



Conserv ACTION Labs

**Connecting MPhil in
Conservation Leadership
Alumni to catalyze rapid
collaboration for strategic
conservation action.**

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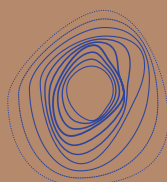
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Introduction.

This document proposes an overarching framework to implement ConservACTION Labs. ConservACTION Labs are rapid-response workshops that bring a multidisciplinary team (including at least three UCCLAN members) to catalyze collaboration for strategic conservation amidst emergencies and challenges. This proposal includes a description of the stages of implementing ConservACTION Labs.

What kind of conservation challenge can be addressed through a ConservACTION Lab?

Three types of conservation challenges can be addressed: (1) a conservation crisis or emergency (i.e., oil spill). (2) Preventive citizen action (i.e., threatened ecosystem), (3) Governance for change and citizen action (i.e., windows of opportunity where political actors and citizens can take decisions in favour of conservation). The influence of the local context should also determine the design of any ConservACTION Lab. For example, local environmental emergencies will lead to a ConservACTION Lab functioning as a 'war room'. This, however, is not prescriptive and could eventually be adapted to other situations. The following framework proposal is a result of the experiences during the pilot ConservACTION Lab in Quito.

Rationale.

Every day, everywhere globally, new threats to biodiversity require strategic social mobilization, advocacy, litigation, and community awareness. Often, concerned citizens are not equipped with the appropriate tools and strategies to act upon such threats with bold, creative, and impactful actions. Concerned conservationists and local organizations usually have limited time and resources to engage local communities in urgent decision-making processes that have important implications for conservation. We believe that strengthening the capacities of local organizations to design and implement campaigns and advocate effectively for biodiversity conservation is key to democratising the access for citizens to become part of conservation initiatives.

Goal.

The goal is to present the University of Cambridge Conservation Alumni Network (UCCLAN) with a practical, adaptable, and non-prescriptive framework for building rapid mobilization and advocacy campaigns to address a conservation emergency or pressing conservation issues and bringing together the best UCCLAN talent for each case.

Framework Development.

This framework was first prototyped at an in-person workshop held in Quito (Ecuador) between the 14th and 18th of February 2022. The first ConservACTION Lab was convened by Carolina Proaño-Castro (MPhil in CL Cohort 2015-2016), where three other UCCLAN members and one external consultant with relevant experience were called to aid in the conservation emergency. The conservation emergency addressed in this first Lab was the threat caused by mining exploitation within the Andean Choco Biosphere Reserve (See Annex 1 for details of the Andean Choco Case and Annexe 2 for more details on the design and implementation of the first ConservACTION Lab.).

Connecting MPhil in Conservation Leadership Alumni to catalyze rapid collaboration for strategic conservation action

ConservACTION

ConservACTION Lab framework.

The method presented here has five phases and has been designed for an in-presence workshop: 1. Set the stage, 2. Connect, 3. Feedback, 4. Co-create, and 5. Reflect

PHASES	SUGGESTED TIMES FOR EACH PHASE OR STAGE
1. SET THE STAGE	Before the ConservACTION Lab*
2. CONNECT	
2.1 Get Inspired	1 hours
2.2 Dive Into the Challenge	
a. Present the challenge and share	6 hours
b. Watch and listen	One or two days
3. FEEDBACK	Around 4 hours
4. CO-CREATE	1.5 days
5. REFLECT	After the ConservACTION Lab*

* Times are not suggested for these phases because they occur before and after the ConservACTION Lab.

01 Set the stage.

This moment is led by the Convener, the person that presents the challenge, and it consists in:

1.1 Define the challenge:

First, it is necessary to clearly define the situation, understand the stakeholders and define an expected outcome for the ConservACTION Lab.

- a. **Problem or situation analysis** It is important to define the scope, the conservation target (s), and the main threats to the conservation target(s). This can be achieved by creating a situation analysis¹ based on the Open Standards of Conservation. However, this is not prescriptive and can be achieved using other methods like problem trees².
- b. **Stakeholder analysis:** It is desirable to perform a stakeholder analysis to provide the ConservACTION Lab team with a sufficient understanding of local pressures. There are different methods to create one. We suggest using the Power/Interest analysis³.
- c. **Define an expected outcome for the mobilization strategy or campaign:** After defining the problem and conducting a stakeholder analysis, it is necessary to set an expected outcome for the campaign. It should include the change that needs to happen and the target audience.

1.2 Lab Team selection:

After defining the challenge, it is necessary to determine the capacities needed in the group. Based on the local context, each Lab should decide which profiles of people are required. One person can fulfil more than one profile: for instance, the Convener may also be a technical expert or a legal adviser may also be a communications expert. Below we suggest a minimum of roles and/or capacities that should be represented in a ConservACTION Lab:

- **Convener:** This person calls for the ConservACTION Lab, chooses the experts, and oversees the implementation of solutions. This person is close to the Conservation Emergency and is a UCCLAN member.
- **Technical expert:** Depending on the challenge this person or people have the knowledge to provide technical advice and are highly informed about the conservation target (species, ecosystems, etc.) and the main threats.

¹ <https://conservationstandards.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/10/CMP-Open-Standards-for-the-Practice-of-Conservation-v4.0.pdf>, pp. 21

² <https://sswm.info/taxonomy/term/2647/problem-tree-analysis>

³ <https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/business-analysis-framework/consider-perspectives/powerinterest-grid>

- **Communication:** Within the team, someone needs to bring experience in implementing civic action campaigns, social marketing, or related fields. This person/people do not need to be close to the Conservation Emergency and can come from the broader UCCLAN community.
- **Legal or Policy capacities:** This person/ people are aware of pertinent international and national laws and international and national policies. This person /people need not to be close to the Conservation Emergency but can grasp local and national laws and understand political sensibilities.
- **Community member(s):** This person or people must be part of (or constantly interacting with) the affected communities. They can give insights from various members of these communities about the problem and the solutions that the campaign will propose.

Also, at least one member of the ConservACTION Lab represents or knows the campaign’s audience. This person might not be close to the conservation emergency but is part of (or understands) the audience or audiences of the campaign. This person possibly comes from or lives in the same country as the conservation emergency.

After a clear definition of the needed capacities to implement the ConservACTION Lab, the Convener should call for candidates from the UCCLAN alumni network through the official channels of the MPhil in Conservation Leadership. Choosing people willing to commit appropriate time as part of the ConservACTION Labs is essential. Sometimes, time commitments go beyond the ConservACTION Labs (See Annexe 3 to see who participated at the first ConservACTION Lab.).

1.3 Provide information

ConservACTION Lab participants should be provided with sufficient background information before the ConservACTION Lab so that they can get familiarized with the conservation challenge. This information should give an understanding of the scope of the issue, the conservation target(s) and the main threat(s) to the target(s). , which could include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Academic articles.
- Gray literature.
- The problem or situation analysis.
- Grant proposals that include a sufficiently detailed problem description.
- Documentaries, videos.
- Informative websites and other media.

02 Connect.

In this phase, Lab participants meet near or at the place of the conservation challenge. When the team has gathered, it is time to connect, and the following stages are advised:

2.1 Get inspired

This stage builds trust and collective identity. When we all arrive, we are individual entities. It is essential to take some time to start creating a group identity. We suggest using one or two exercises by the Public Narrative methodology (Ganz, 2009) to inspire a connection within the group and find a shared narrative that sets the tone for the meeting (See Box 1 for an example of such an exercise). However, we suggest this section not to last more than two hours (see Annexe 4 to learn more about this step at the first ConservAction Lab.).

Participants will be led to introspection. It is about finding an event in their lives that is the reference point for who they are, what they do and why they have been called to this process. Once identified, they will share their individual narrative. Each participant will be asked to write their personal story in three minutes and tell it to another person. The two participants in each group listen to each other and, based on their accounts, extract the main elements, and create a shared narrative. This shared story will be stuck on a flipchart that will accompany the process until the last day, when it can be used to build a collective narrative.

2.2 Dive into the challenge

Once we have a more cohesive identity, it is time to dive into the challenge. This phase aims to comprehensively understand the emergency or challenge, including the main threats, drivers, opportunities, stakeholders, etc. Therefore, we propose the two following steps:

- a. **Present the challenge and share:** First, it is vital to understand the benefits, potential and threats to the conservation target. This can be introduced by a 30-minute presentation, followed by an unstructured Q&A and conversations. It is helpful to discuss significant opportunities and risks within this step (e.g., political context, relevant decisive dates, etc.). This step can be complemented by presentations where the participants or other experts share experiences on relevant topics (see Annexe 5 to learn more about this step at the first ConservAction Lab.).
- b. **Experience:** Besides understanding the context and data previously provided, It is key that each “ConservACTIONlber” has the chance to experience the area, its potential and its threats. It is vital that in a short visit, each participant can make sense of the challenge-emergency by listening to key stakeholders, smelling, seeing, tasting, and enjoying the area worth protecting. This hopes to bring about the best ideas and diversity needed to solve in a creative manner challenging situations (see Annexe 6 to learn more about this step at the first ConservAction Lab.).

03 Feedback.

Once the ConservACTION Lab has created a more collective identity and participants have dived into the challenge, it is convenient to have feedback time. This phase aims to hold a space to feel how the process is going for group reflections and feedback. We suggest the following guiding questions (see Annexe 7 to learn more about this phase at the first ConservAction Lab):

- a. Do the participants think they have enough information to move on to the next stage of the ConservACTION Lab (co-creating an action plan)?
- b. Does the itinerary have to be adjusted to include additional information gathering, brainstorming, open conversation etc.?
- c. Are there changes necessary to the group dynamics or logistics of the ConservACTION Lab?

04 Co-create.

The goal of this phase is for the team to suggest ways forward and co-create a plan. Here, six steps are proposed:

- a. Analyze the main drivers of the conservation challenge based on the previous phases of the ConservACTION Lab. An example methodology to guide this step could be the Situation Model of the Open Standards⁴.
- b. Brainstorm potential solutions to the threat drivers and identify broad action strategies. A guiding technique for this section could be the Metaplan Technique⁵.
- c. Prioritize which action strategies have the highest potential for impact and are the most realistic for implementation. Decide on which solutions the ConservACTION Lab will focus on and develop in further detail.
- d. Establish SMART Objectives for the action strategies. (To find a reference for building SMART goals, go to the Open Standards 4.0 guide).
- e. Broadly develop the activities that would contribute to achieving the SMART Goals, identifying who would have to be involved (incl. external actors), broad timeframes, and critical opportunities/risks that should be considered.
- f. Build a communications plan (see Annexe 8 for suggested resources.).
- g. Governance and Logistics committee: Establish a way to go forward with a committee that will be able to follow-up on the ConservACTION Lab proposals. This committee should include the convener, strategic line leaders, and implementing partners.
- h. Establish a budget and define what can be done according to the available budget, human resources, strategic alliances, and the convener's mission. Also, analyze if and how stakeholders will be involved in the implementation phase.

The result of this phase will be a prototype that will be the primary basis for action. However, this prototype is meant to be improved through an iterative process within the ConservACTION Lab (see Annexe 9 to learn more about this step at the first ConservAction Lab.).

4 <https://conservationstandards.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/10/CMP-Open-Standards-for-the-Practice-of-Conservation-v4.0.pdf>, pp. 21

5 https://www.metaplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Metaplan_Basiswissen_engl.pdf

05 Reflection.

Implementation and monitoring: After the ConservACTION Lab, the Convener will have to decide how to implement the strategy with the Logistics and Governance Committee. It might be possible that the Convener can implement only a portion of the plan and that partners must be engaged to implement the other parts. Ideally, ConservACTIONLabers will be able to support specific aspects during the implementation of the strategy.

Note:

The ConservACTION Lab method intends to be a living one. For instance, the next step is to hold another ConservACTION Lab that can feed into this methodological strategy. Also, while this proposal relies on an in-person event, adaptations to create methodologies using virtual ConservACTION Labs are welcome.

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Annexe 1.

The First ConservACTION Lab: The Andean Chocó

The Andean Chocó is unique due to its elevational variability ranging from 360 to 4480 m.a.s.l., harbouring diverse ecosystems including pre- montane forests, montane forests, Andean forests, and paramo. This region remains a terra incognita. New species are frequently described for science, and it's regarded as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots since it shelters an extraordinary density of endemic species that exist only in this place. A small fragment of protected land in the Andean Chocó, not larger than 6,000 hectares (less than 1% of the country's surface), could hold almost 2,000 plants representing 12% of Ecuador's plant diversity. In this same small space, up to fifteen individuals of the iconic Andean Bear could be found together. The Pinocchio lizard was reencountered after it was presumed extinct. As well as being rich in biodiversity, the Chocó boasts several archaeological sites representing fascinating ancient cultures and local communities committed to creating a more sustainable future. This natural treasure trove is critically threatened by gold and copper mining. Communities and private landowners had not been consulted appropriately about the extraction of minerals in this area located within the Metropolitan District of the Quito (MDQ). A group of committed local stakeholders came together and submitted a request for public consultation on mining in the region to the Constitutional Court. This request aimed to let the citizens of Quito decide democratically if they wanted to allow mining within the Biosphere Reserve or not. At the same time, Carolina and her team had realized that the Quito citizens did not know that the Andean Chocó was part of Quito; many had never visited it or even knew about it. As further protection of the Andean Chocó depended on the citizens of Quito, it was essential to connect Quito citizens with the Andean Chocó. Therefore, the objective of the first ConservACTION Lab was to design a citizen action strategy that focused on developing a communication campaign to raise awareness and build a sense of belonging among the inhabitants of Quito towards the Andean Chocó (threatened by mining).

Annexe 2.

Design and Implementation of the first ConservACTION Lab

An initial framework was proposed to implement the first ConservACTION Lab, and it had different phases:

- 1. Contextualization:** Inspire, Understand, Share; the first day was for the team to get inspired, understand, share experiences, and set the context.
- 2. Immersion:** the second and third days were to allow the team to have an immersive experience with a diversity of stakeholders through a field visit to the Andean Chocó.
- 3. Co-creation:** the fourth and fifth days were to co-create solutions to address the defined conservation emergency threatening the Andean Chocó in Ecuador.

The first ConservACTION Lab aimed to prototype a civic action campaign to face a conservation challenge in the Andean Chocó. During the contextualization and Immersion phases, we combined several methodologies that allowed the group to reach the final aim. We incorporated a macro level principle of the Transformative pedagogy for peacebuilding, along with those of Theory U. At the activity level, we considered elements from Public Narratives and Open Standards methods.

Theory U is a method by Otto Scharmer that draws on the MIT “tradition of action research and learning by doing” (Scharmer, 2018). Theory U was considered for its ability to promote collective leadership capacity and encourage tackling environmental challenges by leading changes from an ego-system to an ecosystem’ (Scharmer, 2022).

Participants needed to connect to the challenge, to themselves, and to each other to provide an impactful solution. In this regard, Theory U states that “the quality of results achieved by any system is a function of the quality of awareness that people in these systems operate from” and also that it is essential to activate “the intelligence of the heart” Scharmer (2018). On the other hand, the Transformative pedagogy for peacebuilding (Chapela, 2013) is a method proposed by UNESCO that invites everyone involved in a transformational process for peacebuilding first to “Feel” the place where you are and the people you are with, then “Think” and then decide on how to “Act”.

The phase of co-creation required a more dynamic approach. It took the format of a “war room” method which calls a small group of participants to an executive working session to develop strategies to face a pressing issue (Aguar, 2018).

It is important to note that after the implementation of the first ConservACTION Lab, the framework was adjusted and improved according to the experience and lessons learnt within that space.

Annexe 3.

Participants at the first ConservACTION Lab

The participants that Carolina Proaño-Castro convened to the first ConservACTION Lab were Bruno Monteferri, Mariano Castro, Lucía Norris and Christel Scheske. Bruno is a Peruvian (MPhil in CL Cohort 2010) Director of “Conservamos por Naturaleza” in the Peruvian Society for Environmental Law (SPDA). He was called to be part of the ConservACTION Lab because of his effective, impactful, and highly inspiring experience in social mobilization for decision-making in Peru, for example, the protection of surf breaks; the prevention of damming of the Marañón river, and urban light pollution. Christel is German-Indonesian; she is the Finance and Projects Coordinator at the SPDA; Christel (called as an independent consultant) was invited for her knowledge of diverse planning methods and approaches to facing conservation challenges and for her experience in supporting the design and implementation of social mobilization campaigns. Mariano Castro is a Costa Rican (Cohort 2018-2019), Consultant for the Peace and Biodiversity Dialogue Initiative at the Convention of Biological Diversity. He was called to bring legal and policymaking advice and his broad experience organizing social movements and building coalitions to protect endangered species in Costa Rica. Lucia is Ecuadorean (Cohort 2016-2017) and an Independent Consultant on Sustainable Development and Circular Economy. She represented the local audience and brought communication, strategic planning, and facilitation skills to this project. Also, the first ConservACTION Lab was facilitated by Liz Pereira and systemized by Gonzalo Cáceres and Lucía Norris.



Figure 1: Mariano Castro, Bruno Monteferri, Carolina Castro, Lucía Norris, Gonzalo Cáceres (left to right, back row), Christel Scheske and Liz Pereira (left to right, front row)

Annexe 4.

The Get Inspired stage at the first ConservACTION Lab in Quito

The first and last days of the ConservACTION Lab were held on the outskirts of Quito. On the morning of the first day, a group breakfast took place where three videos related to the Andean Chocó case were screened. The first video referred to the history of some of the inhabitants of the communities. The second referred to the community organization of the women's groups, and the third showed the current situation of these territories. In addition, the participants had the opportunity to dialogue based on the question: "What has led you to do the work you do today?"



After breakfast, the participants went to the workshop's room and participated in activities based on the "Feel →Think→Act" cycle (Public Narrative Methodology). For example, participants were shown a map of Quito and asked to draw the route they took to arrive in Quito. Afterwards, participants were asked to build a narrative. After a short, guided meditation, the participants wrote an individual story, which they transformed into an integrated new story by forming pairs. These exercises created a connection within the group. Nevertheless, there was a feeling that some of this time could have been used for the next stage. It is important to mention that the connection within the group starts here and develops all over the ConservACTION Lab.



Picture 1. Mariano showing his route from Guatemala.



Picture 2. Bruno and Lucía building an integrated narrative.

Annexe 5.

The Present the challenge and share step at the first ConservACTION Lab in Quito

On the afternoon of the first day of the ConservACTION Lab in Quito, Carolina held a 30-minute presentation of the Andean Chocó case followed by a Q&A. Right afterwards, there were presentations from Bruno and Mariano on their experiences promoting civic action campaigns. The schedule time for this section was insufficient, and the meeting overran; this is not ideal. Therefore, to allow the team to grasp the situation, it is essential to set aside enough time for this part.



Picture 1. Carolina presenting the emergency at the Andean Chocó



Picture 2&3. Bruno and Mariano presenting their experiences in civic action campaigns in Peru and Costa Rica

Annexe 6.

Experience step at the first ConservACTION Lab in Quito

At the first ConservACTION Lab the participants visited the Andean Chocó. During that field trip, they talked to many community members and learned about their projects and ways of living.



Picture 1. Participants sharing breakfast with Mr. Collahuazo, the leader of Yunguilla cooperative and ecotourism community project.



Picture 2. Participants listening to Carolina Dávalos about her entrepreneurship of silvopastoral livestock farming



Picture 3. Participants talking to Inty Arcos about his activism against mining.



Picture 4. Participants talking with Nina Duarte about the importance of promoting unconventional food plants.



Picture 5. Women from local products entrepreneurship "ASOMEG" and ConservACTION Lab participants.



Picture 6. Don Napa, Park guard, explaining how he stopped cutting the forest and is now passionate about conserving it.



Picture 7. Back in Quito, participants could also listen to the historian Ana Sevilla, who brought in many insights about the audience of the campaign, the inhabitants of Quito.

Annexe 7.

Feedback Phase at the ConservACTION Lab in Quito

At the ConservACTION Lab in Quito, the feedback session was performed on the bus on the way back from the Andean Chocó to Quito. This feedback allowed the facilitation to adjust the agenda for the next two days. The decision was that the team had already dived into the challenge and was ready to co-create. In this case, the decision allowed the team to guide themselves and choose their own ways forward. The facilitation was there to support any interaction. This section was closer to a war room format, where participants actively participated and proposed ways.

Annexe 8.

Communications Plan

STRATEGIC MATRIX:

Specific goal:				
Strategy	Purpose	Audience	Tactic	Activities
How are we going to reach our goal?	What do we want to achieve with the Strategy?	Who is it aimed at?	Which tool should we use?	What kind of activities will I carry out to meet this objective?

MEDIA PLAN:

Type of media: press, radio, television, digital.				
Media	Program or section, timetable.	Audience	Media or product tactics, e.g.	Activities

SOCIAL NETWORKS:

Social Network	Purpose	Audience	Content: call to action, images, pictures, #message.	Activities

Timetable

Activity	March				April			

Annexe 9.

Cocreate Phase at the First ConservACTION Lab



Picture 1: Bruno and the team brainstorming potential solutions.



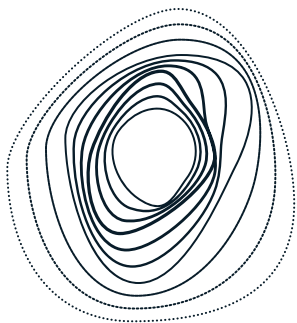
Picture 2: The team proposing strategies and objectives



Picture 3: Christel systematizing strategies and activities.

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