislen on [Unsplash](#).

2.2. Develop a detailed national strategy for OECMs through an inclusive and consultative process

To ensure that efforts on OECMs within countries are consistent and following strategic guidance, countries should aim to create a national strategy for OECMs. The process for developing a strategy could begin with national consultations that involve stakeholders from the government, relevant NGOs, IP and LC representatives, and even the private sector. Some IP and LC groups are concerned that

governments may not uphold the standards in the Annexes to Decision 14/8 and will not engage and consult IPs and LCs in the process (FPP and The ICCA Consortium, 2022). Hence, the national strategy should be devised through an inclusive and consultative process with relevant stakeholders and rightsholders and explicitly state how they will be involved. It would also be highly beneficial to form strategic collaborative management partnerships across different organisation types due to the diverse nature of OECMs (Sharma et al., 2023). At a higher level, it would be highly beneficial for there to be regional discussions and partnerships on OECMs within parts of Asia, such as through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Asian Species Action Partnership (ASAP) for countries within Southeast Asia, and the Asia Protected Areas Partnership (APAP), among other groups. This would enable countries to exchange knowledge on OECMs more effectively and accelerate processes on OECMs for other nations in the region.

The strategies developed by nations should also be integrated into their national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) to mainstream efforts on OECMs and formalise commitments towards them. NBSAPs have been shown to effectively raise awareness of biodiversity issues, stimulate concrete actions, mobilise support, and enhance accountability, although there are still challenges in their implementation (Cardona Santos et al., 2023). The strategy should ideally contain the following aspects:

a) A nationally-relevant understanding of the agreed criteria from CBD Decision 14/8 and IUCN guidance

Under the CBD, criteria for OECMs have already been agreed, but it could be helpful to develop a national understanding of the criteria. This might include incorporating specific terminology used nationally, providing geographically relevant information, or references to national legislation to make it easier for national stakeholders to use. For example, the Maldives incorporated terminology related to marine frameworks in their guidance since all their potential OECMs are currently marine (Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, 2022), and India identified and created a category of fourteen area types that are locally relevant (MoEFCC, NBA, and UNDP, 2022). Additionally, the Republic of Korea created their own term for OECMs that translates to "Nature Coexistence Areas" in English ("자연공존지역" / "Jayeon Gongzone Jiyeok" in Korean) as there were issues with public acceptance and uncertainty with the term "OECM". It was decided that a new Korean term should be used instead of a translation of the term OECM, and the new term was chosen based on the results of a survey that consulted regional experts (KNPS, 2023).

It is important to clarify that the modifications to make the criteria nationally relevant should provide additionality to the existing CBD criteria, rather than changing them or lowering the social or ecological standards required. It is critical for sites to meet the CBD criteria, as well as the requirements of the WD-OECM, for them to count towards Target 3.

b) A process to formally identify OECMs nationally

Using the CBD criteria and any nationally-relevant understandings of it as described in (a) above, OECMs can be identified nationally. Countries should develop a national identification process that includes practical considerations for the groups or individuals eligible to identify proposed sites, the types of areas that can be considered nationally, how proposed OECMs will be assessed, and the steps in the identification and assessment process.

c) A method to report OECM sites to national databases and the WD-OECM

Once a site meets the criteria and has been formally identified as an OECM, it should be reported to both national databases and the WD-OECM, which will typically include two main steps of reporting. The first step will be for sites to be reported to a national database usually managed by a relevant government department, which should include a separate section for OECMs. The second step will usually be from the government department to the WD-OECM. The WD-OECM is managed by UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), which maintains a focal point contact with each country. There are two steps because an OECM has to be established and approved nationally by the government before it can be reported to the WD-OECM. Some countries may have a third step if the country chooses to have sites reported to regional or provincial authorities first, who would then submit the information to national authorities.

Reporting mechanisms should include supporting landowners with the technical aspects of reporting, particularly for IPs and LCs; since there are many technical requirements to submit a site to the WD-OECM, IPs and LCs may face difficulties with this and could be dependent on governments and NGOs for technical support unless training and capacity building is provided from trusted organisations (FPP and The ICCA Consortium, 2022). Hence, to streamline this process and encourage submissions from other sectors and diverse governing bodies, there should ideally be an effective way for potential sites to be submitted to the government directly along with the necessary information to show that the site meets the OECM criteria. The government can then review these sites, approve them nationally, and then submit them to the WD-OECM. India, for example, has created an [online portal](#) for this. For the second level, governments should ensure that they comply with UNEP-WCMC's WD-OECM [reporting requirements](#).

At the site level, it is important to consider which groups or individuals could be involved with the reporting process. For instance, whether it should be the same groups or individuals responsible for governing, managing, monitoring, or evaluating the site, or a separate body, such as an NGO that is facilitating the process. National consultations on OECMs should aim to address this with the participation of IPs and LCs. This could include field visits to sites to assess the various levels of management arrangements in ICCAs (IUCN ARO, 2023).

At the national level, it could be the same individuals responsible for reporting sites to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), another team that has already been taking the lead on OECMs nationally, or a combination of both, for instance. Non-governmental groups can report OECMs as well, as UNEP-WCMC accepts data from both governmental and non-governmental sources. It could even include the formation of a new national working group that includes research institutions, NGOs, and other experts (IUCN ARO, 2023). One example could be the governors of the site reporting it to their district, who then report it to their national government, who finally report it to the WD-OECM. These systems should be piloted first before wide-scale implementation to assess their feasibility for the diverse groups of individuals who will be governing OECMs.



Figure 1. Flowchart of a potential national reporting process, from the site level to reporting the site to the WD-OECM. *This step may not always be needed, depending on the country, or it could even include additional sub-levels

Box 2. The identification and reporting process for OECMs in the Maldives

Only resort islands can currently be OECMs in the Maldives.

1. An expression of interest is submitted to the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology by the resort owner to recognise a proposed section of their resort’s surrounding marine area as an OECM;
2. A screening process is conducted, which involves assessing the site against the national OECM criteria and guidelines;
3. The site is recognised as a Candidate OECM if it passes the screening process;
4. An ecological survey of the area is conducted following national guidance and is submitted to the Ministry;
5. A management plan of the area is prepared by the owner;
6. The ecological survey report, management plan, and proposed boundary of the OECM is submitted to the Ministry;
7. The boundary of the area is determined officially by the Ministry;
8. The OECM is formally identified nationally and included in a government database with details on the site;
9. The site is submitted to the WD-OECM (Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, 2022).

d) A method to monitor and evaluate the sites

Simply designating a site as an OECM or a PA does not guarantee long-term conservation outcomes, which is a key requirement of OECMs; therefore, developing a monitoring and evaluation plan is necessary to assess this. To ensure effective monitoring, it is crucial to implement robust measures aligned with the IUCN WCPA (2019) guidelines (updated version to be published in 2024), which mention:

“(i) baseline documentation and ongoing monitoring of the sites’ biodiversity values;

(ii) ongoing community-based monitoring, participatory mapping and incorporation of traditional knowledge, where appropriate;

(iii) monitoring conservation actions, including those focused on sustaining biodiversity and improving in situ conservation, and

(iv) monitoring of governance, stakeholder involvement and management systems that contribute to the biodiversity outcomes”.

The new IUCN site-level identification tool (Jonas et al., 2023) also underscores the importance of monitoring threats.

The evaluation process should ideally include multiple actors, as highlighted in a recent study (Maini et al., 2023) that emphasised the need for transdisciplinary knowledge co-production during this stage. This could include collaboration amongst various stakeholders, including owners, managers, governments, NGOs, and academics.

Box 3. Examples of monitoring in India and the Maldives

India:

There are diverse monitoring approaches in India; in the Jabarkhet Nature Reserve, this involves the use of camera traps that are monitored weekly by nature guides with supervision from the Managing Director of the site, while in Coromandel Birds Paradise, a Biodiversity Management Committee was established for comprehensive biodiversity management, monitoring, and evaluation. The committee's main goals are to maintain and monitor the green belt and waterlogged area, conduct surveys of plants and animals, and provide rehabilitation and medical care to injured wildlife. The site also has round the clock security to monitor poaching activities (UNDP and NBA, 2022).

Maldives:

Only resort islands can currently be OECMs in the Maldives, and all of them need to follow the same monitoring and reporting process. Resort owners are required to submit annual monitoring reports that cover ecological and biological conditions, socio-economic impacts, and enforcement and compliance. The monitoring approach is aligned with national frameworks, emphasising marine indicators, and requires video transcripts for survey validity. The ecological survey report must be prepared by either the marine biologist of the resort or a registered survey team appointed by the resort. Non-compliance with the requirements can lead to delisting of the site (Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, 2022).

Institutionalising monitoring and evaluation processes

Currently, monitoring processes have not been formalised by the CBD for OECMs. Doing so would enable conservation outcomes to be better compared across sites and regions. This could involve integrating the monitoring requirements listed by IUCN WCPA (2019) into national frameworks, ensuring collaboration amongst diverse stakeholders, and adhering to standardised reporting structures. It is important to strike a balance between user-friendly methods and rigorous, comparable results (WWF-US, 2022). There are currently several frameworks to evaluate the effectiveness of PAs but ones for OECMs specifically are yet to be developed. The Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT), which is the most popular Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) tool used globally, is not well suited to track biodiversity outcomes (Stolton et al., 2019), and this is a critical part of assessing OECMs. A better option for assessing conservation outcomes is the IUCN Green List Standard (IUCN and WCPA, 2017); however, even though OECMs are mentioned under the Green List indicators, developing an adapted version of this List based more specifically on the OECM criteria (e.g., including

the concept of important biodiversity values) would improve the evaluation process for assessors. The adaptation of the IUCN Green List for OECMs is currently under discussion and will be ready to pilot in the second half of this year. Improving the monitoring and evaluation process for global area-based conservation policies is also crucial for delivering equitable and effective outcomes (Gurney et al., 2023).

The challenge with institutionalising monitoring and evaluation processes in OECMs is that many sites will be under diverse governance mechanisms and, as a result, it may be difficult to institutionalise processes across all sites. This is because there may not be sufficient capacity available, at least initially, and training individuals on using specific monitoring frameworks could take time.

It is also important to ensure that the burden of extensive monitoring does not fall entirely on IPs and LCs for their sites. As mentioned in the IUCN WCPA guidance for monitoring above, community-based monitoring and traditional methods can be used for monitoring, but for the purposes of institutionalising processes, support could be provided from NGOs and governments—subject to the FPIC from the respective governance authority. Even if the monitoring process cannot follow standardised methods or frameworks across all sites, there should still be certain monitoring requirements to ensure that long-term conservation outcomes are being achieved across all sites, as that is the main requirement to be listed as an OECM. The monitoring results should also be reported to governments, which could follow a similar method as mentioned in (c).

Documenting outcomes in the peer-reviewed literature

Studies that have evaluated the effectiveness of OECMs at achieving *in situ* conservation outcomes are extremely rare in the peer-reviewed literature (Cook, 2023). Hence, where feasible, monitoring efforts in sites moving forward should ideally be documented and reported in the peer-reviewed literature to fill this knowledge gap and share the lessons learned with others. It is acknowledged that high publishing costs can be a financial challenge—one option is to publish findings as case studies in the IUCN WCPA journal [PARKS](#), which is free of cost. Documenting findings in other types of resources that have external reviewers is another option, such as in organisational reports.

e) A comprehensive financing plan

This financing plan is related to the costs of implementing the national strategy rather than financing individual OECM sites (see 2.4 for that aspect). The costs for this could, for instance, be related to hiring technical staff/external consultants and acquiring technological resources to develop the national criteria, databases, and other mechanisms described above. A good financing plan should present and consider available funding sources and opportunities, identify financial gaps, and estimate funding targets (Cabrera et al., 2021). Additionally, governments should (i) align financial planning with their medium and long-term strategic objectives, integrating them comprehensively; (ii) regularly update planning assumptions and forecasts for informed decision-making; (iii) analyse past performance critically to formulate realistic financial plans, and (iv) identify areas of risk and uncertainty within financial plans, presenting information in a manner conducive to effective decision-making (NAO, 2023).



Private resort island, Ithaafushi, Maldives. Photo by Masroor Ahmed on [Unsplash](#).

2.3. Develop legal or other effective types of mechanisms for OECMs

Once a national system to formally identify and report OECMs has been established, it will be important for countries to strengthen these sites with legal or other effective types of mechanisms. Legal mechanisms can help define and outline the boundaries of various area-based approaches, such as determining what constitutes a protected area versus an OECM, and regulate the governance and management arrangements within OECMs, among other aspects (Paterson, 2023). However, legislation for OECMs may not be needed if there is an effective alternative measure in place that can help the site maintain long-term conservation outcomes, such as through clear policies, customary laws, or binding agreements with the landowners (IUCN WCPA, 2019). Regardless of the type of measure used, they should be equitable, recognise human rights, and uphold social safeguards for IPs and LCs. These systems should also be transparent and include consultations with IPs and LCs to ensure that they are comfortable with them and that they are not at risk of having their land taken from them or losing their rights. Countries should identify the best way to incorporate a legal or other type of mechanism for OECMs based on their own contexts and current laws. Potential methods include (Sharma et al., 2023):

- A. Examining existing laws and regulations and seeing where OECMs can fit into these—this should be the first option before exploring the development of new legislation
- B. Redefining national conserved areas that are not PAs as OECMs if they have existing legal frameworks and meet the OECM criteria
- C. Developing entirely new laws and regulations based on the key definitional elements of OECMs
- D. Using other effective measures, such as clear policies and binding agreements with landowners

Box 4. Examples of legal mechanisms from Canada, the Maldives, and the Republic of Korea

Canada:

The Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard uses Canada's Fisheries Act as the legal mechanism to establish fishing area closures as marine refuge OECMs if they meet Canada's guidance on marine OECMs (Government of Canada, 2023).

Maldives:

The Maldives is including the area submitted under the legal boundary of the resort (all of the Maldives' OECMs are currently under resort islands) under their existing legal regulation for this (Regulation no: 2012/R-7 (Regulation on Determining Boundaries of Leased Islands for Tourism Development), rather than a boundary for a protected area (Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, 2022).

Republic of Korea:

In Cheorwon, a "Rice Paddy for Cranes" area near a demilitarised zone hosts vital habitats for white and red-necked cranes. Identified as a potential OECM, the site underwent assessment in October 2022 using the IUCN WCPA OECM screening tool. The area falls under the National Trust Act, which allows for a clear legal basis for long-term effectiveness and site monitoring (IUCN, 2023).

2.4. Seek diverse and sustainable financing opportunities for OECMs

Models for sustainably financing PAs should be applied to OECMs where applicable and these should be determined on a case-by-case basis. The funding of OECMs will depend on their governance and management structures, and not every OECM will need additional financing, particularly if they are already overseen by entities with sufficient funding. Some potential methods include:

- A. Forming collaborative management partnerships with NGOs and the private sector to fund sites
- B. Creating mechanisms for payment for ecosystem services (PES)
- C. Providing tax incentives to landowners
- D. Applying for official development assistance (ODA) from multilateral developmental banks such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, KfW Development Bank, and other funding agencies such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Green Climate Fund, and GIZ, as they are involved in financing PCAs

Box 5. Examples of financial mechanisms being used or considered for OECMs

Japan: Biodiversity “support certificates”

Japan has initiated the initial phase of a pilot programme for companies participating in government-certified biodiversity projects. Led by Japan's Ministry of the Environment through the 30 by 30 Alliance, the scheme involves issuing "support certificates" to corporations that support OECMs in various ways, including donations, purchasing naming rights, or investments. These non-tradeable certificates serve as documentation for corporations demonstrating their support for biodiversity activities under the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) framework, resembling biodiversity credits or offsets (Reklev, 2023). If the pilot succeeds, full-scale implementation is scheduled for 2025. These areas will need to be carefully assessed to ensure they have important biodiversity values to avoid greenwashing.

Viet Nam: PES

Viet Nam is considering providing a legal basis to finance OECMs through regulations on payment mechanisms for ecosystem services as outlined in Article 138 of the Law on Environmental Protection in Viet Nam (Sharma et al., 2023).

Maldives and India: Public-private partnerships

Both these countries are using collaborative management partnerships between governments and the private sector to fund OECM sites. In the Maldives, this is by collaborating with resorts (Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, 2022), and in India, this is by collaborating with major corporations, who sometimes have their corporation's name listed in the OECM site name (UNDP and NBA, 2022).

South Africa: Tax incentives

South Africa has introduced a new tax incentive for landowners that enables qualifying citizens to deduct expenses related to conserving threatened species and ecosystems from taxable income. It is expected to unlock around ZAR 1.5 million (USD 80,000) per year in new finance for conservation. This incentive provides financial benefits for conservation while simultaneously creating Candidate OECMs (Sustainable Finance Coalition, 2023).

2.5. Support and prioritise the most ecologically valuable areas

Countries should prioritise identifying new OECMs in the most ecologically valuable locations, including Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) where applicable, that currently lack coverage by PAs. This focus has been highlighted in a publication on priorities for PCA expansion, which states that the primary focus of PCA establishment should be “areas of particular importance for biodiversity” (Watson et al., 2023). Targeted areas should encompass important biodiversity values, as described earlier, that have been identified through mechanisms such as the IUCN Red List of Ecosystems, IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, or other nationally/sub-nationally established methods and databases (Sharma et al., 2023).

A helpful place to start is to use the [Key Biodiversity Areas \(KBA\) database](#) to identify sites that are important for biodiversity and filter the database by areas that have no coverage by protected areas. Certain types of KBAs should be prioritised where possible, such as [Alliance for Zero Extinction sites](#) (AZEs), since they contain Endangered (EN) and Critically Endangered (CR) (based on the IUCN Red List) species in areas that are significantly important to the survival of the species, and are, therefore, critical for safeguarding biodiversity. Spatial planning processes and tools should be used to aid these efforts (Watson et al., 2023).

As mentioned before, it is still important to prioritise the establishment of PAs over OECMs, but OECMs should be established when PAs are not a viable option.

3. Conclusions

To conclude, ensuring the proper identification, reporting, monitoring, and strengthening of OECMs in Asia will require a five-pronged approach around (1) building capacity, (2) developing a national strategy through an inclusive and consultative process, (3) developing legal or other effective types of mechanisms, (4) seeking diverse and sustainable financing opportunities, and (5) prioritising the most ecologically valuable areas, such as KBAs, using spatial planning processes. All of these aspects should be considered in conjunction with the latest versions of the criteria and guidance from the CBD and IUCN WCPA OECM Specialist Group. To truly accelerate efforts in the region effectively, it will be particularly useful for nations to leverage knowledge from each other through partnerships with other nations and organisations. Within Asia, existing partnerships such as ASEAN, ASAP, and APAP would be a beneficial starting point, and creating dedicated regional working groups and partnerships on OECMs could lead to far greater advancements in this field. These working groups could create strategies and coordinate efforts more efficiently across Asia.

Efforts in this region will have a significant impact on biodiversity conservation globally, as Asia is known to have immense biodiversity and host several of the world's ecological hotspots and threatened species. Hence, safeguarding areas in this region, whether as PAs or OECMs, is a critical step towards making progress on several relevant KM GBF targets, particularly Target 3, and preserving important biodiversity values.



Pokhara, Nepal. Photo by Mitali Sharma.

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