

# Conservation news

## Making the world a smaller place—sharing tools and building global networks

It is now widely accepted that sustainable conservation in biodiversity-rich countries requires strong local and national organizations. Yet these organizations are often resource poor and working in isolated conditions, severely restricting their effectiveness. Recognizing this, a unique collaboration has been formed to link local and national organizations together through a global Capacity for Conservation network, focusing on strengthening institutional capacity through organizational development.

The concept of organizational development dates back to the 1940s and is often attributed to the research of psychologist Kurt Lewin. In 1947 he proposed that a group or organization was more than the sum of the individuals, and that a group has specific structural properties: 'relations between parts rather than by the parts or elements themselves' (K. Lewin, 1947, *Human Relations*, 1, 5–41). By 1974 organizational development was considered a proactive process that could help organizations respond positively to increases in education, income and social mobility (F. Friedlander & L.D. Brown, 1974, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 25, 313–341) and flourish during times of change. Organizational development is intended to be driven from within. Rather than an external expert attempting to diagnose and cure a problem, the onus is on those within the organization to identify systemic, structural or cultural issues that are hindering performance, and develop their own solutions with some guidance from an external facilitator.

Organizational development is now an established concept in the conservation sector. The mission statements of Fauna & Flora International and many other organizations describe a commitment to invest in local capabilities to bring about sustainable change. The need for this is clear: local and national partner organizations frequently ask for cost-effective, simple, appropriate solutions to tackle common organizational needs in order to become more resilient and able to deliver enduring actions to protect habitat and species.

Successful initiatives such as the MPhil in Conservation Leadership at the University of Cambridge and the Conservation Leadership Programme are already targeted to those who work in areas of high biodiversity and who are well positioned to identify development needs in their organizations and wider communities. The first international conference on Capacity for Conservation took place in Colombia in 2013, bringing together practitioners from all over the world, and a second conference is planned, in Africa, in 2015. These intensive, face-to-face opportunities are essential, yet resource limitations mean a relatively small

number of people are able to attend. We also need approaches that make learning, information and support accessible to all those seeking to develop their conservation organization.

The Capacity for Conservation collaboration is a partnership between BirdLife International, Fauna & Flora International, the Tropical Biology Association and the Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, supported by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative. Responding to calls for assistance from the 250+ local and national conservation organizations with which these organizations work, the collaboration is committed to supporting the self-led organizational development of conservation organizations, with recommended tools, resources and networks.

The first product of the collaboration, [capacityforconservation.org](http://capacityforconservation.org), launched in September 2014. It is a new online resource for those working in the conservation sector and has already attracted 167 users logging on from 82 countries, from Antigua to Zimbabwe. The website offers an organizational assessment tool that guides the user through a review of their organization in 12 areas, including project planning, leadership, external communications, fund-raising, and monitoring and evaluation. The results of the assessment suggest what needs to change; the toolkit then assists with this. The toolkit already contains 140 resources in 18 languages, as well as case studies to illustrate how others have approached the same issue. This bank of resources will grow as users upload their own tools and case studies, sharing learning and knowledge between local initiatives, globally.

In addition to guiding individuals committed to organizational development, the website also has a research purpose. As each organization completes their self-assessment, they contribute data that, cumulatively, will point to the most pressing development needs within the conservation sector as identified by the organizations themselves. This information has great potential to inform the investment strategies of donors and partners, to ensure support enables local conservation organizations to develop and deliver the strongest possible conservation outcomes.

AMY REED *Fauna & Flora International, Cambridge, UK*  
E-mail [amy.reed@fauna-flora.org](mailto:amy.reed@fauna-flora.org)

## A new Caucasus Programme

Recently described as one of the world's forgotten landscapes, Eurasia's importance for global biodiversity is now being rediscovered. Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has been working in Eurasia for over 15 years and, with projects