

sDiv working group meeting report

"sCREATE"

Working group meeting report

Meeting Overview: The first sCreate synthesis meeting launched the STEPS (Structured decisions and Effective Participation for Sustainable coexistence) Framework project, bringing together an interdisciplinary team to develop practical guidance for addressing human-great ape conflict through participatory structured decision-making. This iDiv-funded synthesis project bridges the gap between conservation theory and on-ground implementation by providing accessible tools for conservation practitioners navigating complex human-wildlife conflict situations. STEPS systematically addresses ten common implementation mistakes through specific guidance embedded within a seven-step SDM process. The framework's novelty lies in translating dispersed academic knowledge across multiple disciplines into a practical toolkit that time- and resource-constrained practitioners can immediately apply without requiring extensive theoretical background.

Key Discussion Topics

Addressing the Implementation Gap. While theoretical frameworks are abundant, practitioners tackling complex conservation problems often lack accessible tools to effectively balance social and ecological outcomes. Participants documented ten common mistakes spanning inadequate facilitation, tokenistic participation, insufficient context analysis, weak theories of change, and applying standard wildlife solutions to great apes without considering their unique cognitive characteristics.

Framework Architecture. STEPS synthesises decision science, IUCN human-wildlife conflict guidance, participatory methodologies, equity frameworks, and social-ecological systems thinking. Key innovations include practical guidance helping practitioners avoid common mistakes at each decision stage, adaptations accounting for how great apes learn and change behaviour, and flexible tools applicable across different communities and landscapes.

Practitioner-Centred Design. Field practitioners and researchers with field experience shared real implementation challenges: community members unable to attend lengthy meetings, facilitators lacking neutrality, insufficient funds, political pressures for rapid results, and conflicting stakeholder demands. The framework acknowledges these constraints and provides guidance for making informed decisions within available time, funding, and capacity limitations.

Case Study Planning. The team discussed potential site selection based on scientific value and ethical considerations: existing conflict with coexistence potential, capable partners, genuine stakeholder engagement, and intervention feasibility. Ethical principles guided selection, ensuring community engagement leads to tangible impact rather than wasting

people's time, linking with existing projects to avoid survey fatigue, remaining aware of extractive science, and prioritising established, trusted community relationships. Sites include locations in Virunga, Republic of Congo, Guinea, Uganda, Tanzania, and Indonesia, ensuring the framework accommodates diverse governance systems, cultural contexts, and socioeconomic factors.

Knowledge Synthesis. The team organised data and existing resources spanning IUCN guidelines, great ape databases, conservation frameworks, and conflict resolution techniques. Critical gaps included lack of site-specific understanding of social-ecological complexities, insufficient evidence on which participatory elements improve outcomes, and absence of practical protocols within resource constraints. Interdisciplinary integration combined perspectives from conservation biology, social science, decision science, conflict resolution, primatology, and field practice.

Key Outcomes

Framework Development. The meeting transformed STEPS from initial concept into a concrete framework emphasising mistake prevention and practical implementation. The circular design involves iteration and adaptation rather than linear progression.

Dissemination Strategy. Knowledge products will target different audiences: peer-reviewed publications for academics, field-tested tools and training curricula for practitioners, and synthesis reports for funders and policymakers. Strategic channels include the ICCB 2025 symposium, IUCN networks, partner organisations, and direct engagement with at least 25 conservation teams across 5 great ape range states.

Funding and Sustainability. The iDiv funding supports synthesis work, framework development, and case study planning. Since the initial meeting, the team has held several online meetings to maintain engagement, momentum, and collaborative energy. Full implementation proposals (US\$600,000 for 3 years) received positive initial responses. Sustainability plans include building local practitioner capacity, publishing open-access tools, and integrating training into existing programs.

Indonesian Partnership and Implementation. Additional funding of US\$16,193 enabled training and co-design workshops at ICCB 2025, where Indonesian conservation leaders gained structured decision-making skills while contributing their contextual knowledge and expertise to adapt STEPS for human-orangutan conflict settings. These practitioners will now implement the workshops they co-designed in villages where they work, testing how the framework operates in Indonesian contexts and whether it transfers effectively from African apes to orangutans.

Next Steps. Priorities include finalising the framework paper, evaluating how existing great ape conservation projects currently address participation and coexistence, advancing African case study partnerships and logistics, developing prototype decision support tools for practitioner feedback, and conducting targeted synthesis on equity integration and monitoring approaches.