



BEYOND PROJECTS
IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY UNIT REPORT
2016-2022

21.09.2022

ISU AT A GLANCE

The Impact and Sustainability Unit (ISU) was created in 2016 to reinforce the diverse impacts of the foundation's programmes and to guarantee their sustainability. It was a distinct unit, transversal and complementary to the programmes: the beneficiaries of our support were the partners engaged in MAVA's Outcome Actions Plans. Support itself went beyond the projects and considered our partners and the system in which they operated in a holistic way. Our actions were implemented through 4 interconnected pillars, allowing us to use complementary levers and create synergies between our kinds of support. The ISU team comprised the equivalent of three full-time positions, collaborating closely with programme teams who had in-depth understanding of the local context. The Unit either supported initiatives directly or acted as a resource centre for the programmes and their partners.

We collaborated with institutions known for their expertise, iteratively when approaching innovative subjects. The solid relationships we built with experts ensured an objective view of needs and guaranteed the attractiveness of our support, while allowing us to save time and increase reactivity in the implementation phase.

Like the programmes, the ISU used adaptive management in the implementation its strategy. This flexibility and our connections with diverse partners allowed us to respond to urgent needs, like during the pandemic.

The pertinence of ISU's approach goes beyond the closure of a foundation. It is for this reason that we are invested in sharing it more widely within the philanthropic sector.



To find out more about MAVA's commitment beyond projects : MAVA Learning product ['Be An Octopus'](#)

RESULTS AND IMPACTS

13%

of MAVA's
budget

250

target partners,
of which 40 were
key partners

125

partners received
at least one
support

2/3

of key partners
received at least 3
kinds of support

The impact on MAVA partners has been multidimensional. Notable progress has been observed on the individual level but also at organisational and contextual levels. The Unit offered partners the opportunity to invest time and resources which they often lacked - like funding, expertise, and training - in themes aimed at strengthening their sustainability and impact.

At the individual level, the Unit has contributed to strengthening competences and interpersonal skills, providing for the emergence of new leaders who are better equipped, more inspired, and more confident. Beneficiaries demonstrated more skills and commitment, although this impact differed by region.

At the organisational level, a majority of partners have understood the importance of investing in structure and staff development. We have observed organisations that became more professional, more responsive, and better connected, leaving us optimistic for their future.

We also had impacts beyond MAVA's direct partners. We have forged links with the private sector to leverage the impact of philanthropy and increase the volume of funding for the foundation's priority causes. Additionally, we have invited new players, such as social entrepreneurs, to take an interest in conservation or the circular economy.

Tangible conservation impacts are somewhat more difficult to quantify. However, we believe that supporting the actors and their interactions inside of a cohesive community helps increase their impact on the ground.



Individuals

In collaboration with [Common Purpose](#) and [Mowgli Mentoring](#), we have enabled over 200 leaders in our programmes to develop their leadership skills and personal resilience.

- ¾ of participants feel more confident and therefore able to be more courageous and proactive.
- Alumni in leadership positions were able to evolve their organisations' culture and strategy towards more inclusive models.
- 87% of participants reported being more aware of the needs/expectations of the other generation with 80% of senior professionals having increased their collaboration with junior professionals.
- Recognising the need to develop their people and create stronger internal and external relationships helped build teams that were both more effective, more supportive, and more resilient.
- Challenge: Leadership needs differ by region. We have developed a specific programme for French-speaking African partners.

Support for green entrepreneurship:

- Collaboration with [Acumen Academy](#) and [Impact Hub](#) has helped integrate environmental issues with more than 2,000 social entrepreneurs.
- Some 40 rural businesses promoting biodiversity have improved their profitability (e.g., 60% of the rural businesses supported in the High Atlas (Morocco), of which 40% report a profit increase of 10 - 20%).
- >150 entrepreneurs and around 40 business development service providers (BDSPs) worldwide have engaged in the circular economy.
- Challenge: BDSPs are concentrated mostly in urban areas. We have been testing methods to 'de-isolate' rural entrepreneurs through mentoring (with established entrepreneurs) and providing personalised support over time.

For more information: [impact report MAVA Leaders for Nature Academy](#).



Organisations

We supported the foundation's partner organisations directly through 20 organisational development (OD) partnerships and indirectly through [Hatch](#) by BirdLife International. We also provided 48 small grants to support fundraising and learning activities. 119 partner organisations benefitted from the course [Nonprofit Fundraising Essentials](#).

- 89% of OD partners have increased their staff stability.
- Partners state that they have essentially improved their strategy, governance, and fundraising.
- Partners particularly valued the provision of experts, and funding for staff costs and training.
- 50% of small grants recipients raised at least CHF 243,000 each over a one-year period.
- Challenge: Organisations need time to evolve. Depending on the challenges, OD took several years to deliver concrete results.

For more information: [MAVA learning product](#) and this [collective paper](#) on OD.



Civil Society

We have invested in 3 mechanisms that combine small grants (average EUR 30,000) with organisational support for civil society organisations (CSOs). These CSOs are essential to the animation of a diverse and dynamic civil society.

- 140 CSOs were supported in North Africa, West Africa, and the Balkans.
- CSOs were provided with tailor-made support from the very beginning of their project.
- These grants were often the first funding for CSOs that were just starting to structure themselves.
- These CSOs have gained credibility and confidence, particularly in finding new funding.
- Challenge: The step from a small, young structure to a medium-sized, more professional organisation is a difficult one. Growth must be accompanied over time.

For more information: [Cross-capitalisation of Small-Scale Initiatives Programmes](#)



Conservation Finance

On the basis of an [initial theoretical report](#) and feasibility studies (some of which were not confirmed), we supported a dozen innovative financing mechanisms, involving half of the MAVA action plans. We have also supported innovation and strengthened the sector overall. Here are some examples:

- [Community-based avoided deforestation project in Guinea Bissau - REDD+](#) ensures annual revenues of several million for the benefit of protected areas and communities (approximately EUR 8M between 2011 and 2021).
- A mixed financing agreement, combining philanthropy and the banking sector, will guarantee the management of protected areas on Sal Island in Cape Verde from 2023.
- The Emerging Senegalese Plan incorporates concrete proposals for a green economy (PSE Vert).
- The role of protected areas as economic actors has been reinforced in Switzerland and in the [Mediterranean](#).
- 2 mechanisms to facilitate the transition to sustainable fisheries have been supported: [Ocean Stewardship Fund](#) and a [pre-financing mechanism](#) for European fishers.
- Challenge: These topics are new to the sector and require the arrival of specialist players and the strengthening of traditional partners. By targeting our priority regions rather than seizing opportunities elsewhere, results may take longer to materialise.

For more information: *MAVA learning product to come.*

PERSPECTIVES

What's next?

The themes addressed by the ISU are now better integrated, both among our partners and throughout the philanthropic sector.

We are satisfied with the results obtained by the ISU and pleased to see that many certain topics have been taken up by our partners - [Mentoring for Effective Nature Conservation](#) by EuroNatur, Common Purpose's [Sky Blue programme for environment leaders](#), replication of the Academy's approach (with minor modifications) by [Partners for a New Economy](#) - or will continue through the involvement of other donors like small grants and organisational support for emerging NGOs through [Hatch](#) by BirdLife International or the [Small-Scale Initiatives Programme](#). Many donors - including Phileas's [OD Community of Practice](#), which we co-initiated - will continue to promote organisational development as a means of ensuring philanthropic impact and sustainability.

The individual and organisational changes brought about will continue. Some organisational dynamics will be continued and/or amplified: all partners have stated that they want to further develop their organisational and fundraising processes.

Some conservation financing mechanisms, like trust funds, are sustainable by their very nature. Others will be finalised and replicated without the need for MAVA support (PSE Vert, REDD+, blended finance, [regenerative agriculture](#)).

Going the distance

Support for leadership, organisational development, strengthening civil society and establishing sustainable funding mechanisms are key elements for the sustainability of actions. These levers are still too infrequently used in the nature conservation sector. **We encourage donors to support organisations beyond projects** by offering a range of targeted funding. Based on our experience, we recommend the following elements:

- **Consider support on a long-term basis**, possibly including the provision of external expertise for partners.
- **Accelerate innovation in conservation by integrating and adapting tools and approaches from other sectors.**
- **Do not take the availability of organisations for granted** (possible tension between implementing conservation actions and organisational or individual developments) and put in place incentive mechanisms (conditional support, personnel financing, etc.).
- **Foundations might consider setting up a transversal unit to support thematic or regional programmes.** This favours additional specific expertise and a diversity of viewpoints which encourages objectivity and links between programmes. This mechanism must be anchored in common ownership of the sustainability issues within the whole foundation, an understanding of the transversal unit's offers, and a clear sharing of responsibilities.