

OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES (OECMs) Briefing Note



Buayan village in Sabah, Malaysia, with the Crocker Range Park in the background © Harry Jonas

OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES AT A GLANCE

- ‘Other effective area-based conservation measures’ (OECMs) are areas outside protected areas that deliver the long-term, effective, *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity;
- OECMs can be governed by government agencies, private actors, indigenous peoples and/or local communities;
- OECMs complement protected areas in landscapes and seascapes and help promote equitable governance and effective conservation, for example, by enhancing ecological representation and connectivity;
- OECMs should be provided appropriate recognition and support, in ways that enable the governance authorities to manage their areas, and not suppress or supplant existing approaches; and,
- OECMs can be reported internationally to the World Database on OECMs.

What is an ‘OECM’?

While protected areas are a critically important means by which to conserve biodiversity, they cannot be used in all contexts to protect species and broader ecosystems. For this reason, in 2010, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) agreed that

biodiversity should be conserved through “well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures”. Parties to the CBD subsequently adopted the following definition for an ‘other effective area-based conservation measure’: *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 (CBD decision 14/8)*. The term ‘other effective area-based conservation measure’ is often abbreviated to ‘OECM’.

What is the relationship between protected areas and OECMs?

While a protected area has a primary conservation objective (i.e. is dedicated towards the conservation of biodiversity), an OECM delivers the effective *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity *regardless of its management objectives*. Like protected areas, OECMs can be governed by government agencies, private actors, indigenous peoples and/or local communities. Protected areas and OECMs complement each other in landscapes and seascapes and should be recognised and supported within well-connected conservation networks.

What kinds of areas are OECMs?

There are three kinds of areas in Asia that might qualify as OECMs:

First, there are areas that deliver *in-situ* conservation as a by-product of management activities, even though biodiversity conservation is not a management objective. Examples include sacred natural sites or military areas that are not established to conserve biodiversity in the first instance, but lead to the conservation of important biodiversity. This kind of protection can deliver the ancillary conservation of important biodiversity.

Second, there are areas where biodiversity outcomes are a secondary outcome of ecosystem management. For example, enduring watershed or wetland protection policies and management may result in effective protection of biodiversity. Sites managed to provide ecological connectivity between protected areas or other areas of high biodiversity, thereby contributing to their viability, may also qualify as OECMs.

Third, there are some areas that conform to the IUCN definition of a protected area, but which are not officially designated as such because the area cannot be recognised as a protected area or the governance authority does not want the area to be recognised or reported as a protected area. Importantly, assuming an area meets the OECM criteria, the governance authority has the right to withhold or give its consent to the area being recognised as an OECM.

Examples of Categories of 'Potential OECMs' by Governance Type

- **Ancillary:** Military areas, sacred sites, war graves.
- **Secondary:** Territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities – including areas used for the collection of non-timber forest products, watershed protection areas, ecosystem-related wetlands.
- **Primary:** Areas governed by government agencies, private actors or indigenous peoples and local communities that meet the definition of a protected area but cannot be recognised as such for various reasons.

NB: For a site in any of these categories to be considered an OECM, it should be fully assessed at the local level, based on the free, prior and informed consent of the relevant governance authority.

What are the benefits of identifying OECMs?

The identification of OECMs offers a significant opportunity to recognise *de facto* effective long-term conservation that is taking place outside currently designated protected areas under a range of governance and management regimes, implemented by a diverse set of actors, including by indigenous peoples and local communities, the private sector and government agencies. Identifying OECMs across landscapes and seascapes promotes:

- Equitable governance, effective management and conservation outcomes;
- An increase in coverage of ecologically representative areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- Enhanced connectivity between protected and conserved areas and across landscapes and seascapes;
- Engagement with a diverse range of rights-holders and stakeholders who contribute to area-based conservation outside protected areas;
- Transformation in sectoral practices; and
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation, contributing to net-zero climate targets and building resilience to the physical impacts of climate change through nature-based solutions.

How can OECMs be recognised and supported?

Identification of OECMs should be followed up by processes to determine appropriate kinds of recognition for the site (including legal, policy or institutional forms of recognition) as well as support (monetary and/or non-monetary). These should aim to enhance the governance capacity of their legitimate authorities and secure their positive and sustained outcomes for biodiversity. While national circumstances will differ, any related recognition or support should provide greater recognition and support to existing governance systems and not seek to supplant or unnecessarily alter those local arrangements that are effective.

How can OECMs be reported?

All types of governance authorities can submit data on OECMs to the World Database on OECMs managed by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Such reporting should be done with the free, prior and informed consent of the relevant governance authorities.

Additional guidance and links

- [IUCN WCPA OECM Specialist Group](#)
- [IUCN WCPA Technical Report on Recognising and Reporting OECMs](#)
- [World Database on OECMs](#)
- [FAQs](#)

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