Step 25: Strategy rating

Evaluate the strategies

Often strategies are set and implemented without a subsequent assessment of their feasibility and potential impact. This can lead to unreflective management where those executing the strategies have little understanding of their effectiveness. An evaluation of strategies helps to adjust the strategy design and prioritise from the portfolio of strategies. This process improves the effectiveness and robustness of the strategies and helps to avoid negative impacts of the implemented strategies that remain unforeseen without proper reflection.

During this step, each strategy is assessed for both feasibility and potential impact.

Feasibility and impact of strategies

Feasibility

Feasibility describes the degree to which a strategy is likely to be implemented under the prevailing conditions in the planning area. It refers to the available resources, but also to risks, constraints and conflicts.

Effect

The impact of a strategy is measured by its effects and changes within and outside the designated planning area and which directly or indirectly generate consequences for the target systems.
Positive impacts refer to the maintenance or improvement of the state of the defined target systems. Negative impacts are those that lead to an increase in stresses, stress drivers and/or their negative underlying factors and causes by either reducing the sensitivity or increasing the adaptive capacity of the target system. For example, the increased risk of flooding can be reduced by improving the buffering capacity of wetlands.

Evaluation of existing strategies

Existing strategies are best evaluated through a peer review process conducted with external evaluators to promote a more balanced and objective perspective. When existing strategies are analysed by the same team that developed or implements them, the assessment results are usually not sufficiently objective. Pre-existing assumptions are confirmed and conflicts and errors may not be fully taken into account. But internal review also opens up opportunities for self-reflective analysis for the teams developing strategies. This in turn improves the detection rate of risks that might otherwise go undetected.

Feasibility

Feasibility describes the degree to which a strategy is likely to be implemented under the prevailing conditions in the planning area. It refers to the available resources, but also to risks, constraints and conflicts.

Degree of acceptance by relevant stakeholders

Since management strategies affect many stakeholders, the successful implementation of a strategy depends directly on the willingness of stakeholders to accept it.

Their willingness depends on the potential harms or benefits that the strategy represents for them. For example, a strategy to restrict mining activities in a river basin will most likely be opposed by miners, but might be supported by local fishermen. It is therefore important to consider both positive and negative impacts of planned strategies and to imagine extremely unfavourable scenarios. This allows robust strategies to be developed and the mentalities of stakeholders to be understood.

Relevant stakeholders are all internal and external groups of people who are directly or indirectly affected by the strategy, have demands and expectations and can therefore influence the strategy. Their attitude towards a strategy can range from very positive to negative.

Table 37: Classification of relevant interest groups

Relevant stakeholders			
Very positive = 4	**Positive = 3**	**Neutral = 2**	**Negative = 1**
The relevant stakeholders in this category are very positive about the strategy and strongly support its implementation.	The relevant stakeholders in this category are positive about the strategy and support its implementation.	The relevant stakeholders in this category have a neutral attitude towards the strategy, they do not support its implementation, but they do not oppose it either.	The relevant stakeholders in this category have a negative attitude towards the strategy and reject its implementation.

Table 38: Rating categories for the degree of acceptance by relevant stakeholders

Degree of acceptance by the relevant stakeholders			
Very good acceptance = 4	**Good acceptance = 3**	**Rather low acceptance = 2**	**Extremely low acceptance = 1**
The strategy is accepted by (almost) all relevant stakeholders.	The strategy is accepted by a large part of the relevant stakeholders.	The strategy is only supported by a small part of the relevant stakeholders, but not rejected.	The strategy is supported by only a few of the relevant stakeholders and rejected by most.

Supportive legal framework

Management activities do not take place in a legal vacuum. Therefore, the legal framework can strongly influence the feasibility of a strategy. While clear, strong and binding legal frameworks can support implementation, conflicting legal frameworks can have the opposite effect. For example, a wetland may be subject to both national and international legal frameworks, such as the Ramsar Convention.

Table 39: Rating categories for supporting legal frameworks

Supportive legal framework			
Strong binding legal framework = 4	**Non-binding legal framework = 3**	**Weak or missing legal framework = 2**	**Contradictory legal framework = 1**
There are clear, strong and binding legal frameworks that support implementation.	There are non-binding legal framework conditions that support implementation.	Weak or diffuse legal frameworks exist or legal frameworks are lacking.	There tend to be contradictory legal frameworks that could hinder implementation.

Resources required

Implementing strategies requires different types of resources: time, financial support, human resources and knowledge. The right combination of resources is important. Even if sufficient financial resources are available, they can be downright wasted through inappropriate knowledge management.

Table 40: Rating categories for necessary resources

Resources needed			
No resource problems = 4	**Some resources available = 3**	**Only limited resources available = 2**	**Not enough resources = 1**
Sufficient financial, human, time and professional resources are available within the managing institution to implement the strategy.	Some resources are available to implement the strategy, at least in part, and it is likely that additional resources can be obtained.	Few limited resources are available for the implementation of the strategy and only very small and rather isolated activities can be carried out. It will be difficult to obtain additional resources.	The resources of the managing institution are not sufficient to implement the strategy and it is unlikely that additional resources can be obtained.

Plausibility of identification with the strategy

The success of a strategy also depends on the involvement of relevant stakeholders. Only stakeholders who have developed a strong identification with the strategy will make an effort to maintain it in the long term. For example, if remuneration is the only motivation for stakeholders to participate in the planning process, they will most likely stop implementing the strategy once the activity is over.

Table 41: Rating categories for plausibility of identification with the strategy

Plausibility of ownership			
Strong personal responsibility = 4	**Some personal responsibility = 3**	**Only limited personal responsibility = 2**	**No personal responsibility = 1**
The managing institution has developed strong ownership of the strategy	The managing institution has developed some ownership of the	The managing institution has developed only limited ownership of the	The managing institution has not developed ownership of the strategy

Plausibility of ownership			
Strong personal responsibility = 4	**Some personal responsibility = 3**	**Only limited personal responsibility = 2**	**No personal responsibility = 1**
and will make significant efforts to maintain it in the long term.	strategy and will make some effort to maintain the strategy, at least in part, in the long term.	strategy and is unlikely to make efforts to sustain the strategy in the long term.	and will not make any effort to maintain it in the long term.

Likelihood of benefiting from external factors, especially opportunities

Not all change is bad. For example, a highly dynamic political situation can promote new laws or programmes that directly benefit the implementation of ecosystem-based management strategies.

Other possibilities are additional funding or cooperation with institutions that deal with similar problems.

Table 42: Rating categories for probability of benefiting from external factors, especially opportunities

Likelihood of benefiting from external factors (especially opportunities)			
Very high = 4	**High = 3**	**Low = 2**	**Very low = 1**
It is very likely that the strategy will be able to take advantage of existing or emerging opportunities such as additional resources or external support.	It is quite likely that the strategy can take advantage of existing or emerging opportunities such as additional resources or external support.	It is not very likely that the strategy will be able to take advantage of existing or emerging opportunities such as additional resources or external support.	It is very unlikely that the strategy will be able to take advantage of existing or emerging opportunities such as additional resources or external support.

Likelihood of damaging risks to the implementation of the strategy

However, not all dynamic situations are beneficial. Conversely, an uncertain political situation can lead to the cancellation of planned funds or to less interest in ecosystem-based management.

Among other things, extreme weather events and unfavourable economic investments can jeopardise the potential for implementing a strategy.

Table 43: Rating categories for probability of adverse risks to the implementation of the strategy

Likelihood of damaging risks to the implementation of the strategy			
Unlikely to be affected by risks = 4	**Probably not threatened by risks = 3**	**Probably threatened by risks = 2**	**Extremely threatened by risks = 1**
There is (almost) no likelihood of risks that (could) complicate the implementation of the strategy.	There is a low probability of risks that (could) make the implementation of the	There is a high probability of risks that (could) complicate or even hinder the implementation of the strategy.	There is a high likelihood of risks that (could) significantly hinder the implementation of the

Likelihood of damaging risks to the implementation of the strategy			
Unlikely to be affected by risks = 4	**Probably not threatened by risks = 3**	**Probably threatened by risks = 2**	**Extremely threatened by risks = 1**
	strategy somewhat more difficult.		strategy or even render it completely ineffective.

Adaptability to change

Uncertainty and unexpectedly changing circumstances are important fundamentals that management strategies must take into account. The development of versatile strategies that respond adaptively to changing conditions supports the overall risk and vulnerability management of the planning area.

For example, strategies involving the construction of buildings are often less adaptable than "soft strategies" (such as those related to communication).

Table 44: Rating categories for adaptability to change

Adaptability to change			
Very adaptable = 4	**Rather adaptable = 3**	**Not adaptable without significant additional resources = 2**	**Poorly adaptable or not adaptable at all = 1**
Adapting the strategy to changing circumstances or unexpected events can be done easily and without additional resources.	Adapting the strategy to changing circumstances or unexpected events can probably be achieved with some additional resources.	Adapting the strategy to changing circumstances or unexpected events could possibly be achieved, but requires significant additional resources.	The strategy is (possibly) not adaptable to changing circumstances or unexpected events.

Effect

As part of addressing the potential impacts of the strategies, it is advisable to develop extreme scenarios based on assumptions about undesirable side-effects. Ask yourself the following question:

> What could cause the strategies to produce other than the desired effects?

And, very importantly, remember:

> Avoid wishful thinking. Something that is supposed to be successful does not necessarily have to be successful;

> To try to act as the devil's advocate;

> Murphy's Law: "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong".

Generation of social, political and institutional conflicts

It is important that stakeholders are engaged in the strategy implementation process. Sometimes it happens that management objectives conflict with the socio-economic interests of stakeholders. Possible conflicts could be those over land ownership or rights, increasing or removing subsidies or incentives, etc.

Strategies that reduce land drainage and rewetting directly affect the ability of some farmers to use the land to produce the food they need for their livelihoods. They may perceive the strategies as disproportionately negative and form an association demanding the return of their land.

Table 45: Rating categories for the generation of social, political and institutional conflict

Emergence of social, political and institutional conflicts			
Very low risk of conflict arising = 4	**Medium risk of conflict arising = 3**	**High risk of conflict arising = 2**	**Very high risk of conflict arising = 1**
There is no or almost no likelihood that the strategy will lead to conflicts between different stakeholders.	It is possible that some degree of conflict may arise between different interest groups and that these may affect the planning area.	It is likely that there will be relevant conflicts between different stakeholders and that these have the potential to influence the planning area.	It is (almost) certain that there will be relevant conflicts between different interest groups and that these will influence the planning area.

Generation of negative effects on the target systems

Although a thorough analysis has been carried out, it is very likely that there are elements of the complex socio-ecological system that have not been fully understood.

During the implementation process, flawed assumptions may become apparent through unexpected reactions of some system components that exacerbate stress drivers and stresses or create new ones.

Assess the likelihood of strategies causing direct damage to target systems and their components.

A strategy that incentivises the commercialisation of plants could lead to their local extinction if the plants are over-harvested.

Table 46: Rating categories for the generation of negative impacts on the target systems

Emergence of negative impacts on the target systems			
No risk of a negative impact on the target systems = 4	**Low risk of causing negative impacts on target systems = 3**	**High risk of causing negative impacts on target systems = 2**	**Very high risk of causing negative impacts on target systems = 1**
There is no risk that the implementation of the strategy will have a negative impact on the	It is not very likely that the implementation of the strategy will have a negative impact on the	There is a high risk that the implementation of the strategy will have a negative impact on at	There is a very high risk that the implementation of the strategy will have negative impacts on

Emergence of negative impacts on the target systems			
target systems in the planning area.	target systems in the planning area.	least one target system in the planning area.	several target systems in the planning area.

Synergy effects with other strategies

Synergies occur when strategies are carefully constructed to work integratively with other objectives and activities within the planning area.

A strategy that promotes the social and political organisation of local communities can develop significant synergies with communication strategies or legal enforcement.

Table 47: Evaluation categories of synergy effects with other strategies

Synergy effects with other strategies			
Very high probability of synergy effects with other strategies = 4	**High probability of synergy effects with other strategies = 3**	**Mean probability of synergy effects with some strategies = 2**	**Low probability of synergy effects with other strategies, if any = 1**
The strategy is very likely to develop important synergies with several other strategies.	The strategy will most likely develop important synergies with some other strategies.	The strategy is moderately likely to develop synergies with some other strategies.	The strategy is quite isolated and is unlikely to develop synergies with other strategies.

Conflicts with other strategies

Some strategies work directly against other strategies, reducing the overall effectiveness of the strategic portfolio.

A strategy that improves public awareness of an area could lead to increased pressure from visitors.

Once identified, changes need to be made to address the identified conflicts.

Table 48: Evaluation categories for conflicts with other strategies

Conflicts with other strategies			
Low probability of conflict with other strategies, if any = 4	**Mean probability of conflict with other strategies = 3**	**High probability of conflict with other strategies = 2**	**Very high probability of conflicts with many strategies = 1**
The strategy has (almost) no conflicts with other strategies implemented in the planning area.	The strategy conflicts to some extent - but not problematically - with other strategies being implemented in the planning area.	The strategy conflicts with a number of strategies being implemented in the planning area.	The strategy is in strong conflict with a significant number of strategies being implemented in the planning area.

Effectiveness in reducing stress drivers

Effectiveness in reducing stress drivers describes the degree to which they are mitigated or avoided through the implementation of a strategy. This step promotes critical reflection on the actual effects of strategies on stress drivers.

This is neither a measure of efficiency (the cost-benefit ratio), nor of effectiveness (the achievement of defined goals within the defined timeframe) of the strategy, but a measure of the success of strategies to reduce the vulnerability of target systems by directly addressing the stress drivers outlined in the systemic situation model.

A strategy that regulates groundwater abstraction may lead to a direct reduction in the stress driver, while awareness-raising campaigns may have only indirect effects.

Table 49: Rating categories for effectiveness in reducing stress drivers

Effectiveness in reducing stress drivers			
Very high effectiveness in reducing stress drivers = 4	**High effectiveness in reducing stress drivers = 3**	**Low effectiveness in reducing stress drivers = 2**	**Very low effectiveness in reducing stress drivers = 1**
The strategy is very effective: it will lead to a significant and sustainable reduction or even elimination of several stress drivers.	The strategy is quite effective: it will lead to a far-reaching reduction of at least one stress driver.	The strategy is not very effective: it will only lead to a minor reduction in a stressor, and possibly only temporarily.	The strategy is (almost) ineffective: it will not even indirectly lead to a reduction in stress drivers.

Direct increase in the functionality of the target system

Some strategies aim to directly improve the functionality of a target system or at least bring it back to an acceptable level of functionality.

This step attempts to assess the potential change and hopefully increase in functionality of a target system that has been influenced by strategy.

Strategies that reduce drainage and rewet land can directly increase the functionality of target wetlands.

Table 50: Rating categories for the direct increase in the functionality of the target system

Direct increase in the functionality of the target system			
Very positive for the functionality of the target system = 4	**Positive for the functionality of the target system = 3**	**A small and rather indirect contribution to the functionality of the target system = 2**	**No measurable improvement in the functionality of the target system = 1**
The strategy will ensure or fully restore the long-	The strategy will go a long way towards	The strategy will make a small contribution to	The strategy is unlikely to contribute to maintaining

Direct increase in the functionality of the target system			
term functionality of one or more systems.	maintaining or restoring the functionality of one or more systems.	maintaining or restoring the functionality of one or more systems.	or restoring the functionality of any of the systems.

Degree of possible regret

Strategies can fail to achieve their intended effects and still generate secondary positive effects.

Therefore, the failure of such a strategy does not mean a total waste of the resources invested. In the case of positive effects, the strategy would be a "low- or no-duration option".

An environmental education strategy can still contribute to the acceptance of activities by the local population, even if it does not directly change behaviour.

Table 51: Rating categories for Degree of possible regret

Degree of possible regret			
Strategy without regret = 4	**Strategy with low regret = 3**	**High regret strategy = 2**	**Strategy with very high regret = 1**
The strategy will produce clear positive side effects, even if the originally intended effect is not achieved.	The strategy is likely to produce some positive side effects, even if the originally intended effect is not achieved.	The potential level of regret is high. If the originally intended effect is not achieved, the strategy will not generate (significant) positive side effects. The strategy will also be difficult to reverse and could lead to a waste of resources.	The potential level of regret is very high. If the originally intended effect is not achieved, the strategy will not produce positive side effects. The strategy cannot be reversed in time and would clearly lead to a waste of resources.