

# SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS IN CASE STUDY ANALYSIS FOR CONSERVATION NEEDS

Uncertainty about the effectiveness of conservation investments has resulted from a lack of scientific knowledge, or *evidence*, on the value of particular interventions; and limited monitoring and evaluation to generate better evidence about what works and what does not. Robust scientific evidence in the conservation sector can help us to monitor progress towards goals, demonstrate impact, learn from our results and improve the performance of programs. Analysis of case studies can play an important role in building an evidence base on the effectiveness of conservation policies, on-ground interventions and programs.

## APPROACHES

Methodologies for designing case studies and analyzing groups of case studies are well-established in the field of social research. Across multiple sectors including health, education and public administration, case study analysis enables practitioners and researchers to bring together observations, data and experience on complex issues through a detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Insights on conceptual and logistical issues from social research are useful to facilitate improvements in the development, application and evaluation of case studies for generating and testing hypotheses on the effectiveness of conservation interventions.

**Case study method:** An empirical inquiry, often exploratory in nature, which investigates a contemporary phenomenon, within its real life context, when boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. Multiple sources of evidence can be used.

**Systematic review:** A synthesis of both qualitative and quantitative evidence which combines case studies with similar hypothesis to examine the effect of an intervention. A **meta-analysis** focuses on statistical methods to comparing effect size using quantitative evidence from case studies and might be part of a systematic review. Selection of case studies might be conducted retrospectively in which a number of search criteria are defined to identify case studies. Alternatively, case studies might be designed prospectively to meet criteria and facilitate comparison later.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The methodology for developing a case study will vary depending on the research question and the context in which the case occurs. From the social research literature, several guiding principles have emerged to inform production of consistent and well-grounded case study data:

1. Determine and define the research question or line of enquiry
2. Develop a case study protocol which identifies key information about the case needed to answer the research question
3. Collect evidence from multiple sources to allow for triangulation between observations
4. Compile evidence in a case study database which allows organization of raw data
5. Interpret findings of case study using evidence from database

OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Flexibility to cope with uncertainty</li><li>• Integration of different qualitative and quantitative data</li><li>• Broad application across different interventions</li><li>• Highlight factors related to context which influence results</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generalization of theories or conclusions based on individual cases;</li><li>• Less suitable for hypothesis testing</li><li>• Tendency to confirm researchers' preconceived notions</li></ul>

**KEY REFERENCE:** Yin, R.K (1994) Case Study Research: Design and Methods. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.

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