ASL

AMAZON
Sustainable
Landscapes Program

ASL regional coordination project
Lessons learned to date and recommendations

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Introduction

The Amazon's extraordinary cultural and biological diversity offers immense opportunities for the region to become an epicenter of conserved landscapes and a thriving bioeconomy of standing forests and free flowing rivers, providing local, regional, and global benefits. We at the Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Program (ASL) have the privilege to be part of these efforts. The ASL is an Impact Program funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which brings together seven countries – Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname – with the objective to improve integrated landscape management and conservation of ecosystems in targeted areas in the Amazon region.

The initial phase of the ASL was approved by the GEF Council in 2015 with three countries: Brazil, Colombia, and Peru, and expanded to seven countries in 2019. This document is a compilation of lessons learned to date to take stock of what has worked well and how to improve the Program's performance and impact, and provides recommendations based on those lessons. The lessons emerged from ongoing monitoring of the program, surveys conducted among stakeholders, internal reflection within the team, conversations with partners and stakeholders, and feedback from ASL–hosted events. The quotes illustrating each section have been extracted from surveys and direct feedback provided by ASL stakeholders. We hope these lessons and recommendations will also be useful to other agencies implementing GEF–funded and other regional projects and programs involving coordination and knowledge management. We would like to thank the various teams that have reached out to us to learn from one of the first Impact Programs of the GEF and who encouraged us to develop this document.

Looking forward, the ASL will continue supporting communities, governments, and institutions in their efforts to protect the Amazon region by connecting people and institutions to connect landscapes.

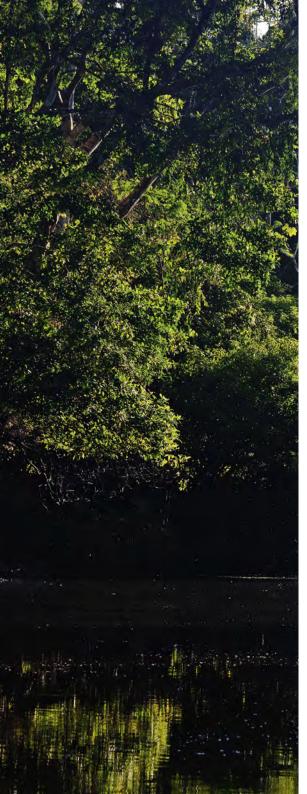**ASL Regional Coordination Team**

Background:
The Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Program

The ASL Program is a regional effort for the conservation and sustainable development in the Amazon with a total of US$ 203.7 million in GEF grant funding endorsed in two phases. Under an integrated regional approach, the ASL includes national projects in **Bolivia**, **Brazil**, **Colombia**, **Ecuador**, **Guyana**, **Peru**, and **Suriname, and a regional project** that promotes coordination and knowledge management. Together, the projects aim to **improve integrated landscape management and ecosystem conservation in targeted areas of the Amazon**.

The program was initially approved in October 2015 by the GEF council with Brazil, Colombia, and Peru as participant countries with a total GEF amount of US$ 114 million (ASL1). Later in the next GEF replenishment cycle, the Council approved a second phase with the initial participant countries plus Bolivia, Ecuador, Guyana, and Suriname and a total GEF amount of US$ 89.5 million (ASL2). Both phases include a **regional coordination project**, executed directly by the World Bank as the program lead agency, to provide technical assistance and knowledge management opportunities to the participant countries and program partners.

The ASL national projects are led by the countries' Ministries of Environment or lead environmental agencies and are being executed collaboratively on the ground by public and civil society organizations. The World Bank, the WWF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) take the role as GEF Agencies providing support and supervision to their respective national projects.

To achieve its programmatic goal, the ASL is structured in **4 pillars**. The program operates under the rationale that the protection of significant biodiversity, the connectivity between its landscapes, and the integrity of ecosystem services can be achieved if:

1. A representative area of the Amazon is effectively conserved and managed under various regimes (protected areas, indigenous lands, Ramsar sites, and other conservation strategies).

2. Agriculture lands, forests, and freshwater habitats are sustainably managed and restored, providing economic and social, inclusive wellbeing.

3. Legal instruments, policies, and intersectoral agreements are enabling conservation and sustainable development.

4. Institutional and community capacity building and regional multistakeholder cooperation are strengthened.

SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION LANDSCAPES
Agriculture lands, forests, and freshwater habitats sustainably managed and restored, providing economic and social, inclusive wellbeing

PROTECTED LANDSCAPES
A representative area of the Amazon effectively conserved under various regimes (protected areas, indigenous lands, Ramsar sites, and other conservation strategies)

CAPACITY BUILDING AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION
Institutional and community capacity building and regional multistakeholder cooperation strengthened

POLICIES AND INCENTIVES FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Legal instruments, policies and intersectoral agreements enabling conservation and sustainable development

The combination of national and regional interventions within these four pillars constitute the integrated landscape management approach proposed for the region. By working together under one program and with support from the regional coordination project, national project teams learn from one another, involve national and regional level partners, share ideas and best practices, voice concerns, and align efforts to conserve and sustainably develop Amazon landscapes. Doing so allows the program to achieve larger impacts than if the projects were implemented in isolation.
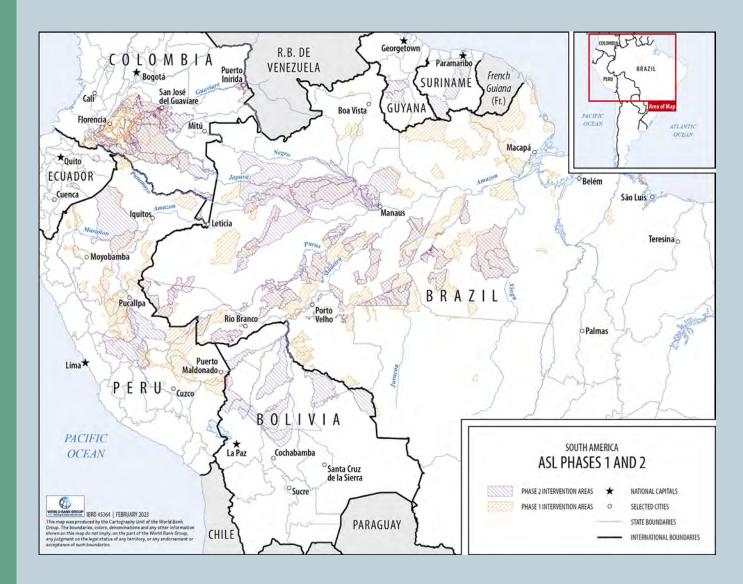
"This is a very valuable space for coordination and knowledge exchange. Continuing with the interesting and necessary task of getting to know the different views and visions that each country has on the Amazon, on issues of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services provided by the Amazon biome, is the path that will allow us to make a common effort to influence policy, to the extent that each country allows, and at the level of the territories where we intervene."

Anonymous. (Translation from Spanish by authors).

Within the areas of intervention, ASL activities from both phases will benefit a total of 241 protected areas (more than 111 million hectares), including national and subnational areas. Collectively all ASL national projects aim to achieve the following targets:

- Facilitate the creation/expansion of **4.4 million hectares of protected areas**

- Strengthen management effectiveness of more than **87 million hectares of protected area**

- Promote sustainable practices on **3.7 million hectares**

- Restore **48,500 hectares of degraded lands** both inside and outside protected areas

- Mitigate greenhouse gas emissions by **200.6 million mt CO2e**

- Directly benefit **60,079 people**

SOUTH AMERICA
ASL PHASES 1 AND 2

PHASE 2 INTERVENTION AREAS ★ NATIONAL CAPITALS
PHASE 1 INTERVENTION AREAS ○ SELECTED CITIES
STATE BOUNDARIES
INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES

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LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ASL REGIONAL COORDINATION PROJECT

The ASL regional project operates under the premise that working together under one program will generate results greater than the sum of its parts. It plays a vital role in bringing together a wide array of stakeholders from multiple countries active in the Amazon and in creating and nurturing linkages and relationships for an integrated program. It seeks to bring the national teams together to strengthen collaboration; contribute to strategic knowledge at regional scale; build capacity and scale up innovative approaches; create a community of practice; and streamline reporting, access to tools and ongoing technical support. As part of program preparation and implementation, opportunities for regional collaboration and governance processes have also been promoted with a wider community, including government institutions, donor agencies, and civil society organizations working in the Amazon. Stakeholders range from project community beneficiaries to decision makers at the highest levels.

The ASL coordination team has distilled lessons from the regional project's four components of work – coordination, knowledge management, communications, monitoring and evaluation – in addition to cross-cutting lessons and recommendations on stakeholder engagement, which are shared below.

▶ Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is a cross cutting issue that lies at the heart of everything the ASL Program aims to achieve. Amazonian stakeholders are diverse and include local communities and indigenous groups, national protected areas staff, multi sectoral subnational and national authorities, multilateral organizations, the scientific community, national and international NGOs, donors, private sector, and the general public. The ASL Program has engaged key stakeholders from the early stages of the program conception and development process and throughout all phases of the project. The ASL has a specific Stakeholder Engagement Plan, which in conjunction with the Gender Strategy and Private Sector Engagement Plan, seeks to foster dialogue and collaboration between the growing group of diverse national projects and regional program stakeholders. Specific attention is paid to gender equality and to the participation of Indigenous Peoples and afro-descendant communities, respecting cultural knowledge and beliefs. Beyond the stakeholders from the regional project, the WBG Coordination team supports the country teams of the national child projects in their engagement with their own stakeholders.
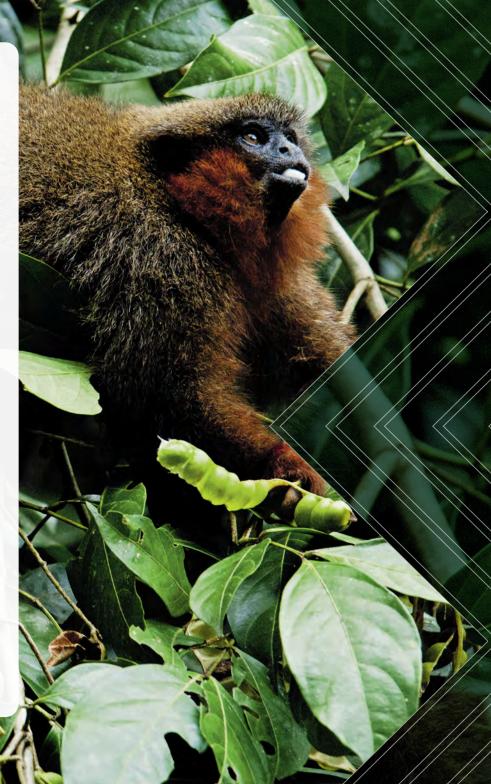
"What inspires me about the ASL program is the Community of Practice and the way experiences are shared, and the support that the ASL team is always willing to offer to our countries, and especially to us as a GEF agency."

Cecilia Guerra, CAF. (Translation from Spanish by authors)

Challenges: Engagement efforts recognize that each country and stakeholder have specific challenges and interests and seek to identify common goals and activities to address these. When launching the ASL program many stakeholders didn't yet know each other and/or how to work together, so investing in building relationships and dialogue has been key. Similarly, stakeholders within and between countries were not necessarily equally familiar with the challenges faced by each other nor where commonalities exist. Consequently, one of the main ASL challenges was to jointly develop a common framework with sufficient flexibility to reflect the diverse realities of the Amazon and priorities of each sovereign country. Another challenge is to establish a process that generates ownership; a feeling of belonging, where individual contributions are recognized; and momentum. The ASL program has needed to find an approach which recognizes and includes local voices and concerns together with those of global interests, as the Amazon has been prioritized at global level, but solutions are local.

Lessons and recommendations about stakeholder engagement:

- Build a shared vision/common framework that enables effective joint actions by involving stakeholders in designing the theory of change and a common basic architecture for the Program within which countries can focus on specific areas of national concern.

- Allow for adaptive management, flexibility, political know-how, and understanding of different perspectives while acknowledging everyone's contributions, including through co-branding.

- Address and design jointly a range of opportunities and themes to ensure engagement of diverse interest groups by finding common interests and a common language that cut across national and institutional borders.

- Establish relationships with multiple stakeholders to build program support and facilitate buy-in and ensure decision making does not come only from top-down approaches but is fed by bottom-up information. Identify champions/ focal points to facilitate discussions.

- Build strong working relationships that value and respect everyone's knowledge and inputs by fostering an environment of trust (building trust takes time, patience, and perseverance) and engagement within and between diverse stakeholder groups ensuring balance in gender, country representation, skills, and expertise. Hold periodic physical, in-person meetings to strengthen relationships, and use technology to maintain ties (virtual meetings, WhatsApp groups, communities of practice, among others).

▶ Coordination

ASL efforts within its coordination component aim to strengthen the collaboration and dialogue among the participating national governments, ASL project teams, GEF agencies, the international donor community, and other stakeholders active in the Amazon, in order to maintain extensive and continued engagement at national and international levels to support all components of the Program. Both internal and external coordination are promoted.

Internal coordination

Internally, the goal is to promote coordination between the national ASL projects. Two primary mechanisms are used for smooth coordination: (a) the Program Steering Committee (PSC), which serves as a key advisory forum to facilitate collaboration and promote synergies between the national projects; and (b) the Annual Conference where all key stakeholders from the project teams and GEF agencies present national and regional level progress, discuss prioritized themes of interest, and identify future collaborative actions. Beyond ensuring coordination of the themes that the ASL aims to tackle, the coordination component also ensures that cross-cutting themes are considered and reflected in all projects, such as gender balance; stakeholder engagement; and opportunities for green inclusive recovery.

"Having a program for the Amazon is powerful and can have a global impact on how to not only share knowledge but ensure that it is included in the institutional culture at all levels as best practices. This is evidenced by executive meetings like today's, with clear and defined agendas, and clear and unambiguous answers."
Anonymous. (Translated from Spanish by authors)

Challenges: Coordinating a long-term regional program like the ASL includes several challenges, the first among which is the evolving country and political contexts, where elections can lead to changes in political priorities. This creates a risk of turnover in the national project teams which in turn can result in participants having different levels of engagement and knowledge and affects continuity of activities and decision making. Additionally, many of the project implementors have competing demands on their time as they are involved in many projects and programs. There is also a challenge in ensuring information flows that allow each national project team to understand each other's contexts and activities so that they can effectively identify opportunities for collaboration and learning.

Lessons and recommendations about internal coordination:

- Establish a permanent forum to meet regularly on an agreed time-table with designated individuals, clear roles and responsibilities, and transparent/balanced decision making.

- Communicate regularly for quality and coherent program and project preparation and implementation and ensure 'equal opportunity' for participation by empowering all members to make decisions, request activities, and take responsibility for showing results.

- Promote stability and continuity by building ownership within the coordination instances among technical staff, while recognizing that changes are inevitable given political and social contexts.

- Foster institutional memory, continuity, and resilience at the local, national, and regional levels through building a strong ASL community and good communication products.

- Recognize partners have competing demands on their time, so it is important to find ways to keep them engaged and motivated

- Familiarize new members with the program, community, approaches, and activities, and anticipate learning curves.

- Design program and budgets upfront, considering the time and expertise required to achieve successful coordination and management of the program. Manage expectations and ensure that planned activities are doable within the available resources (people, time, funds).

External coordination

Externally, the regional project team identifies key areas of collaboration with Amazon-wide initiatives led by other organizations to protect biodiversity, avoid deforestation, and restore degraded areas, and supports exchange of best practices to reinforce synergies with other programs and partner with other initiatives.

"This Coordination project is an ideal complement to national efforts since it provides an overarching vision of the Amazon basin and has access to other opportunities which are then made available to the participants."
Anonymous. (Translation from Spanish by authors).

Challenges: External coordination is challenging as despite there being an appetite for exchanging ideas, views, and information; avoiding overlaps; and exploiting opportunities for synergies, organizations and donors are focused on delivery of their programs and may lack resources and/or mandate to track on an ongoing basis what others are doing. Competing agendas or even funding needs also challenge concrete collaboration. The ASL regional project, with its focus on knowledge exchange and coordination, actively seeks to engage and facilitate connections between Amazon stakeholders and to bring partners together and facilitate transparent exchanges.

Lessons and recommendations about external coordination:

- Engage with the multiple stakeholders active in the Amazon to maximize impact by finding synergies and avoiding overlaps and reach wider audiences.

- Being willing to lead and facilitate is critical for successful collaborations with other key players in the Amazon while recognizing that collaboration is an evolving process and requires respect for different organizations' priorities and procedures and recognition of their contributions.

- Allocate sufficient budget, time, and human resources to collaborative processes and continuously emphasize the benefits of collaboration given the transaction costs.

- There are different levels of collaboration and sometimes starting small and building on success increases the chances of successful collaboration over the longer term, for example a joint webinar can open the door to further collaborations.

- Engaging other donors leverages greater impact and more efficient use of resources.

"Collaboration rarely results by stakeholders being compelled by principles or an 'ethics of cooperation', but when the net benefits of cooperation are perceived to be greater than the net benefits of non-cooperation, and the distribution of these net benefits is perceived to be fair." *(Grey, D.; Sadoff, C.; Connors, G. (2016). Beyond the River: A Practitioner Perspective. World Bank.)*

▶ Knowledge Management

Knowledge management and learning exchange are core elements of the ASL Program. Activities seek to address the knowledge and capacity needs of the stakeholders on a demand driven basis. The ASL aims to share knowledge between *different types of stakeholders*, from local farmers to government leaders, through scientists, protected area managers, forest engineers, community leaders and more; *across the Amazon,* from local to regional scale; and *across knowledge themes*, from conservation to climate smart agriculture, forestry, climate change, nature-based solutions, etc. To capture knowledge, the ASL gathers emerging good practices on themes relevant for the national projects as well as lessons from the national projects. In order to exchange knowledge and increase learning, various events are organized, including lectures, panel discussions, expert interviews, collaborative training sessions, field visits, and study tours to specific countries to bring together program stakeholders to share knowledge and meet specific learning goals. Project teams and beneficiaries act both as knowledge recipients and providers. As part of disseminating knowledge, the regional project created the ASL [Community of Practice (CoP),](#) a dedicated space to bring ASL stakeholders together to exchange information, share knowledge, find solutions to common challenges, and disseminate lessons learned through implementation. The ASL regional team plays a key role as convener of meetings, developer of joint agendas and learning targets, facilitator of discussions and access to experts, designer and financier of exchanges within the region and outside, and as an overall catalyst for processes and initiatives in the region, in close cooperation with the PSC and the national project teams.

"In my opinion, one of the main instruments of the regional program for learning exchanges between countries has been the periodically organized technical courses and exchanges of experiences. In the case of Brazil, we had representatives participating in events on topics such as conservation agreements, community forest management, and community tourism, among others. The exchange of experiences with partner countries in these events is very rich and helps us to improve the actions of the national project."

Otavio Ferrarini, Brazil's Ministry of Environment
(Translation from Portuguese by authors)

Challenges: One of the key challenges facing the ASL program's knowledge exchange activities is how to prioritize the wide array of themes, particularly considering the diversity of the audience, levels of knowledge, expectations, and languages. There is also a great range in the type of knowledge stakeholders bring to the table, notably local, traditional, and scientific knowledge. Encouraging participants to take the lead and fostering an effective and engaging learning environment and group dyna-mic is a core challenge in general and particularly in the context of the Amazon where stakeholders have poor connectivity.

Lessons and recommendations about knowledge management:

- Tailor knowledge sharing activities to projects'/ countries' needs through a demand driven process, prioritizing themes with potential for replication and scaling up and promote ownership of events, including through sharing of costs and responsibilities between coordination and national projects.

- Use diverse tools and approaches, including publications, webinars, workshops, study tours, working groups, websites, blogs, newsletters, collaborative platforms, among others.

- Be clear about the objectives of the event, including a good understanding of the participants' expectations, of their potential contributions, and have a well-structured approach to foster a good group dynamic. Provide translation services to facilitate and promote participants' exchanges. This is true for both in person and virtual events. Invest in building a good stakeholder network, as this helps identify experts with relevant knowledge and experience to share; and recognize and value knowledge from multiple sources, bringing to the forefront local, traditional, and indigenous knowledge, rules, and customs.

- Ensure leadership, common learning objectives, an environment of trust, and above all, time – both from the facilitator(s) and the group members - for successful working groups.

- Establish a common knowledge platform/system in multiple languages that becomes an easy-access repository for storing, reviewing, and exchanging information, including reports and presentations of webinars, to support continuous stakeholder engagement and promote network and relationship sustainability beyond the life of the Program. Ensure that material can be easily accessed and downloaded, including from areas with low/bad internet access.

- Promote peer-to-peer exchange and dialogue via workshops that allow for discussion or field visits and disseminate contextual, background materials in advance to participants to maximize in-person learning time. This is particularly true for study tours and workshops where time is often limited and maximizing the on-the-ground, real-time interactions is key.

▶ Communications

The ASL communications strategy aims to disseminate knowledge and raise awareness on the importance of the Amazon region as a key provider of local, national, and global environmental benefits as well as the essential services needed for sustainable inclusive development. The strategy also aims to showcase the ASL's added value to build and foster a regional vision for the Amazon. This includes highlighting the activities taking place across the national projects, the knowledge resources that the ASL curates, produces, and exchanges, communicating on program impact and promoting our partners' complementary work. The regional project team coordinates a communication's working group with representation from each country, promoting cross-fertilization, delivering joint events and campaigns, and providing guidance to national level communication initiatives so there is harmonization of messages and tools with the overall program goals.

"Communication in the ASL has been very effective, purposeful and proactive. The Lead Agency has been able to reach all levels (managerial, technical and community) of stakeholders."

Laura Bermudez, Colombia's Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. (Translation from Spanish by authors).

Challenges: To successfully achieve the above, the ASL regional project faces the challenge of developing and implementing a communications strategy able to meet the needs and interests of a wide array of stakeholders. Additionally, it needs to find ways to both stay on top of the emerging knowledge in the field and more detailed project specific learning, knowledge, and experience emerging from the national projects working on the ground, and to deliver these in an accessible form.

"I really liked the option of interpreters, because it allows to understand more accurately what the person wants to say in his or her mother tongue."

Anonymous. (Translation from Spanish by authors).

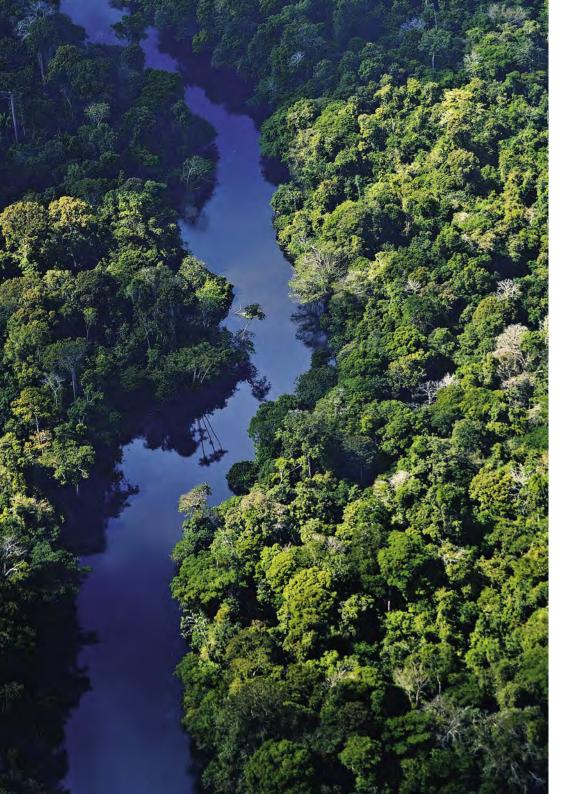*Lessons and recommendations about communications:*

- Format and mode for dissemination of messages needs to be tailored to the specific stakeholder to be effective, recognizing the diversity of the potential audiences.

- Ensure communications (e.g., meetings, PowerPoints, newsletters, etc.) are delivered in all languages so everyone can understand, participate, and feel at ease.

- Regularly disseminate information and products using multiple communication tools (e.g., events, webinars, reports, newsletters, blogs, storymaps, videos) and channels (e.g., website, social media, C4D) to ensure it reaches the maximum number of stakeholders.

- Establish a joint forum or working group for communication experts from regional and national projects to help coordinate national and regional efforts, identify new audiences, and promote peer-to-peer learning and capacity building.

- Spread the word about other initiatives relevant to the program to facilitate coordination and building of partnerships and celebrate accomplishments of others.

- Have dedicated communications personnel as core team members and ensure they are aware of all the program's activities and understand the nuances of what needs to be communicated and when so that information dissemination is both clear and timely.

▶ Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation

The ASL utilizes a program-level monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, supported by the regional coordination project, to inform program decisions, facilitate adaptive management measures, support other project components, and guide the national projects' implementation. The system aggregates national-level project data to report on progress using GEF core indicators and sub-indicators, a results framework, and satisfaction surveys in addition to qualitative data collected through reports and interviews. The ASL team disseminates this information in the ASL program-level annual reports, newsletters, and online website; tracks program results, outcomes, and challenges; and ensures alignment of national project activities with specific program components. Guidance, quality assurance, and training are provided to national project teams to help them adopt these tools, harmonize the approaches, and ensure an effective portfolio-level M&E system. The regional project coordinates an M&E working group with specialists from each national project to facilitate data collection and quality assurance, identify training requirements, and develop a peer-review system to enhance the quality of program products.

"It starts with having M&E groups working together and sharing their reporting, this helps create awareness of what others are doing and helps identify opportunities for cross collaboration. The newly launched M&E training opens a lot of possibilities for countries to share knowledge about how to develop good indicators and monitor projects in a more effective way, and having teams more capable of identifying, capturing and sharing those lessons is an amazing impact that ASL could have." *Isabel Filiberto, WWF.*

Challenges: Despite having a common overarching Theory of Change, designing an ASL program-level monitoring and evaluation system is challenging as each country has its own specific realities, and individual national projects have differing thematic priorities. Moreover, even once a program-level system has been established, there are practical challenges to be tackled vis-à-vis both consolidating the data from the diverse national projects, feeding this information back to the ASL community, and fostering the adoption of related adaptive management measures as each national project has its own monitoring and reporting processes, procedures, formats, and timetable. Measuring the impact of the regional coordination project itself also presents challenges, both in tracking the practical application of the knowledge exchanges on stakeholders' daily work, and in the identification and quantitative measurement of the contribution of the activities towards the core program indicators.

Lessons and recommendations about reporting, monitoring and evaluation:

- Monitor and evaluate not only project results but compile lessons to allow for adaptive management. Lessons can come from dedicated moments or continuous surveys and collection of information after knowledge management activities and/or from PSC members.

- Facilitate and ensure harmonized program-level reporting and tracking of outcomes by fostering collective monitoring through agreement on a set of common indicators to be monitored and reported on by each country. Build on existing indicators (GEF core indicators) plus a few extra ones to minimize burden on projects and create a common reporting template to help programmatic level aggregation.

- Foster ownership of the Program reports to encourage participation of national project teams in providing national information and contributing to the final product.

- Have a dedicated monitoring specialist in the program/regional coordination project core team, responsible both for coordinating monitoring activities and for gathering feedback to ensure the activities and communications under the program are meeting stakeholders' needs and expectations.

- Identify and respond to unexpected events and use the reporting effectively to guide management and adapt actions.

Learn about the ASL

ASL website:

https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/amazon-sustainable-landscapes-program

C4D website: https://collaboration.worldbank.org/content/sites/collaboration-for-development/en/groups/amazon-sustainable-landscapes-program-cop.html

Contact the ASL if you need more information at asl-info@worldbank.org