

The following document has been created to support those aiming to establish Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) National Coordination Groups for their country to identify, map, monitor and conserve KBAs.

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## What are KBA National Coordination Groups?

Key Biodiversity Area National Coordination Groups (KBA NCGs) are proposed as the key structures to coordinate the KBA programme in a country. They provide a mechanism at country level that manages the KBA identification process and promotes the conservation of identified KBA sites. The NCG works closely with the KBA Regional Focal Point as well as the KBA Secretariat to ensure KBAs identified are recognised and published in the World Database of KBAs. KBA NCGs provide national coordination with roles such as:

- Coordinating the identification and delineation of KBAs in country
- Creating awareness, understanding of, and visibility of KBAs;
- Ensuring KBAs are monitored at regular intervals (at least every 8-12 years)
- Promoting KBAs in national policy and legislation
- Aligning KBA activities with relevant policies and practices including spatial planning;
- Working to support national commitments to CBD and SDGs guiding expansion of protection under 30% by 2030 using KBAs;
- Supporting sustainable and effective management of KBAs on the ground,
- Ensuring KBAs are effectively conserved.

The roles of KBA NCGs changes over time but initially they generally focus on awareness raising and capacity building, assessing existing KBAs against the KBA Global Standard and starting a national process for the identification of new KBAs across multiple taxonomic groups. Later on they may focus more on monitoring KBAs and ensuring their long-term conservation, promoting them in national policy and legislation. The KBA NCG should therefore be organized around which of these activities will be the focus of their work at any particular time and may change composition over time to ensure the group remains relatively small and able to be effective.

KBA National Coordination Groups are thus made up of multiple groups with potentially different interests. They can be classified as multi-stakeholder forums (MSFs), which are defined as “organized interactive processes that bring together a range of stakeholders to participate in dialogue, decision making, and/or implementation to address a common problem or achieve a goal for their common benefit<sup>1</sup>”.

## What is needed for a KBA NCG to succeed?

In order for KBA NCGs to be successful and resilient, it is important to work to ensure they are open and transparent in the process to identify, map, monitor and conserve KBAs. It is important to build a team with expertise in identifying KBAs but at the same time have the links with groups that have political influence and can ensure their recognition in national policy and legislation. The KBA NCG should be flexible to changing interests, and ready to bring in interested groups as they learn about the tool. A perception that the process is open and transparent, and free from conservation agendas, is key to engaging with a breadth of stakeholders and rights holders. Designing for *engagement* combines top-down and bottom-up processes, such as the internationally established KBA Criteria and delineation methods, together with institutions that hold local and national data on species and ecosystems, each with their own needs and realities, with the ultimate aim of generating *joint ownership* of the KBA process in a country.

For this to happen, the process needs to be participatory by nature, bringing people together from different stakeholder groups providing them an opportunity to provide input into the KBA identification process. One of the main factors that greatly influence the success of a KBA NCG is the trust in the process and in those who lead it. Through creation of national ownership of the process, by involving multiple stakeholders at different levels in a country, credibility and continuity of the KBA process will be strengthened.

## Overarching considerations when establishing a KBA NCG

The following section is comprised of general recommended steps to take for the different phases proposed for setting up a KBA NCG. Remember that these are suggestions to make sure that the process is adequately designed but can be modified to be nationally relevant to your situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarmiento Barletti, J.P. and Larson, A.M. (2019). *The role of multi-stakeholder forums in subnational jurisdictions: Methods training manual and tools for in-depth field research*. Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR.

When establishing a KBA NCG it is good to consider the sociopolitical context of the country and the existing structures in place that can be worked with. KBA NCGs can also support existing processes ongoing in countries. One clear example is the focus by many countries on expanding protected and conserved areas to 30% by 2030, a target of the CBD's Global Biodiversity Framework. KBA identification can clearly support such a process and guide where the protected and conserved areas should be sited. Initially it is good to raise awareness of the role of the KBA NCG and invite institutions with relevant data or expertise to participate. As others recognise the value of the KBA NCG they may request to join with time and as long as the group remains transparent and open this is usually possible to accommodate. There needs to be agreement on what the objectives of the KBA NCG are, and what they are not. There is also an important aspect of relationship-building that needs to be fostered. This means holding meetings and organising training workshops with different institutions, organisations or individuals, explaining what KBAs are until there is a solid general understanding of this and how they are useful in guiding conservation nationally. There is a need to be aware that different partners may have different objectives and to be clear what KBA NCG members expect from a KBA NCG.

It is important to make sure sufficient time is allocated for the KBA NCG to be established. For some countries, this process may take a year or more. Once established the KBA NCG may change over time, adapting to political changes such that its formation can be seen as an evolving process. Taking time to build a solid process with strong foundations is important and worth investing in to ensure an efficient and effective process. It is more important to build KBAs on a solid structure, with a common understanding and with joint planning than on something that will need to be considerably revised later, often requiring more financial, time, and human resources.

Before beginning this process, the people or institutions involved in the initiation of this process need to make sure that they are aware that different institutions or people, according to their mandates or areas of expertise, need to be targeted for activities or phases specifically relevant to them. Moreover, it is crucial to design the process according to the specific context (e.g. cultural, political) that the country or region is set in. Comprehensive support by all relevant stakeholders will increase the potential for KBAs to be safeguarded in future.

## Summarised process for establishing a KBA National Coordination Group

This document provides a summary of the steps (Figure 1) that have been used to establish a KBA NCG, and factors to consider. More details of the process can be obtained from the KBA Secretariat.

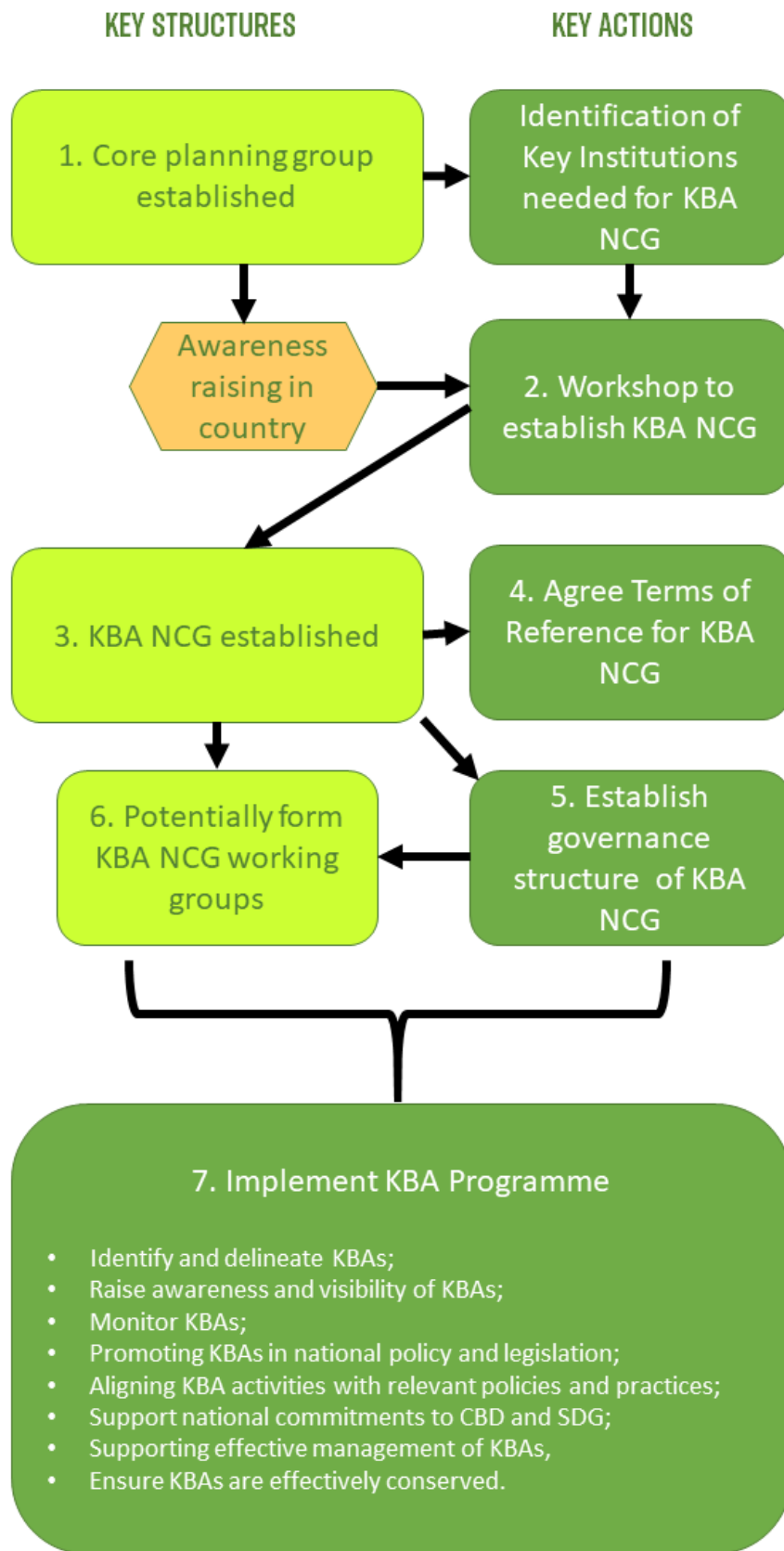
### Step 1- Convening key stakeholders to form a core planning group

#### *Objectives of this phase:*

- Raising awareness of what KBAs are
- Raising awareness of what a NCG is and why it is needed
- Raising awareness that a KBA NCG is being created
- Convening biodiversity professionals and encouraging them to be a part of the process
- Obtaining the political buy-in to the KBA identification process

#### *Activities to conduct:*

The organisation or individuals who start the process begins identifying people/institutions to convene as part of the core planning group; who will work to identify and engage potential partners



**Figure 1.** Steps outlined in this document that can be used to establish a functioning KBA NCG

who would form the KBA NCG before it is established. There may be existing conservation institutions and/or biodiversity forums in a country that could do this step, which will make the process more efficient and meaningful. Together with KBA Partners in the country (see the KBA website for the full list of KBAKBA Partners), or with other biodiversity-related institutions, the core planning group needs to create a list of all institutions/ organisations whose work is related to KBA activities to discuss with them the KBA Programme and invite them to be a part of the process. This step should also review existing KBAs (including IBAs and AZE sites) and include the stakeholders supporting their conservation. KBA NCGs can include government offices from national, subnational, and local levels, as well as civil society, academia, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), grassroots organisations, organisations representing Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC) representatives, private sector, and more. Useful questions to ask to identify the relevant stakeholders include: *who has decision-making power on biodiversity? Who holds biodiversity information? Who can implement actions at the national, regional, and local levels? Who can provide expertise on certain issues? Whose support is crucial to make KBAs work in the country? Who may be interested in funding this process or one of its phases/ activities? Whose support is crucial to make the implementation of KBA management work? Is there anyone whose behaviour needs to be changed to invite them to learn more about ways to change it?*

After these stakeholders have been identified, they are sent an invitation to an event (see Step 2) that briefly highlights and explains what KBAs and KBA NCGs are, explaining also that a process in the country has begun to set up a KBA NCG. Invitees can also be asked to identify other potential stakeholders who would play an active role in a KBA identification and conservation process, thus creating a snowball effect and reaching out to broader networks.

The core planning group should also contact the relevant KBA Regional Focal Point at this stage to make them aware of the interest in establishing a KBA NCG and to check there is not already an ongoing process in the country that they may be unaware of.

## Step 2- Organising an introductory event to KBAs

### **Objectives of this phase:**

- Increased understanding of what KBAs are and what their importance is
- Increased understanding of what the KBA NCG is, what it aims to do, and how it works
- Motivate people to join the KBA NCG
- Beginning the establishment of the KBA NCG

### **Activities to conduct:**

The core planning group organises a workshop for relevant stakeholders identified in step 1, that aims to increase understanding of KBAs, their importance and use by governments, donors and private sector; aiming to build a constituency that will support the KBA NCG and KBA programme in country. This will include highlighting KBAs as an opportunity to fulfil country commitments (e.g. the United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity – UN CBD)). There may be a need to hold smaller one-on-one meetings and target different groups with different types of meeting to make them aware of KBAs prior to this larger workshop. The aim of this larger workshop is to obtain agreement on the formation of the KBA NCG and who should be the key members.

Bear in mind that if this event is conducted in person, people from geographically inaccessible areas may not be able to attend; and that if organised virtually, people without access to internet

connection may not be able to attend either. Furthermore, make sure that the language used is easy to understand and not too technical, as decision-makers whose support you need may not have a technical background. This introductory workshop should aim to agree a process for moving forward to establish a KBA NCG and request offers and suggestions of who should be part of the KBA NCG. In some countries there may be a need for follow-up meetings individually and potentially multiple workshops before the KBA NCG is established.

### **Step 3- Convening KBA NCG members**

#### ***Objectives of this phase:***

- Defining the composition of the KBA NCG
- If required, establishing representatives for stakeholder groups

#### ***Activities to conduct:***

The core planning group meets to agree the composition of the KBA NCG from those that expressed an interest in being part of the KBA NCG. These potential members are then officially invited to participate in the KBA NCG, and the group's creation is finalised after their responses have been received. If the group of people or organisations that expressed interest to participate is too large, the core planning group should group the potential members and request each group to consider selecting an individual or organisation that they consider will effectively represent their needs, interests and information at the KBA NCG meetings, and who would report back to them after the meetings are held. It is suggested that a group of 10-20 individuals makes a useful size for a KBA NCG but some KBA NCGs are larger but then split up the roles of the participants so that not everyone needs to attend every meeting.

It is important to have a balanced diversity in KBA NCG participant composition. For example, if a conservation group focuses on a single taxonomic group, care must be taken to balance this group with others with broader taxonomic interests. However, the KBA NCG members also need to be committed to the process and have the time available which may preclude some members. As stated above some groups may be members for certain parts of the life of a KBA NCG but leave the group as the focus of activities changes.

#### **Essential consideration**

When designing a KBA NCG, it is crucial to address equity in its phases as much as possible. Therefore, it is key that the KBA NCG representatives are able to represent relevant sectors who may have critical information or that might be key for the effective designation, management and monitoring of KBAs. It is important to allow for real inclusion from the beginning of the process where every member has a voice and can contribute to supporting KBA identification and conservation. More or less Government representation is dependent on the context of each country and that should be assessed carefully. In countries where the Government plays a leading or major role in conservation activities, the relevant government institutions should be adequately represented in the NCG and specific roles should be clear for them.



## Step 4- Drafting KBA NCG terms of reference

### *Objectives of this phase:*

- Establishing a terms of reference for the KBA NCG
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of each position
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of each type of member
- Setting a roadmap and milestones for the KBA NCG

### *Activities to conduct:*

Early on in the establishment of a KBA NCG there is a need to agree the process by which the KBA NCG will work and to set goals and objectives for the group. The core planning group leads the group in establishing a first draft of a terms of reference (there is a [template NCG Terms of Reference](#) on the KBA website). The group will decide on additional specific country objectives, their roadmap, and milestones. This includes how many times the NCG will meet per year, the definition of the group's structure and specific roles, time each representative will serve for each position, if membership is to be limited to institutions, individuals, or both. It will include detailed descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of each role, which should include the chair, co-chair (if applicable), secretary, and facilitator, and the of roles that each type of member will have (e.g. providing data; contributing to skills-building such as capacity-building workshops, etc.). In some cases, the NCG can decide to elect a management committee comprised of the members of the group assigned with the most relevant roles who can push the group's activities forward. This approach can be especially helpful for large NCGs (e.g. 20 or more members).

The KBA NCG will also decide on whether working groups are needed, who will be part of these groups, how often each working group would meet, how decisions will be made, and who will be responsible for making decisions. Additionally, the ToR specify the available roles as part of the KBA NCG's governance structure (e.g. Chair and Secretary) with descriptions of their roles and responsibilities, as well as how long a person or institution will serve in each official role. The Terms of Reference should specify how to handle instances of conflict and what conflict-resolution mechanisms will be used. Specific ToRs for the group's specific roles and working groups can also be developed.

The Terms of Reference should proactively address inequalities between participating stakeholders (e.g. more lobbying power, more data on a specific taxonomic group), as these cannot be simply addressed by bringing people together. The Terms of Reference should also specify how to handle instances of conflict and what conflict-resolution mechanisms will be used.

## Step 5- Establish Governance Structure of KBA NCG

### *Objectives of this phase:*

- Selection and assignment of KBA NCG participants' roles and responsibilities
- Assignment/ signing up for Working Groups

### *Activities to conduct:*

It is usual to appoint a KBA NCG Chair and Secretary and some NCGs have other roles in their structure. These NCG leaders need to be able to address likely differences in power that the



participating groups will have, the skills to chair meetings and arrive at decisions, and the ability to motivate the members of the KBA NCG to work as a team to achieve the objectives of the KBA NCG.

When applicable, in large countries where there are many organisations to manage, or in countries with complex and very different subnational jurisdictions and realities, Subnational Management Committees, that operate under the umbrella of the principal KBA NCG committee, may be created following the establishment of the KBA NCG.

Through a voting process, designed by the core planning group initiating the KBA NCG and agreed by the majority of the participants, participants vote for a Chair, a Secretary and any other eligible roles that are agreed by the NCG. In some cases it has helped to have a full time Coordinator to manage the process who is fully funded by project funds because often the Chair and Secretary have other duties and cannot focus solely on the KBA Programme. It is important that the Chair and Secretary are people that represent the broad spectrum of stakeholders and/or that have the capacity to liaise with decision-making authorities, such as the Government. They should also be able to represent the group as a whole and be sensitive to ensuring all members participate equally and openly.

## Step 6- Optional step: Formation of working groups

### *Objectives of this phase:*

- Identify potential working groups that can be formed from the members of the KBA NCG
- Identify members and appoint chairs of each group

### *Activities to conduct:*

Depending on the size and complexities of a country, the NCG might decide to form working groups as part of the KBA NCG. Different working groups may be related to the different objectives of the KBA NCG. Working groups need to designate the institution or person who would represent them, as chair of the group. Suggested (optional) working groups that might be formed include (but are not limited to):

- **KBA identification and review committee:** this working group focuses on identifying potential KBAs and reviewing proposals submitted by independent proposers. Experts in GIS and taxonomic groups, for example, should be amongst those in this working group. Members should be able to apply the KBA criteria and have a good range of knowledge of the country's biodiversity. This group would also coordinate the development of KBA proposals for incorporation in the World Database of KBAs.
- **Capacity-building committee:** this committee oversees the development of workshops and other training or capacity-building events.
- **Fundraising committee:** this working group focuses on raising funds for the KBA NCG's activities and KBA-related activities. It would also find out where the overlaps between member organisation's mandates with work that is needed for KBAs. They would elaborate the KBA NCG's budget to support its objectives and annual plan, seeking out funding opportunities to support the work of the KBA NCG.
- **Partnership committee:** this working group focuses on building alliances with other individuals and institutions to try to bring them into the KBA programme. They would conduct relationship-building activities and one-on-one meetings to identify overlaps between the KBA process and national policies and initiatives. Those with strong diplomatic skills and/or with deep understanding of KBAs and why they are required for the country could be amongst those in this group.

- **Communications committee:** this working group would prepare communication material to continue raising awareness on KBAs and their importance nationally and internationally.
- **IPLC engagement committee:** this working group makes sure that when decision-making happens, that it is participatory. It can build bridges with local communities and indigenous peoples and ensure they can engage with the KBA NCG and KBA identification as well as giving input from local knowledge into the process.
- **KBA database committee:** where a KBA NCG has the resources to establish a central database, this working group can be formed to make sure that all biodiversity data and data on KBAs in the country is arranged in a single platform/database, and coordinates with stakeholders as necessary to populate the database and update it. Experts on different taxonomic groups, for example, could be amongst those in this working group.
- **Monitoring and Stewardship committee:** with time there may be a need to have a committee that focuses on monitoring identified sites and ensuring their long-term conservation once the initial sites have been identified.

However, it is strongly advisable to limit the number of such working groups to a minimum to keep them operational and ensure they support the process rather than slow it down.

## Step 7- Summary operations of the KBA NCG

### *Objectives of this phase:*

- The KBA NCG is coordinating the identification and delineation of KBAs in country
- KBAs are monitored at regular intervals (at least every 8-12 years)
- KBAs are promoted in national policy and legislation
- KBAs are effectively conserved
- Monitoring and evaluation of the KBA NCG is undertaken periodically.
- Annual reporting of the status of KBAs in the country

### *Activities to conduct:*

We summarise here some of the main activities the KBA NCGs should become involved in:

The KBA NCG should initially start a process of KBA identification at a national scale using the most recent IUCN's standards, aiming to identify KBAs across a broad spectrum of taxonomic groups of species. This can be promoted by the NCG itself or by one of its members or group of members, under a specific adequately funded project. Usually the process starts with a training workshop to ensure all participants in the KBA identification process (both members of the KBA NCG and other relevant institutions) understand and can apply the KBA Criteria and delineation methods. It is often necessary to make a re-assessment of a country's existing KBAs, identifying whether the existing trigger elements still meet the relevant thresholds, and also identifying new trigger elements that have not been assessed before. A second step can be assessing whether protected areas or OECMs, that are not existing KBAs, also meet KBA status before moving to unprotected/unrecognised areas of natural habitat. Sometimes it is necessary to be opportunistic, for example, if a taxonomic expert for a poorly known taxonomic group visits your country and becomes interested in KBAs for their group, they may be encouraged and supported to make KBA assessments for that group that might not have been initially planned.

Once participants better understand what is required, then taxonomic-focussed working groups are formed and facilitated to work on identifying KBAs across the country. In very large countries, such as Canada, several groups have formed for different regions of the country. Experts of different taxonomic groups and ecosystems should be brought together to compare where KBAs are being

identified and to jointly identify KBA boundaries that will encompass several trigger elements at the same site. Those members of the NCG who lead the proposal process will harmonize these boundaries and recalculate the relevant assessment parameters for each of their species based on the revised site boundaries. Groups then agree these boundaries and recalculate the relevant assessment parameters for each of their species based on the revised site boundaries. This process can be done through workshops mixed with meetings, desktop and fieldwork whenever possible. Proposals are then developed once all the trigger elements are identified across all taxonomic/ecosystem groups for a site, or as many as possible. The KBA NCG should review the proposals before submitting these to the relevant KBA Regional Focal Point for review. Once adjustments are made and the proposals are considered satisfactory, these are nominated by the proposer to the KBA Secretariat for final validation and publishing in the World Database of KBAs (WDKBA).

Baseline data are collected when any KBA proposal is made and incorporated in the WDKBA which can be useful for monitoring. Ideally monitoring of the KBA trigger elements will occur regularly to be able to assess trends and whether a site still meets KBA status, by assessing it against the baseline data. The WDKBA automatically identifies and flags sites that are in need of re-assessment. This can be due to a variety of factors, for instance: due to changes of the category of threat on the IUCN Red List, changes in the ranges of species mapped on the Red List, changes in estimated global population numbers etc. and it will also automatically flag a site that hasn't been monitored for 12 years. Flagged sites will be communicated to KBA NCG chairs and Secretaries. All sites in the WDKBA that have not been assessed using the KBA Global Standard<sup>2</sup> are flagged as in need of assessment and should be assessed at the start of the KBA identification process as a priority.

Once the identification and reassessment of KBAs is completed, KBA NCG members will ideally work to ensure the conservation of KBAs identified. Promoting the recognition of KBAs in national policy and legislation will greatly help their conservation and is one of the core roles of a KBA NCG. Here it helps greatly if members of the KBA NCG include representatives from Government institutions, particularly relevant Ministries (such as Environment, Tourism or Sea/Fisheries) as well as from particular departments or equivalent (such as a national park authority). Conservation of sites will vary greatly depending on where they are located and who can be engaged to support the conservation of the trigger elements. Creating protected areas is one way to conserve sites identified but several other methods are used around the world, including working with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) to conserve KBA trigger elements, working with private land owners and business, as well as simply recognising KBAs but having no management in more remote areas. How a KBA NCG engages in KBA conservation will vary on the context of conservation in a country. In some countries the KBA NCG primarily is seen to be completing a management-neutral, scientific assessment of KBAs and its value is bringing in the scientific credibility to identify sites of global importance which are then conserved by government. In others KBA NCG members are much more engaged in the conservation of sites and their monitoring, including funding the conservation of sites.

National Spatial Planning for biodiversity has been around for at least 30 or more years but it is being promoted more strongly under the Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity. KBAs should form a core component of national spatial plans and can be used to best inform where there are globally important populations of species, areas of ecosystems and sites

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<sup>2</sup> IUCN (2016) [A Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas](#), Version 1.0. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland

of global ecological integrity and irreplaceability. IUCN Resolution [WCC2020:081](#) calls for governments, IUCN members and national bodies to develop spatially explicit conservation plans that incorporate KBA identification.

The activities proposed will only be possible if there is enough funding for the group to operate. The amount of funding that each NCG will need is dependent on its characteristics and country context. Nevertheless, there should be at least enough annual funding for the group members to meet the number of times per year that are defined in the NCG's ToR, for continuous training, and annual workshops or communication events/products to share information on KBAs. Identification, delineation, management and monitoring of KBAs require significant amounts of funding, which can usually only be raised through specific projects. Therefore, it is essential that besides the potential fundraising committee of the NCG, the remaining members put dedicated effort on fund raising, especially the KBA partnership members represented in the country.

It is also important to regularly monitor the performance of the KBA NCG to identify if 'new blood' is needed or where there are issues with equity in the participation of all members. In particular, where members are not participating actively it is important to gauge whether this is because they feel they are not being listened to and can't therefore participate, or whether they have no time or inclination to engage and should ideally be replaced with another institution. Ideally some form of evaluation of the KBA NCG would happen annually.

Some KBA NCGs produce an annual or regular report on the status of KBAs in their country. This is a useful tool for raising awareness of the status of threatened KBAs in particular and promoting action to remove/mitigate the threats. It is also a useful tool in helping keep a broader conservation community aware of what is happening with KBA identification and conservation nationally and may encourage more participation in, or support to the KBA programme.