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# Power Plays in Partnerships: Unraveling Agency and Structure in WWF's Leading the Change

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*A qualitative study of structural dynamics in conservation initiatives*

Author: Quinci Croall

Supervisor: Ilia Farahani

*Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with;  
it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society.*

- Michel Foucault

## Abstract

This thesis explores the structural power dynamics and agency within WWF's Leading the Change (LtC) program, focusing mainly on its implementation in Kenya. By analyzing how the institutional structure within the program influences decision-making and how the practical implementation either facilitates or impedes inclusion and the representation of stakeholders, the study employs the frameworks of Critical Institutional Analysis and Development and power theory to dissect how power is distributed and exercised within this transnational conservation initiative. Through document analysis and in-depth interviews, the study examines the alignment between the LtC program's stated policies and their implementation, highlighting the complexities and challenges of managing stakeholder relationships and achieving equitable conservation outcomes.

The research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between structural power and local agency, offering insights into current practices' potential and limitations in fostering inclusive and effective partnerships. This thesis presents a balanced view of the institutional and human factors that shape conservation efforts by integrating theoretical perspectives on power dynamics with empirical investigation.

**Keywords:** multi-stakeholder partnerships, agency, structural power, sustainable development, decision-making, Kenya, WWF

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## List of Abbreviations

AI - Artificial Intelligence

CBOs - Community-based Organizations

CIAD - Critical Institutional Analysis and Development

CSO - Civil Society Organizations

GDPR - General Data Protection regulation

HRBA - Human Rights Based Approach

IPOs - Indigenous Peoples' Organizations

KWS - Kenya Wildlife Service

LtC - Leading the Change

LtC2 - Leading the Change phase 2

MI - Motivational Interviewing

MoU - Memorandum of Understanding

MSPs - Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations

SAPs - Structural Adjustment Programs

SDGs- Sustainable Development Goals

SEK - Swedish Krona

Sida - The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

UN - United Nation

WWF - World Wide Fund for Nature

# 1. Introduction

Conservation initiatives led by institutions such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) play a pivotal role in addressing global environmental challenges. With their vast resources and transnational reach, these institutions have the potential to shape policies, influence decision-making processes, and drive change at local, national, and international levels. Understanding the dynamics within such institutions is essential for evaluating the effectiveness and equity of conservation efforts, particularly concerning the involvement of stakeholders from diverse geographical and socio-economic backgrounds reliant on conservation to secure beneficial outcomes for people and the planet. Furthermore, insights into the power dynamics and decision-making processes within these institutions offer valuable lessons applicable beyond the realm of conservation, providing insights into universal challenges faced in teamwork, collaboration, and leadership across various sectors. Such knowledge may inform strategies for improving institutional effectiveness, fostering transparent and inclusive decision-making, and navigating complex stakeholder relationships in diverse settings.

## 1.1 WWF and Leading the Change insights

As one of the largest and most influential international conservation organizations, WWF stands at the forefront of efforts to safeguard biodiversity, combat climate change, and promote sustainable development (WWF, 2023; WWF, 2020). Its initiatives span across continents, engaging stakeholders from both the Global North and the Global South, with over 5 million supporters and a global network operating in over 100 countries (Ibid.). Among its programs, the Leading the Change (LtC) initiative stands out for its commitment to addressing issues of poor governance, unsustainable management of natural resources, and social injustices that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. The LtC program is managed collaboratively by WWF Sweden and the WWF national and country offices in each program location.

The LtC program has initiated 18 interventions and is majority funded by The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) where “[t]he programme budget is 500 M



SEK, out of which Sida Civsam contributes 90% and WWF Sweden contributes 10% from other funding sources” (WWF, 2022). It represents a collaborative effort to empower local communities and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to drive sustainable development and conservation initiatives.

CSOs are non-governmental and non-profit groups that bring people together to pursue common goals and interests. They encompass a broad spectrum of formal and informal organizations within civil society, such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), indigenous peoples' organizations (IPOs), faith-based groups, labor unions, professional associations, and various other forms (WWF Good Practice Standard, 2020). By enhancing the capacity of CSOs and promoting inclusive decision-making processes, LtC seeks to address the root causes of environmental degradation and promote equitable access to resources and benefits. However, the complexities inherent in such partnerships, particularly the power dynamics between Global North and Global South stakeholders, warrant critical examination.

## 1.2 Objective

Against this backdrop, this study aims to delve into the intricacies of power dynamics within the LtC program, focusing on the interactions between WWF Sweden and WWF Kenya and their engagement with the partner CSOs. By scrutinizing the partnerships, decision-making processes, and outcomes of the LtC program, this research seeks to shed light on how power is distributed, negotiated, and exercised within transnational development corporation entities. Ultimately, this study endeavors to contribute to a deeper understanding of how to foster more equitable and inclusive conservation practices for the benefit of both people and the planet.

Kenya serves as an interesting case due to its "obstructed civic space," meaning that the country is "experiencing severe restrictions in fundamental freedoms" (Civicus, 2023) and partly free democratic governance (WWF LtC2, 2022). It makes an interesting case for this thesis focus, as the program aims to "empower communities through partner CSOs to participate in decision making and strengthen equitable and sustainable natural resources management." (Ibid.) Further elaboration on the case study selection is presented in the methodological approach section.

On paper, LtC acknowledges a key problem in many conservation programs: the exclusion of people and communities dependent on natural resources from decision-making processes, leading to human rights violations and an inequitable distribution of benefits. This research seeks to uncover potential power dynamics between Sida, WWF Sweden, WWF Kenya, as well as their partner CSOs in the LtC program. It examines how local agency is prioritized in the partnership and whether the overarching structure aligns with intended ideals.

To achieve this, the study will shed light on the relationships between local and transnational organizations and institutions. A variety of methods will be employed. A thorough document analysis will investigate program strategy plans, reports, and communication materials related to LtC. This analysis will inspect framing and key themes, revealing implicit power relations and structural elements embedded in the program's narrative. Additionally, a detailed examination of LtC's policies and strategies will be conducted, analyzing official documents to identify overarching goals, implementation strategies, and intended outcomes. This method aims to assess the alignment between policy rhetoric and on-the-ground practices, highlighting potential gaps and power imbalances.

In-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including representatives from WWF, will provide qualitative insights into the lived experiences and perspectives related to LtC. Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions will capture narratives on decision-making processes, power discussions, conflict resolution, and the impact the structure has on partners within the program. These approaches aim to offer valuable insights into the implementation of the LtC program, facilitating an understanding of the alignment of actual outcomes with the program's aims and goals.

Throughout this thesis, "sustainable development" will be based on the United Nations (UN) sustainable development philosophy:

In practice, sustainable development requires the integration of economic, environmental, and social objectives across sectors, territories, and generations. Therefore, sustainable development requires the elimination of fragmentation; that is, environmental, social, and economic concerns must be integrated throughout decision making processes in order to move towards development that is truly sustainable (UN, n.d.).

Further, this thesis will encompass a critical institutionalist definition of "institution" and follow Crawford and Ostrom (1995) stating:

Institutions are enduring regularities of human action in situations structured by rules, norms, and shared strategies, as well as by the physical world. The rules, norms, and shared strategies are constituted and reconstituted by human interaction in frequently occurring or repetitive situations. Where one draws the boundary of an institution depends on the theoretical question of interest, the time scale posited, and the pragmatics of a research project (Crawford and Ostrom, 1995: 582)

## 1.3 Research questions

The research strives to explore the topic by answering the following questions:

- RQ1: How does the institutional structure within WWFs Leading the Change program influence the decision-making process of the project?
- RQ2: How does the practical implementation of the program reflect institutional structures that either facilitate or impede CSO inclusion and the representation of diverse values in decision-making and project outcomes?

The LtC program, with its focus on strengthening civil society through capacity building and promoting sustainable and rights-based work in nature conservation, natural resources, and climate issues, serves as a significant focal point. The goal of LtC is to enhance the capacity of CSOs at various levels, specifically ownership, sustainable natural resource management, inclusive conservation, and the implementation of a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA). By scrutinizing the power structures and agency within LtC, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into the decision-making process, effectiveness, and impact of such programs.

## 2. Background review

The historical landscape of international relations, particularly within the context of development partnerships between the Global North and the Global South, has been markedly influenced by a power dynamic that often sees developed nations imposing strategic directives on their developing counterparts (Mosse, 2005). This relationship has evolved from colonial legacies to

contemporary development approaches, with significant shifts in strategy and ideology (Lodigiani, 2020).

Historically, relationships forged during the colonial era set a precedent for unequal power dynamics, further entrenched during the Cold War as superpowers used aid as a strategic tool for global influence (Ibid., 2020). Development theorists such as Rostow argued that establishing a global market would enable all countries to progress. This suggested that over time, every nation would eventually reach the "final phase" of development, characterized by high mass consumption (Lodigiani, 2009; Rostow, 1964). This ushered in the era of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s, during which international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank implemented economic policies that frequently prioritized Western economic interests above local needs (Lodigiani, 2020).

In recent decades, however, a concerted effort has been made to transition from these top-down models to more collaborative and partnership-oriented approaches (UN, n.d.). Initiatives such as the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have emphasized principles of mutual accountability, local ownership, and alignment with the priorities of recipient countries. These changes signify a nominal shift toward more equitable development practices, aiming to mitigate the historical imbalances in international aid.

Despite these efforts, the transition has been met with substantial criticism, particularly concerning the efficacy and authenticity of the partnership models (Utting & Zammit, 2009; Bäckstrand, 2006; Zammit, 2003). Critics argue that while the rhetoric of partnership and mutual accountability is promising, the implementation often falls short. There remains a significant gap between policy and practice, with developed countries and international organizations still holding considerable sway over development programs' strategic directions and priorities.

Critiques of the top-down approach are multifaceted. Firstly, there is an ongoing concern about the need for more local ownership and the imposition of external priorities, which may not necessarily align with the recipient countries' actual needs or socioeconomic contexts. This misalignment can lead to ineffective and unsustainable development outcomes (Mosse, 2005).

Secondly, the effectiveness of aid itself is questioned, with debates on whether it promotes dependency rather than facilitating genuine development (Ibid.). This critique extends to the argument that aid often addresses the symptoms of poverty and inequality without tackling their root causes, thereby ensuring a continuous cycle of dependency and intervention.

In summary, while there has been a shift towards more inclusive and partnership-driven approaches in international development, significant challenges remain. The legacy of a top-down, donor-centric model continues to influence how aid is structured and delivered, underscoring the need for more genuine and effectively implemented shifts toward equity and local empowerment in global development strategies.

Building upon the foundational understanding of power dynamics outlined in the introduction, the following literature review will delve deeper into existing research on power relations within conservation partnerships. By synthesizing critical insights from scholarly literature, this review aims to comprehensively analyze the institutional arrangements, power dynamics, and critiques within the context of conservation initiatives such as the LtC program.

## 2.1 Importance of Understanding Power Dynamics in Conservation Partnerships

Power dynamics significantly influence decision-making processes in conservation partnerships, influencing the outcomes of environmental initiatives (Dietz et al., 2003; Folke et al., 2005). Recognizing and understanding these power dynamics is essential for numerous reasons:

### 2.1.1 Equitable decision-making processes

One reason is that a comprehensive understanding of power dynamics facilitates equitable decision-making processes within conservation partnerships. By acknowledging and addressing power differentials among stakeholders, decision-making processes can be made more inclusive and participatory, ensuring that the interests of all parties involved are taken into account (Armitage et al., 2009a; Cash et al., 2006).

### 2.1.2 Enhancing collaboration and synergy

Another reason is that effective collaboration among stakeholders is contingent upon recognizing and navigating power dynamics within conservation partnerships. Stringer et al. (2006) highlights that “stakeholders must forge new relationships to enhance multi-directional information flows, learn from each other, and together develop flexible ways of managing their environments.” (Stringer et al., 2006:38) Given the diversity of interests and levels of influence among stakeholders, understanding power dynamics enables partners to navigate conflicts and negotiate mutually beneficial outcomes, thereby enhancing cooperation and synergy in conservation efforts (Leach et al., 1999; Stringer et al., 2006).

### 2.1.3 Addressing power imbalances

Furthermore, understanding power dynamics is crucial for addressing power imbalances that may exist within multi-stakeholder conservation partnerships. Marginalized groups, such as local communities or indigenous peoples, often have limited access to decision-making processes and resources, leading to unequal distribution of benefits and adverse social or environmental impacts (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Ribot, 2002). By recognizing and addressing these power imbalances, conservation practitioners can promote greater participation, empowerment, and social justice within conservation initiatives (Blaikie, 2006; Sunderlin et al., 2008).

Thus, understanding power dynamics enhances accountability within conservation partnerships. By scrutinizing decision-making processes and power structures, stakeholders can hold each other accountable for their actions, ensuring that decisions are transparent, fair, and aligned with conservation objectives (Brockington et al., 2008; Larson & Soto, 2008).

## 2.2 Power Dynamics in Conservation Partnerships

A literature review on power dynamics within environmental governance and conservation partnerships reveals a rich body of research examining the complex interplay of power relations among different stakeholders. Specifically, studies have focused on analyzing power dynamics between NGOs, CSOs, governmental bodies, and local communities involved in conservation initiatives. Here, the research presents some critical insights learned from existing literature:

### 2.2.1 Power dynamics between NGOs and governmental bodies

Scholars have identified power differentials between NGOs and governmental bodies in conservation partnerships and how "[i]t ignores the deep and subtle ways in which communities, states, and NGOs are mutually implicated in relations laced with power" (Brosius et al., 2005: 445). NGOs often wield significant influence due to their expertise, funding, and capacity to mobilize resources. However, governmental agencies may hold formal authority and regulatory powers, shaping decision-making processes and resource allocation (Brosius et al., 2005; Agrawal & Gupta, 2005).

Power dynamics between NGOs and governments are shaped by various factors such as funding dependencies, political interests, and the regulatory environment. NGOs may strategically leverage their relationships with governments to advocate for policy changes or secure funding for conservation projects, while governments may seek to co-opt or regulate NGO activities to maintain control over natural resources (Büscher & Whande, 2007; Brockington, 2008).

### 2.2.2 Power dynamics between CSOs and local communities

Scholars have also examined power dynamics between CSOs and local communities engaged in conservation initiatives. Acting as intermediaries between external donors, governmental agencies, and local communities, CSOs wield influence over decision-making processes and resource allocation (Robbins & Marks, 2010; Goldman, 2011).

However, power differentials between CSOs and local communities can lead to tensions and conflicts, particularly concerning issues such as resource access, land rights, and representation. Local communities may perceive CSOs as external actors imposing top-down conservation interventions, while CSOs may face challenges in building trust and legitimacy among local stakeholders (Peluso, 2005; Corson, 2010).

### 2.2.3 Interrelations of power dynamics

Research highlights the interrelated nature of power dynamics within conservation partnerships, shaped by communal axes of identity, such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Interrelational analyses reveal how power relations are mediated by social hierarchies and

inequalities, influencing access to decision-making processes and benefits from conservation initiatives (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Nightingale, 2011). Understanding the dynamics of power is essential for promoting more inclusive and equitable conservation partnerships, as it allows for recognizing marginalized voices and developing interventions that address underlying structural inequalities (Coulthard, 2012; Sultana, 2014).

## 2.3 Institutional Arrangements in Conservation Partnerships

Conservation partnerships and collaborations involve complex institutional arrangements that govern decision-making, resource allocation, and collective action among diverse stakeholders. This section explores existing literature to examine conservation partnerships' institutional structures, processes, and dynamics.

### 2.3.1 Formal Institutional Arrangements

Formal institutional arrangements, such as policies, laws, and regulations, serve as the backbone of conservation partnerships, providing the legal and regulatory framework for governance (Ostrom, 1990; Young, 2002). Decentralized governance structures and community-based management institutions have been highlighted for their role in facilitating local participation and stewardship of natural resources (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Ribot, 2002).

### 2.3.2 Informal Institutional Arrangements

In addition to formal structures, informal institutional arrangements, including norms, values, and customary practices, significantly shape conservation partnerships. These informal norms dictate social interactions, cooperation, and collective decision-making among stakeholders (Cinner et al., 2006; Adger et al., 2009). Local knowledge systems and customary governance mechanisms are vital in fostering community-based conservation initiatives and adaptive management practices (Goldman, 2007; Brosius et al., 2005).

### 2.3.3 Hybrid Institutional Arrangements

Many conservation partnerships adopt hybrid institutional arrangements, integrating formal and informal elements to tackle complex environmental challenges. These hybrid structures often



involve collaborative governance mechanisms and co-management arrangements that bridge diverse perspectives and interests (Armitage et al., 2009b). Adaptive co-management approaches have proven effective in enhancing resilience and adaptive capacity within social-ecological systems (Folke et al., 2005; Armitage et al., 2009b).

Power dynamics significantly influence institutional arrangements within conservation partnerships, shaping decision-making processes and resource distribution (Cash et al., 2006; Leach et al., 1999). Power struggles among stakeholders may lead to institutional inertia, resistance to change, or certain actors' dominance of decision-making processes (Blaikie, 2006; Sunderlin et al., 2008). Understanding these power dynamics is crucial for comprehending the underlying structures and dynamics that influence conservation governance and practice (Hoffmann, 2007; Scott, 2009).

Despite the potential benefits, institutional arrangements in conservation partnerships face challenges such as fragmentation, conflicting interests, and limited adaptive capacity (Cash et al., 2006; Young, 2002). However, they also offer opportunities for innovation, learning, and collaborative problem-solving (Folke et al., 2005; Berkes et al., 2009). Addressing these challenges necessitates adaptive partnership approaches that promote transparency, accountability, and equitable participation among stakeholders (Armitage et al., 2009a; Cash et al., 2006).

#### 2.3.4 Power Dynamics and Institutional Context in Conservation Partnerships

The LtC Kenya program involves a diverse array of stakeholders, including WWF Kenya, WWF Sweden, governmental bodies such as the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and Ministry of Environment and Forestry, CSOs, local communities living around conservation areas, and donors (Sida) supporting conservation efforts.

In the context of the LtC Kenya program, WWF Kenya holds a central role, leveraging its international expertise, resources, and networks to shape conservation agendas and strategies in the country (WWF, n.d.). Governmental bodies, particularly the Kenya Wildlife Service, wield formal authority over wildlife conservation and protected areas management, exerting significant influence on policy formulation and implementation (KWS, n.d.). NGOs and CSOs, including

local and indigenous organizations, contribute grassroots knowledge, community mobilization efforts, and alternative perspectives, influencing project implementation and stakeholder engagement (Goldman & Riosmena, 2013; Ogada & Woodroffe, 2014). As rights-holders and stewards of natural resources, local communities possess inherent power. However, their influence may be constrained by factors such as limited access to decision-making forums, resistance from elites, and resources (Kuria et al., 2020). Donors, such as international development agencies and philanthropic foundations, or in this case, Sida, provide financial support and technical assistance, influencing program priorities and implementation strategies (Goldman & Riosmena, 2013).

Power differentials among stakeholders in the LtC Kenya program are influenced by factors such as control over resources (financial, human, and natural), possession of "expertise and knowledge", the strength of networks and alliances, and the legal and regulatory framework governing conservation activities in Kenya (Reid et al., 2000; Kamanga et al., 2009).

Power dynamics shape decision-making processes within the LtC Kenya program, often resulting in asymmetrical power relations where some stakeholders exert more significant influence (i.e., financial). Decision-making may be influenced by factors beyond scientific evidence or community needs, including political considerations, institutional inertia, and donor priorities (Ogutu et al., 2011; Barnes & de Jager, 2011).

Inequitable power relations within the LtC Kenya program can undermine conservation initiatives' legitimacy, effectiveness, and sustainability by excluding local perspectives, perpetuating social injustices, and aggravating conflicts. Empowering marginalized stakeholders, enhancing inclusive decision-making processes, and fostering collaborative governance mechanisms are essential for promoting more equitable and effective conservation outcomes in Kenya (Reid et al., 2000; Ogutu et al., 2011).

## 2.4 Critiques and Debates

There are numerous ways to analyze power dynamics in decision-making. This thesis will dive into an critical institutional theory which is further elaborated in the explanatory framework section.

The application of Critical Institutional Analysis and Development (CIAD) and similar critical institutional approaches to analyzing power dynamics within conservation initiatives has sparked various critiques and debates. The following section highlights the strengths and limitations of critical institutional perspectives and their relevance in understanding complex socio-political processes.

#### 2.4.1 Strengths and limitations of critical institutional perspectives

Critical perspectives tend to place disproportionate emphasis on power dynamics, potentially neglecting other crucial factors that shape institutional arrangements and decision-making processes. This narrow focus might obscure the roles of agency, cultural intricacies, and historical contexts within conservation partnerships (Armitage, 2007).

Additionally, critical orientation may introduce a normative bias, leading researchers to prioritize specific values or perspectives over others. This bias could compromise the objectivity of the analysis and impede the exploration of diverse viewpoints within conservation partnerships (Armitage, 2005).

Moreover, institutional theory's holistic approach and emphasis on context sensitivity may introduce analytical complexity, posing challenges in operationalizing its concepts and frameworks. This complexity may present methodological hurdles for researchers seeking to apply institutional theory in empirical studies (Cleaver, 2002).

Scholars debate whether CIAD complements or competes with alternative analytical approaches, such as institutional economics or political ecology. Some argue that integrating multiple perspectives can enhance our understanding of power dynamics within conservation partnerships, while others caution against theoretical eclecticism and advocate for theoretical coherence (Leach et al., 1999; Ribot, 2002).

Furthermore, within CIAD analysis, discussions center around the balance between agency and structure. While CIAD underscores the significance of agency and reflexivity in challenging existing power structures, some scholars question how actors and institutions can exert meaningful agency within broader institutional contexts characterized by power imbalances (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999).

Debates also extend to the policy implications of CIAD analyses. Critics argue that CIAD's focus on critique and deconstruction may overshadow its potential contributions to policy formulation and implementation in conservation practice. Conversely, others advocate for a more pragmatic approach that integrates critical analysis with actionable recommendations to foster more equitable and effective conservation initiatives (Blaikie, 2006; Klain & Olmsted, 2015).

Despite the considerable body of research on power dynamics within conservation partnerships, a notable gap exists in understanding the nuanced interactions between Global North and Global South stakeholders within transnational partnerships such as the LtC program. While existing studies shed light on power differentials and institutional arrangements, further research is needed to explore how political contexts and economic disparities influence power dynamics and decision-making processes.

While institutional theory provides valuable insights into the formal and informal structures governing conservation partnerships, its applicability in addressing power imbalances and promoting social justice has been debated. Critics argue that institutional analyses often overlook the agency of marginalized stakeholders and the complexities of power relations embedded in socio-cultural contexts. Thus, there is a need for approaches that integrate critical perspectives and recognize the interconnectedness of power dynamics within conservation partnerships.

### 3. Explanatory Framework

Understanding power dynamics within multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs) requires a comprehensive theoretical grounding that can conceptualize underlying structures while highlighting the significance of local agency. In this study, the researcher aims to merge CIAD with Flor Avelino's meta-theoretical framework to study structural power in the program and the decision-making process. This integrated approach will allow for a nuanced exploration of how actors engage with power, their agency, and the structural foundations of partnerships, particularly within the context of MSPs operating in the Global North-Global South context.

This integrated framework offers several advantages over the HRBA commonly used by institutions like Sida and WWF's LtC program. While HRBA focuses primarily on promoting

human rights principles, CIAD and Avelino's framework delve deeper into structural power dynamics, institutional analysis, and the importance of local agency within MSPs. By adopting this integrated approach, the research can achieve a more analytically superior exploration of power dynamics within MSPs operating in diverse global contexts.

### 3.1 Critical Institutional Analysis and Development

The CIAD framework, rooted in critical institutionalism, aligns with its claims and objectives. The primary focus of CIAD is to conduct a critical and systematic examination of the "complex-embeddedness" of institutions, delving into their intricate connections within broader social and organizational contexts (Ostrom, 2005; Whaley, 2018).

Within the CIAD framework, the analysis explores the interplay between institutional structure, individual agency, and the broader social context (Whaley, 2018). In the specific context of this research on MSPs, this exploration centers on understanding the dynamic relationship between structure and agency.

The CIAD framework places significant emphasis on dissecting power dynamics within the realm of commons governance. In contrast to the current HRBA employed by the LtC initiative, which predominantly centers on broader human rights issues (Sida, 2024), CIAD's narrower focus on critical institutional analysis and 'complex-embeddedness' may offer a depth of analysis beneficial for uncovering intricate power dynamics within institutional structures (Whaley, 2018).

The CIAD framework underscores the significance of power, agency, and structure, acknowledging that institutions are not merely formal structures but also carry social and symbolic meanings (Whaley, 2018). Using CIAD may be advantageous for understanding how different stakeholders exercise agency within MSPs and navigate complex structures, making it a more targeted and relevant analytical framework for the specific question at hand.

In essence, CIAD guides research by emphasizing power dynamics and meanings, viewing institutional change as a creative process, and providing a solid foundation for understanding the complexities existing in commons governance. Therefore, CIAD is a superior framework for

analyzing institutional structure, agency for stakeholders, and power dynamics within MSPs due to its explicit emphasis on power, critical institutional analysis, and alignment with the specific context of commons governance.

## 3.2 Notions of power and meaning

Power and meaning have rich and diverse backgrounds within the realm of social sciences. Whaley (2018) offers insight into how the CIAD framework understands these concepts by emphasizing the recursive relationship between structure and agency. While it is not a fully comprehensive discussion, it presents a valuable approach for analyzing power and meaning using the CIAD framework.

According to Giddens (1984), agency, defined as the capacity for action, inherently implies power. However, this power is deeply intertwined with the structures within which individuals operate. It is crucial to analyze the structural resources available to them to comprehend how power manifests among different actors in social contexts. Giddens posits that resources serve as conduits for the exercise of power, constituting essential elements of social reproduction (Giddens, 1984:16). He categorizes these resources into allocative and authoritative types. Allocative resources encompass tangible assets involved in power dynamics, such as the natural environment and physical objects. Conversely, authoritative resources consist of intangible elements shaping power relations, including discourses, policies, rules, relationships, concepts, and ideas, representing the semantic dimension of social structure.

The CIAD Framework works as a toolbox for unpacking these power dynamics and the role of meaning within them. It offers a structural approach to understanding how various actors interact with systemic and agential elements and navigate the rules and resources within a social context. Depending on their positioning within the given social setting, individuals will wield differing degrees of access and agency over these resources, shaping their ability to pursue their objectives, thus positioning participants in varying power dynamics. Consequently, this highlights the ebb and flow of power dynamics by reflecting their diverse capabilities to exercise agency and, thus, power.

### 3.3 Operationalization

In the upcoming analysis, I will deep-dive into how the LtC program's structural power dynamics in decision-making hold to the program description. Throughout the analysis, I will draw on a modified version of the CIAD framework and Avelion's power framework to identify structural power and the various causal mechanisms that impede or facilitate partner stakeholder agency. By applying core principles of critical institutionalism and CIAD, this study will examine how the WWF LtC program's institutional structure influences the project's decision-making process (RQ1). Additionally, the modified CIAD framework will be applied to understand how the structures within institutions such as WWF impact the ability of national and country offices, and partner CSOs to participate in decision-making processes and influence the outcomes of the program and its projects (RQ2).

Influenced by the critical institutionalism and CIAD framework, this study merges the idea of analyzing power, agency, and structure by looking at structural power and agency within MSPs such as WWFs LtC.

Traditionally, structural power refers to the ways in which power is arranged to influence the norms of society and institutions (Gwynn, 2019). In the context of MSPs between the Global North and Global South, structural power often manifests in the form of unequal access to resources, asymmetrical power relations, and dominance in setting the agenda and decision-making processes (Palladino & Santaniello, 2021).

In this study, structural power refers to the ability of key stakeholders to shape the institutional arrangements, rules, norms, and resource distribution within the system. Or, as Gwynn (2019) defines it:

Structural power characterizes a situation in which the institutional context shapes actor preferences or incentives in such a way that one actor (B) conforms its behavior to (A)'s preferences, independent of any specific attempt by (A) to affect their relationship (Gwynn, 2019:204).

In other words, “structural power enables us to see not only that two partners are dancing but also that they are dancing on a well-prepared stage that ensures that only certain steps in the dance are possible.” (Gwynn, 2019:204-205)

Combining CIAD with Avelino's power toolbox and a critical realist framework to analyze structural power and agency within an MSP involves integrating key concepts, variables, and relationships from each perspective.

### 3.3.1 Ontological perspective

Critical Realism is explored in further detail in section 4.1.

### 3.3.2 Key concepts and variables

- Structural power: Represents the ability of specific actors or institutions to shape institutional arrangements, rules, and resource allocation within the MSPs. It includes control over decision-making processes, agenda-setting, and resource distribution.
- Agency: Refers to the capacity of individuals or groups to act independently and influence outcomes within the partnership. Both structural constraints and opportunities shape agency and can manifest at different levels of analysis.
- Rules and norms: Institutional rules, norms, and governance structures that govern behavior, decision-making, and power dynamics within the partnership. These rules may reflect underlying power asymmetries and shape actors' agency.
- Resources: Material, financial, and symbolic resources available to actors within the partnership. Resource distribution influences power dynamics and actors' ability to exercise agency.
- Conflict and contestation: This term reflects the partnership's tensions, disagreements, and power struggles. Conflict can emerge from divergent interests, inequitable power relations, and contestation over resources and decision-making authority.

### 3.3.3 Key causal mechanisms

- Power “over” <> power “to”: Mechanisms through which dominant actors or institutions exercise control and influence over others within the partnership. This may include



setting agendas, controlling resources, and shaping institutional rules and norms to serve their interests.

- Empowerment < > disempowerment: Mechanisms that enable or constrain actors' agency within the partnership. Empowerment mechanisms provide participation, voice, and influence opportunities, while disempowerment mechanisms restrict agency and reinforce power asymmetries.

### 3.3.4 Relationships and interactions:

- Interplay between structure and agency: Examines how structural power dynamics shape actors' agency and vice versa. It considers how actors' agency can challenge or reproduce existing power structures within the partnership.
- Dynamics of conflict and cooperation: Analyzes how conflict and contestation among stakeholders influence power relations, decision-making processes, and outcomes within the partnership.

By integrating critical institutionalism, Avelino's power toolbox, and critical realism, this conceptual framework provides a holistic approach to analyzing structural power and agency within MSPs. It emphasizes the interplay between structure and agency, the role of power dynamics and conflict, and the need to uncover underlying causal mechanisms shaping partnership outcomes.

Aspect	Key concepts and variables	Causal mechanisms	Relationships and interactions
Ontological Perspective	Critical realism		
Structural Power	Control over decision making	Power 'over' < > Power 'to'	Interplay between structure and agency
	Resource distribution	Empowerment and Disempowerment	Dynamics of conflict and cooperation
	Institutional rules and norms		
Agency	Capacity to influence outcomes	Empowerment and Disempowerment	Interplay between structure and agency
	Constraints and opportunities		
Rules and Norms	Governance structure	Power 'over' < > Power 'to'	Dynamics of conflict and

			cooperation
	Institutional arrangements		
Resources	Material, financial, symbolic	Resource control	Interplay between structure and agency
	Distribution and access	Empowerment and Disempowerment	
Conflict	Tensions, disagreements	power struggle, power over < > power to	dynamics of conflict and cooperation
	Power struggles		

Table 1 (own creation)

## 4. Methodological Approach

### 4.1 Philosophical assumption

In this study, the aim is to delve into the root causes of situations and explore ways to transform barriers. Critical realism acknowledges the existence of both observable empirical phenomena and the underlying structures and mechanisms that produce them. It emphasizes the stratified nature of reality and the need to uncover generative mechanisms shaping social phenomena (Archer, 1995). This involves moving beyond narratives to identify causality and mechanisms for transformation. The study adopts certain assumptions from a critical realist approach to guide this exploration. Critical realism, as described by Gorski (2013), encompasses key philosophical notions such as causality, agency, explanation, and structure. One of the critical realism assumptions is that agency and structure are both real parts of the world and should not be fused together, as structure and agency exist at different "levels" (Archer, 1995).

Archer's (2003) three-step conceptualization of the relationship between structure and agency becomes instrumental in analyzing WWF and LtC. This process involves examining the events or situations in which people act, understanding how social structures shape these situations, considering actors' concerns and reflections on situations, and evaluating the projects actors undertake along with their impacts.

Critical realism, as a philosophy of social sciences, adapts a perspective that seeks to understand underlying structures and mechanisms that shape social phenomena (Lawani, 2020). It emphasizes the distinction between knowledge of the world and the knowledge we construct for theorizing, underlining the existence of a world independent of our understanding. This perspective aligns with Archer's (2020) argument that critical realism acknowledges the independent ontological statuses of both structure and agency, avoiding the analytical pitfall of combining the two (Fletcher, 2017:66).

## 4.2 Reflexivity

In one of my previous roles as a behavioral change counselor, I developed a keen sense of reflexivity, which has become invaluable in my professional and research contexts. Reflexivity is about being acutely aware of how one's personal responses to the social environment shape interactions, perceptions, and communications (Etherington, 2004). This awareness has deepened my understanding of the cultural and social contexts that influence my daily life and how these factors color my interpretation of the world.

Applying reflexivity in my academic research has been crucial. As a researcher aligned with the principles of critical realism, I need to be aware of my biases. This self-awareness helps steer my research from the subjective towards the objective, striving for clarity and reliability in my findings (Kawulich, 2005). Engaging with reflexivity not only enriches my research approach but also ensures a more grounded and balanced perspective in my work. Throughout the research, I did my best to act in neutrality.

## 4.3 Research design

In this thesis, I employ a qualitative research design grounded in a critical institutional approach coupled with Avelion's power theory. Given that the structure of WWF's LtC programs operates within an institutional framework, it is essential to dissect this framework for deeper analysis (Clement, 2010). As the research seeks to explore the structural power dynamics within the partnership decision-making process, power theory will serve as a crucial analytical tool to

unravel the power relationships underpinning equitable partnership and decision-making management.

Observation of entities, interviewing, and in-depth document analysis of government strategies and institutional reports, programs, and proposals were employed to create triangularity to benefit and strengthen the validity (Bryman, 2016). All quotes from Swedish material were manually translated into English.

#### 4.4 Case selection

Wanting to delve into the characteristics of an MSP to identify and showcase the unique aspects of a specific institution, a case study design was selected. This type of research is particularly tailored to capturing details specific to a particular time and place, emphasizing the uniqueness of each case studied (Bryman, 2016). Starting the thesis process with observations also led to the decision to incorporate a case study, and by moving from data to theory, I was also drawn to an abductive reasoning approach as I was searching for plausible explanations with limited data (Bryman, 2016; Magnani, 2005).

Kenya serves as an intriguing case study for scrutinizing power dynamics in the LtC initiative, primarily due to its unique socio-political, ecological, and historical context. As a biodiversity hotspot, Kenya hosts an array of species and diverse ecosystems, drawing significant attention and resources towards conservation efforts (WWF, n.d.). This heightened conservation focus underscores the importance and complexity of decision-making processes within initiatives such as LtC, which are deeply embedded within institutional structures shaped by historical legacies, colonial influences, and evolving national policies (Western & Wright, 1994).

A critical institutional perspective allows for examining the potential underlying power relations and institutional arrangements that govern decision-making processes within conservation initiatives such as LtC. In Kenya, these power dynamics are manifested through a complex interplay of formal and informal institutions, political interests, and socio-economic factors, which influence resource allocation, stakeholder participation, and policy outcomes (Ogutu et al., 2016).

Moreover, Kenya's conservation landscape is characterized by extensive community involvement and indigenous knowledge systems, which challenge traditional conservation paradigms and underscore the need for more inclusive and participatory decision-making processes (Berkes, 2009). However, the institutionalization of conservation practices often marginalizes local voices. It reinforces existing power asymmetries, raising questions about the equity and legitimacy of decision-making within multi-stakeholder partnerships like LtC.

Furthermore, Kenya's geopolitical significance within the East African region adds another layer of complexity to conservation initiatives operating within its borders, with regional dynamics, cross-border conservation efforts, and international partnerships shaping decision-making processes and resource flows (Mwangi et al., 2018). A critical institutional perspective enables unpacking the potential underlying power dynamics and vested interests that drive these processes, revealing the entanglement of conservation governance with broader political and economic agendas.

#### 4.5 Semi-structured interviews and sampling

In order to enrich my narrative and fill in the gaps from findings in the document analysis, four semi-structured interviews were conducted through a convenience sampling with key figures in the LtC partnership (Bryman, 2016).

Four interviews with three participants were conducted to complement the document analysis and observations. To gain a broader understanding of values, beliefs, narratives, and relationships from the perspective of the WWF Kenya national office, which works closely with CSO partners, I decided to conduct an interview as a complementary research method. This choice was particularly crucial due to limited access to specific program documentation. Interviews were also conducted with the “donor office” WWF Sweden. The participants brought to the table years of experience with the program and were key figures, managing the community aspect of the LtC initiative as a Community Development Officer, as well as Program Managers within LtC.

With the difficulties faced in data collection, selecting the right participants was key, focusing on those with a deep understanding of the research area and the particular challenges involved,

aligning with Bryman's recommendations (2016). To explore how the Community Development Officer, in their role, perceived and interacted with the program's structure, dynamics, and power relations, a semi-structured interview format was chosen. This method proved flexible, allowing for spontaneous exploration of new topics as the interviewee opened up about their view of the social landscape (Bryman, 2016).

Three interview guides were created (appendix I, II, III), one for each interview, as they represent and play various parts in the partnership. Each guide included a list of memory prompts covering essential questions and issues, crafted to keep the conversation open and adaptable. This setup enabled the researcher to follow up on interesting leads that emerged during the interview, deepening the understanding of the interviewee's perspectives (Bryman, 2016). The mix of question types used—ranging from introductory to probing, follow-up, interpretative, and open-ended—helped in capturing a nuanced picture of the social realities at play. Furthermore, the guides were created to facilitate information related to this context-specific analysis of institutional functioning in relation to critical institutionalism (Cleaver & Koning, 2015).

Since the interviews were conducted with experts, an interactive interviewing style was chosen to allow the participants broader availability to use their imagination and knowledge (Patton, 2015). Being a licensed motivational interviewing (MI)<sup>1</sup> practitioner gave me the confidence and grounding needed for these discussions, facilitating a more dynamic and insightful exchange. This approach blends academic rigor with a more practical understanding of the complexities within social structures, fitting well within a critical realist framework that seeks not just to observe but to understand the deeper mechanisms influencing social phenomena. Interview questions were not shared with participants in advance.

At one point, a member checking was conducted on a key figure to verify a quote and findings (Patton, 2015). Verbatim transcripts were later created using an AI-generated tool (Goodtapes), followed by manual edits of the transcript throughout its entirety while listening to the recording.

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<sup>1</sup> An evidence-based approach for behavioral change.

## 4.6 Analytical procedure

In order to create the analysis below, this study undertook a literature review that followed numerous broad avenues. The analysis was conducted using a mix of coding schemes that allowed for abductive reasoning. Initially, a set of themes was drawn up based on existing literature and theoretical frameworks. As the interview transcripts and observation notes were examined, new sub-themes emerged, revealing specific structural relations of power relating to both agency and structure. Firstly, I delved into the importance of understanding power dynamics in decision-making processes within MSPs, especially in the context of conservation collaborations. I then created a deeper understanding of the characteristic features of critical realism and critical institutionalism from key review articles focusing on the origination, definition, and application of these schools of thought. Further, I adapted a snowball sampling of citations within the review articles.

As a case study was conducted, I attempted to collect the data on “the lowest level unit of analysis possible” (Patton, 2015:536); thus, I decided to speak to program managers and similar positions instead of program directors or the government to receive information.

A coding scheme was manually developed by identifying the primary patterns in the data to highlight significant themes (Patton, 2015). Once initial patterns in the texts were recognized, Avelino's (2021) power framework was employed to uncover structural power dynamics associated with both agency and structure. The data was then analyzed using Avelino's modified power framework, aligned with my findings. Table 2 outlines the key empirical questions relevant to my data, which will later be referenced in the analysis.

By combining the document analysis of institutional documents with insights gathered from fieldwork and interviews, a comprehensive understanding emerged of the interaction between formal and informal structures that influence power relations within the partnership.

**Power-framework and questions for research on power structure and agency**

<b>Power contestations</b>	<b>Questions about power structure and agency</b>
Power over <> Power to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who is exercising power over whom?</li> <li>- How is power exercised?</li> </ul>
Centered <> diffused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How and by whom is the agenda decided?</li> <li>- Which issues are kept off the agenda?</li> <li>- How are underlying preferences shaped?</li> </ul>
Consensual <> conflictual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which conflicts are “hidden” under seemingly consensual processes?</li> <li>- How and to what extent is consensus oppressive and conflict emancipatory?</li> </ul>
Constraining <> enabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are both structure and agency manifested?</li> <li>- How/to what extent is structural power (a) an object to be transformed (b) a constraint ( c) an enabler for change?</li> </ul>
Quantity <> quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How and to what extent is power exercised, by and over whom?</li> <li>- which actor or entity is exercising more/less power, by and over whom?</li> </ul>
Empowerment <> disempowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who is (dis)empowered and how is it manifested?</li> </ul>
Knowledge as <> prior to knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which knowledges, discourses, ideologies, underly the process of change?</li> </ul>

Table 2 (Avelino, 2012, table 2:441)

## 4.7 Limitations of the methods

In the following section, limitations for each method are presented. Each method holds its limitations which is why this research focuses on combining the methods into a framework which complement each other and exclude all elements which are outside of the focus.

First, the collaboration with an external entity introduced additional layers of complexity that shaped the research process. Participant observation often includes observer biases, which can affect all research stages, as DeWalt & DeWalt (2011) note. To minimize the influence of these biases, I employed rigorous data triangulation and cross-checked findings with participants to ensure alignment with their perspectives.



Additionally, a conscious decision was made not to conduct field studies in Kenya. As an external researcher, my presence in the field could have influenced participant behavior and potentially skewed data due to the power dynamics inherently present in researcher-participant interactions. Staying in Sweden minimized the risk of disrupting the national office (WWF Kenya) and CSO dynamics, allowed for a more neutral stance in gathering and analyzing information, and helped avoid ethical pitfalls related to gaining and maintaining the trust of vulnerable communities. Remaining in Sweden allowed for a focused use of available resources while ensuring adherence to academic timelines for thesis completion.

Reliance on expert interviews presented challenges, particularly in verifying information in the absence of corroborative documentation (Patton, 2015). To address this, multiple experts were consulted across different sectors to capture varied viewpoints, enhancing the study's reliability.

Document analysis serves a certain limitation due to the risk of, amongst others, bias and subjectivity, limited access, and incompleteness (Bryman, 2016). However, triangulating document analysis with interviews and observational data, helps build a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The online format for interviews had limitations, such as the absence of non-verbal cues and the establishment of trust (Patton, 2015). However, efforts were made to build rapport through transparent communication and consistent follow-ups.

These defined boundaries set the extent to which the findings can be interpreted. However, they also present opportunities for future research to delve deeper into areas this study only partially explores. I accept that I may have wrongly interpreted stakeholder's ideas and have sought to share the intermediate findings with all participants in this study.

## 4.8 Ethical considerations

When considering the ethical issues of my research, I followed Patton's (2015) guidelines.

The purpose and theoretical lens were emailed to participants in PDF form. The WWF participants received the consent form (appendix IV) once the interview was scheduled. The consent form is written in English as this is the commonly known and communicated language

within the institution and partnership. As the study examines the structural power of decision-making within the program where the interviewees work, it was argued that it would be helpful in their work. In return, a copy of the thesis, once submitted and graded, was offered. A risk assessment was created for the potential CSO participants, however, was deleted when no interviews came to be.

The participants were given information on the scope and aim of the research before giving their informed consent to participate (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). All data collected was anonymized and used solely for research purposes, per GDPR guidelines. Ethical considerations were also made in terms of possible conflicts of interest since I was previously involved in WWF projects, ensuring that the analysis and findings were not influenced by prior associations. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) (appendix V) was created between WWF Sweden and myself to follow Lund University's standard and contains clear statements about data access and data ownership. For an accuracy check, two key informants from the WWF Sweden LtC program reviewed the case for validity (Patton, 2015).

## 5. Empirical Report

This chapter presents the findings of the empirical data collected through observations, document reviews, and interviews. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics within the LtC program, spearheaded by WWF Sweden and implemented by offices such as WWF Kenya and various CSOs. The narratives are drawn from each methodological approach described above and weave together to illustrate the complex interplay of intentions, implementations, and real-world challenges in the context of conservation efforts.

### 5.1 Dynamics of Power

My initial observations at WWF Sweden revealed a frequently discussed theme of "equitable partnerships," which prompted a deeper investigation into the actual power dynamics and their implications on partnerships. Regular attendance at inter-departmental meetings allowed me to witness firsthand how the concept of partnership was communicated internally and the space it occupied in strategic discussions. These observations raised critical questions about the

authenticity and application of equitable partnerships within the institutional context, particularly when contrasted with the narrative presented in strategic documents.

Simultaneously, document analysis provided a backdrop against which these observed interactions could be further understood. Strategic documents, including project proposals and partnership reports related to the LtC program, often depicted an idealized vision of cooperation and mutual benefit. For instance, the LtC2 program proposal explicitly aligned with WWF Sweden's overarching strategy for 2021-2025, emphasizing an HRBA that claims to uphold equality, mutual respect, and accountability. However, this was juxtaposed against the power struggle of development aid, where funding and support could be unpredictably withdrawn, as mentioned in an interview as echoing the sentiments of some CSO partners who expressed concerns about the reliability of these partnerships and the challenges of planning for long-term sustainability under these conditions.

These observations align with DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), who argue that participant observation can significantly influence the observer's theoretical framework and subsequent data analysis, shaping the understanding of power relations in such contexts. Kawulich (2005) adds that observing how topics are approached in meetings, including how much time and space they are given, can provide insight into an organization's value system and internal dynamics.

## 5.2 Insights

The narrative deepens with insights from semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from the WWF Sweden and WWF Kenya national office. The latter shed light on the practical challenges and operational realities faced on the ground. For instance, the WWF Kenya Community Development Officer highlights efforts to empower local communities through educational and livelihood programs. However, they also voiced concern over the sustainability of these initiatives, particularly due to fluctuating and unreliable funding streams. Furthermore, it is mentioned that CSO partners articulated frustrations regarding the transparency and inclusiveness of decision-making processes. Despite the rhetoric of shared governance and mutual accountability promoted in partnership documents, local voices had felt marginalized in

actual decision-making forums. One example brought to attention by the WWF Kenya interviewee regarding marginalization or exclusion from decision-making within LtC follows:

I think from our end [WWF] not necessarily much but from the partner's [CSOs] end...because of the resources they have and sometimes it's very expensive...it's a big area...what we call rural development biases... the urban buses will pick the people who are around you so that they help you make that decision and then you realize that the people that [are] from the farthest end don't get to be part of it and it could be biased because of time it could be bias brought by resources or it could be other biases so then you realize that the people are not part of that decision then feel that they're limited from decision making and they should have been part of that.

Further, regarding bias in decision-making in local political areas and government, they state “most of the leaders are people who are 40+...that means that sometimes decisions are made when the youth are not in the boardroom or women are not in the boardroom. So...youth or women will feel that they are not part of the decision.” (WWF Kenya interview).

It is crucial to note that interviewees from WWF Sweden highlighted the significant strides in fostering collaboration between WWF and local partners, citing enhanced communication channels and joint capacity-building efforts. However, this progress also reveals a significant disparity between the strategic intent of fostering equitable partnerships and their actual implementation, where power dynamics and donor interests continue to exert a dominant influence on outcomes.

Furthermore, the LtC program framework is undergoing continuous changes, particularly with Sida's withdrawal of funding due to governmental reprioritization, which is significantly affecting the program's operations. Notably, the WWF Kenya interview was conducted prior to the Swedish development aid shift, while the WWF Sweden interviews were conducted post-shift. Despite these circumstances, the thesis aimed to explore the implications of this shift, albeit within the constraints of the study's outreach.

These interview insights align with Patton's (2015) observations that reliance on expert interviews can pose challenges, particularly regarding the verification of claims in the absence of corroborative documentation. This dynamic often warrants a more participatory approach to

partnership governance to ensure the legitimacy of the findings and improve mutual accountability (Ibid.).

### 5.3 Document Analysis

The document analysis complements and contrasts these personal accounts by providing a structured understanding of the LtC program's strategic intentions. Documents like the WWF Good Practice Standard and various project reports emphasize collaborative approaches and shared visions. The Good Standard Practice was developed by a working group with feedback from over 20 implementing WWF offices and provides practical guidance and minimum good practice standards for managing partnerships with CSOs. It covers strategic engagement, equitable partnerships, compliance with social and human rights standards, capacity development, advocacy, planning, agreements, monitoring, evaluation, and mutual learning, ensuring consistency with WWF's principles. However, the analysis of these documents alongside feedback from an action plan, which was developed in a participatory manner within a commission with members from CSOs, country offices, and WWF Sweden, highlighting observations and interviews, reveals a complex picture of how these standards are applied in practice. This action plan follows a learning review on equitable partnerships, which emphasizes the need to improve mutual accountability, balance power dynamics, and increase legitimacy. The theoretical underpinning of partnerships, which stresses local ownership and participatory planning, often clashes with the operational challenges highlighted by CSO feedback, illustrating the difficulties in translating idealistic frameworks into practical, equitable actions.

### 5.4 Merging observations, documents, and voices

This integrated approach allows a nuanced understanding of the LtC program's dynamics, highlighting the interdependencies and often contradictory elements between policy, practice, and lived experience. By synthesizing observations, document analysis, and interview insights, this empirical report not only uncovers the complexities inherent in MSPs but also emphasizes the need for genuine commitment to the principles of equity and sustainability. For partnerships to evolve beyond the constraints of traditional power dynamics and truly embody the principles of a more transparent, inclusive, and consistently supportive approach, one that genuinely

considers and integrates the perspectives and needs of all stakeholders involved is required. These concerns highlighted the need for a more inclusive and participatory approach to partnership governance.

## 6. Analysis

This chapter will analyze how conservation initiatives spearheaded by Global North institutions are influenced by a structural power dynamic that holds strategic dominance over their developing counterparts (Mosse, 2005) by adapting an extended and modified version of the power scheme (see Table 2) and examining using the questions presented in the power scheme. It will also critically examine how structural power may influence decision-making within the LtC program, using detailed quotes from the provided data materials and focusing on themes of agency, power dynamics, and structure.

### 6.1 Analyzing Structural Power

Through analyzing WWF LtC2 Sida proposal (2022) and Final Report Leading the Change 2018-2023 (2023), LtC is highlighted as having an inclusive decision-making process with assessments that allow partners to hold agency. The program supports CSOs in their organizational development and technical capacities to engage in natural resource governance and advocate for rights, thereby empowering them to uphold agency in decision-making processes. Mechanisms such as the CSO Capacity Assessment tool and participatory planning processes support this notion of agency. The texts reflect agency through the empowerment strategies for rights holders and CSOs, promoting their capacity to influence and engage in governance. The document suggests that the LtC program incorporates both structure and agency by recognizing CSOs as critical actors for change. It emphasizes rights holders' empowerment and duty bearers' accountability, reflecting agency. At the same time, it is guided by WWF's structured approaches, such as HRBA and conflict sensitivity, illustrating structural components. Moreover, WWF's international structure, local presence, and capacity development initiatives for CSOs depict structure, whereas the flexible and responsive nature of learning platforms and the adaptive management approach showcase agency.

Sweden's strategy for development cooperation (2024) stated that "Sida will carry out, monitor and report on activities in accordance with the Government's guidelines for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance strategies," highlighting that Sida's decision-making includes oversight through guidelines and regular follow-up, ensuring that Sweden's country strategy is implemented effectively and relevantly, with transparency in the selection of recipient organizations.

### 6.1.1 Decision-Making

A document that visualizes the decision-making process within LtC does not exist, and no structured document, either shared or found, thoroughly illustrates the decision-making process within the partnership. However, after an in-depth document analysis, observations, and interviews with various stakeholders, a simplified visual map was able to be constructed.

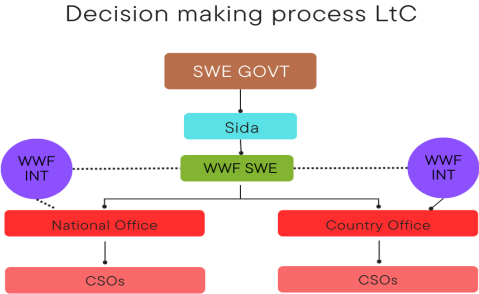


Figure 1: Decision Making in LtC (own creation)

The WWF LtC2 Sida proposal (2022) highlights decision-making through various sections: "Strategic program decisions are made by the Director Governance and Policy or the Secretary-General, after consultation with other concerned department directors through WWF Swedens Senior Management Team" (LtC2 proposal:49) and "[t]he programme head reports to the Director Governance and Policy and will be responsible for monitoring progress, results and risks at the programme level" (LtC proposal:49).

In the Kenya Proposal (2022), the decision-making process is noted to involve stakeholder engagements, consultations, and governance structures such as Steering Committees. Decisions also follow WWF-Kenya's mandate and strategic plan with inputs from partner CSOs. A

commitment to create agency and the intent to share power in decision-making within the partnership is seen through quotes such as "LtC2 has applied the principles of WWF engagement with CSOs", "LtC2 has ensured that CSOs are part of the proposal from the concept level to proposal development," and "In term of governance, we will establish a LtC2 Programme Implementation Steering Committee." However, the lack of mention of a Steering Committee in the Final Report LtC 2018-2023 Kenya (2023) reads as a failure to implement. According to the report, the decision-making process within the program involves multiple levels, including WWF country offices developing their strategy with local CSO partners, emphasizing partnership and community ownership of goals and activities. The report also highlights that WWF Sweden provides overall management, funding allocation, and strategic program development. At the same time, WWF national offices, such as Kenya, and country offices, are responsible for implementation in partnership with local CSOs.

Additionally, the report mentions that the decision-making process within the program involves CSOs in planning and implementing activities, multi-year planning sessions, and consultations with constituents. These steps ensure accountability, ownership, and alignment with strategic goals, as seen in "CSOs and WWF Kenya staff shared progress, lessons learned, and jointly developed plans" (Ibid.: 40).

When asked about these multi-year planning meetings, the WWF Kenya Community Development Officer interviewee states:

[F]or the partners [CSOs], it's more of their strategic plans what they'd want to do in the next three or five years. For us it's also our strategic plan but also looking at the global scope of the project, plus the mandate of everybody. So it's more of a consensus, but guided by what we want to achieve at the end of the day.

When asking Program Managers from WWF Sweden about decision-making and structure, responses included "...we have to stay within the budget..." and "SPO, that is Strategic Partner Organizations...we have to comply with this structure." "...within the program budget...there are limitations.", "It's a bit different how it works in different initiatives.", and "WWF Sweden...chooses which partner offices we work with."

Decision-making in the LtC program incorporates local and international knowledge systems. Local knowledge is valued, as seen in the inclusion of CSOs from the concept level in proposal



development. Nevertheless, strategic decisions made by WWF Sweden are primarily guided by broader institutional policies and international frameworks, suggesting that local knowledge and agency may be subordinated to these overarching priorities. The WWF Kenya interviewee's role in bridging WWF's strategies with local needs highlights an ongoing negotiation between global conservation discourses and local realities.

## 6.2 Power "Over" < > Power "to" - Power Dynamics and Agency

### 6.2.1 Structural influence on agency

The Power "over" < > Power "to" dichotomy is central to understanding the dynamics within the LtC program, particularly when considering the transformation from traditional donor-recipient relationships to more equitable partnerships. WWF Sweden predominantly holds centralized control within the LtC program. Strategic decisions are centralized at the highest levels of the organization, as highlighted in the LtC proposal: "Strategic programme decisions are made by the Director Governance and Policy or the Secretary General, after consultation with other concerned department directors through WWF Sweden's Senior Management Team" (LtC proposal:49). This indicates an explicit power "over" dynamic where strategic control resides with senior management, potentially at the expense of local stakeholder agency.

### 6.2.2 Enabling local agency

This centralized control contrasts with the power "to" enable local participation, where WWF Kenya and local CSOs are engaged in planning and implementation. However, this engagement often occurs within the constraints set by higher institutional levels, as evidenced by the directive nature of funding and strategic alignment: "WWF Sweden...chooses which partner offices we work with" (WWF-Sweden interview). In contrast with this centralized approach, the program also implements mechanisms fostering local participation and decision-making agency. According to the Kenya final report, the decision-making process actively involves "CSOs in planning and implementing activities, multi-year planning sessions, and consultations with constituents" (Final Report Kenya, 2023). This not only diffuses power but also enhances stakeholder engagement at the ground level, supporting a more inclusive governance model.

In the interview with the WWF Kenya Community Development Officer, the interviewee described agency by noting that partners do not need to follow rigid quarterly reporting if activities are completed sooner. This suggests flexibility and the ability of partners to shape the timeline according to their progress, which displays agency within the structured framework of the partnership. They also describe how "we implement the project with the partners then we report to WWF Sweden," reflecting WWF's role in exercising power "over" CSO partners through reporting and oversight mechanisms. This structure empowers WWF to dictate the terms and framework of projects but also provides CSOs with the power "to" execute projects on the ground. The interviewee continues, referring to agency and accountability:

Mutual accountability meaning that when you are given feedback, you take it with open hands and open arms and open mind. You don't judge people and you don't use it to do other things. That then means that there is confidence from people to give you that feedback, knowing that you'll use it well.  
(WWF-Kenya interview)

On the theme of structural power, the WWF Kenya interviewee discusses the institutional norms of WWF, such as the contract schedules and the "bird's-eye view" role of WWF Sweden in overseeing project implementation, articulating a hierarchical structure but also indicating that institutional norms can be adapted for efficiency and effectiveness.

### 6.2.3 Promoting equitable partnerships

The LtC program's focus on local agency is further highlighted through an action plan developed within the LtC team at WWF Sweden that was entirely based on the results and what was said in the Learning Review (2023). This plan was created to scrutinize the equity of relationships between stakeholders within the context of WWF Sweden LtC and seeks to collaborate with WWF Sweden, partner WWF offices, and partner CSOs to understand what equitable partnerships should look like while also offering input and assistance in developing an action plan for fostering more equitable partnerships. The results showed a response to analyze and employ more equity in the program. Some critical findings from the review are that the review emphasizes the need to improve mutual accountability and balance power dynamics. Additionally, it advocates for WWF Sweden's role to be that of "gate openers" rather than "gatekeepers," emphasizing an approach that fosters shared responsibility and learning, and "this perception of donor-beneficiary works also throughout the aid chain from Sida to communities.

All actors tend to see the one on top to be the “donor” and the one down to be the “implementer.” (Final Report Equitable partnerships WWF-SE, 2023)

Within the LtC Sida Proposal (2022), the notion of equitable partnership is examined through the commitment to adhere to the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness and the Istanbul Principles. Structural power within partnerships is addressed by supporting CSOs based on their priorities and providing financial and technical support with expertise in sustainable natural resource management issues and respect for human rights. WWF's partnership with CSOs is based on principles and guidelines in the social policies of the WWF network, ensuring an equitable partnership approach. The program seeks to work in equitable partnerships with local, national, and regional CSOs and networks.

In the Final report LtC (2023) equitable partnerships have been expressed to be prioritized within LtC with efforts towards more trustful collaborations and long-term agreements with CSOs.

The concept of power "over" in the LtC program can be seen in the role of WWF Sweden as "gatekeepers" and primary decision-makers. They control the funding, determine the agenda, and assess outcomes, which places them in a dominant position over the CSOs and other partner offices. This hierarchical structure inherently limits the agency of local partners by establishing a clear power imbalance where the donor (Sida/WWF Sweden) has significant control over the actions and priorities of the recipients (CSOs and national office's).

Conversely, the power "to" concept in the program aims to redistribute this control by empowering all participants to have a say in the decision-making processes and in defining what equitable partnerships should look like. The program seeks to shift from a donor-centric model to a more collaborative and participatory model. This is evidenced by the creation of the Equitable Partnership Learning Review (2023) and its use of multistakeholder participatory processes, such as online workshops and surveys, designed to gather diverse inputs and collectively decide on action plans for more equitable partnerships.

By engaging stakeholders in defining the categories of analysis and allowing them to contribute to the development of action plans, the LtC program is attempting to move away from a

unilateral form of power where decisions are top-down. This is crucial in fostering a power "to" make changes based on a consensus that respects the insights and needs of all parties.

Acknowledging the limitations of previous structures, such as the exclusion of voices from the community level and the reliance on online formats that may not be accessible to all, shows an awareness of the barriers that restrict power "to". Addressing these limitations is vital in redistributing power more equitably.

The program's transformation aims to enhance local initiative by developing long-term agreements that provide more stability and trust among partners. Although the aim to create trust and stability suggests a move towards a partnership where power is not only about control but also about enabling each actor to contribute effectively and share in the responsibilities and outcomes, this can be halted if funding to the program is canceled, flipping the overarching power back to the funding stream, Sida.

## 6.3 National Office Agency and Conflict Management

### 6.3.1 National office agency

Despite the overarching control, national offices attempt to exercise their agency within the given structures. For instance, WWF Kenya is described by WWF-Sweden as being part of its civil society, indicating efforts to align its operations with local societal needs and contexts. Additionally, the WWF Kenya office has its own board and does not fall under WWF International's governance as the majority of other WWF offices in Africa do. This suggests a form of agency where local entities strive to maintain their identity and operational relevance, even when constrained by centralized directives.

### 6.3.2 Perception and handling of conflicts

The ability of national offices to engage in conflict resolution reflects another aspect of agency. However, as noted in one of the WWF Sweden interviews, significant conflicts are escalated to and managed by the WWF international headquarters, which undermines local agency in

effectively addressing and resolving issues independently. This creates a dependency that can stifle local initiative and problem-solving capabilities.

For the LtC program as a whole, a conflict resolution document solely exists from WWF International and not internally for individual programs within LtC, such as the Kenya program. It was mentioned in the WWF Kenya interview that CSOs in the Kenya program create their conflict resolution document intended for their work with duty bearers. Documents illustrating this process were not received. Within the LtC program, however, an internal conflict resolution plan or document has yet to be created. The absence of a clear conflict resolution mechanism may lead stakeholders to feel that their concerns are not adequately addressed, leading to decreased engagement (Thomson et al., 2009). Additionally, unresolved conflicts can divert time and resources away from the partnership's primary goals, which can delay project timelines and increase costs (Tjosvold, 2008).

### 6.3.3 Negotiation of power and control

The dialogue about how national and country offices perceive their relationship with the central office and donors reflects ongoing negotiations of power and agency. National and country offices must navigate these power dynamics to carve out space for operational agency and influence within the institution's structural constraints.

## 6.4 Central < > Diffused Decision-Making Processes and Agenda Setting

### 6.4.1 Centralized agenda setting

Although intended to be inclusive, decision-making processes show a centralization of agenda-setting power. Centralized decisions by Sida and WWF Sweden contrast with the participatory processes at the local level, where CSOs engage in "planning and implementing activities, multi-year planning sessions, and consultations with constituents" (Kenya final report) and "The rights to participation and representation." This participatory approach attempts to diffuse power, fostering local agency in decision-making. However, the failure to implement

structures like the Steering Committee as planned underscores a gap between policy and practice, where central agenda-setting power may undermine local agency.

Interviews with WWF Sweden further underscore the centralized agenda setting, stating that "Sida sees WWF as a network. And that is both correct and a bit skewed because we are still centrally controlled by [WWF] International."

The agenda is centrally decided by WWF International and influenced significantly by donors. This centralized decision-making process determines operational strategies, funding allocations, and overall organizational priorities. Further, "[t]here is a regulatory framework that must be applied to these offices that are not national offices," highlighting that local needs and context-specific strategies might be marginalized or overlooked due to the dominance of central and donor-driven agendas. The potential for national and country offices to influence the broader institutional strategy seems limited.

Continuing the central < > diffused analysis, one Program Manager from Sweden notes on the central agenda that "[i]t is in the nature of things. But so... Is it a problem.", showcasing that underlying preferences are shaped by the institution's need to align with global standards and donor expectations, potentially at the cost of local relevance and effectiveness.

## 6.5 Consensus < > Conflict in Decision-Making

### 6.5.1 Consensual decision-making

The WWF Kenya interview examined and discussed the notion of an equitable partnership through mutual accountability, open communication, and equitable partnership models. The structure includes regular engagement with partner CSOs and documenting decisions. There is an emphasis on both WWF Kenya and WWF Sweden being accountable and working towards shared strategic goals. Interviewee states:

[G]oing back to the equitable partnerships components, I think one of the things to ensure that feedback is meaningful is mutual accountability... So ensuring that some of these barriers, if they are there, they are there. They are broken. So again, ensuring that we all work, the multi-stakeholder teams, so that some of those what we would call barriers are taken into account - And that's why when designing a project, one of the things when you do stakeholder analysis is to do the power dynamics,

in terms of the interest, in terms of whatever, in terms of who would be anti, in terms of who would be for. So that then you start addressing them from the word go...

## 6.5.2 Conflicts hidden under consensus

The program's decision-making is presented as consensual, aiming to harmonize diverse stakeholder interests. However, as indicated in the same WWF Kenya interview, this consensus might conceal underlying conflicts: "It's more of a consensus, but guided by what we want to achieve at the end of the day." This suggests that while the appearance of consensus is maintained, it may be shaped by dominant strategic objectives, potentially suppressing genuine dialogue and alternative perspectives.

Additionally, centralized control might mask conflicts related to agency, resource allocation, and operational freedoms. This suggests that national offices might conform to centralized decisions without real opportunities to express dissent or propose alternatives. One WWF Sweden Program Manager states, "It is quite cumbersome and difficult because I understand that WWF International has a responsibility."

In terms of quantity < > quality, structural power seems to be exercised both in quantity and quality within the program. WWF Sweden exercises considerable quantitative power "over" funding and strategic decisions. Qualitatively, the power exercised by local CSOs in engaging communities and implementing activities represents a nuanced form of influence, directly impacting local governance and empowerment. This qualitative power enhances local agency but is often overshadowed by the quantitative power dynamics at play.

## 6.6 Structural Power: A Duality of Constraining < > Enabling

### 6.6.1 Enabling and constraining factors

The structural design of the LtC program both enables and constrains local CSOs. While empowerment through capacity-building initiatives and participatory planning is significant, the strategic control exerted by WWF Sweden creates substantial barriers. WWF Sweden's unilateral decision-making capabilities illustrate this duality, "WWF Sweden...chooses which partner offices we work with" (Sweden interview), highlighting the constraints within the supposed

empowerment framework. Another WWF Sweden interview states: "It becomes uneven because donor offices do not let go, it's a bit the same thing there, that they do not really let go of control and mandate because they dare not." Further, the structured approach is both enabling and constraining, as seen in the WWF Kenya interview when describing a process where "mutual accountability" and structured meetings enable CSOs to contribute and align with broader goals, yet these same structures impose constraints on what extent of agency CSOs can operate.

The empowerment of local entities is a significant theme in the LtC program. As mentioned, the program aims to empower < > disempower local CSOs by involving them in decision-making processes and enhancing their capacities – "CSOs and WWF Kenya staff shared progress, lessons learned and jointly develop plans." (Kenya final report). Thus, the program's structure is designed to enhance the capabilities of national and country offices and CSOs, thereby fostering agency. The Kenya proposal highlights this empowerment, noting that "LtC 2 has applied the principles of WWF engagement with CSOs; The rights to participation and representation" (Kenya proposal). These mechanisms support the notion that local partners are not just recipients of directives but active participants in shaping the intervention strategies.

However, empowerment is nuanced by certain structural constraints that limit the scope of local decision-making. Interviews from WWF Sweden reveal inherent limitations within the empowerment framework: "...we have to stay within the allowance..." and "WWF Sweden chooses which partner offices we work with." These statements reflect the boundaries within which local empowerment operates, suggesting that while local entities are encouraged to participate, their actions are still confined within a centrally determined framework, tempered by the disempowering effects of centralized control over strategic decisions and funding, which can limit local actors' agency and ability to pursue locally defined objectives.

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis of the LtC program sheds light on the nuanced dynamics of structural power and agency within multi-stakeholder partnerships. It is critical to examine how the LtC program's structure, policies, and decision-making processes either promote or constrain the agency of local partners, particularly CSOs.



The study has revealed a strong tendency toward centralized decision-making within the LtC program. Despite WWF Sweden's commitment to equitable partnerships and decentralization, strategic control over funding, agenda-setting, decision-making, and partnership selection remains predominantly in its hands. This concentration of power is further entrenched by hierarchical reporting and oversight systems that limit the flexibility and agency of local partners. Swedish Program Managers acknowledge the necessity of adhering to strategic directives and funding regulations, which reinforces the top-down nature of the program.

Simultaneously, LtC incorporates mechanisms aimed at diffusing power and fostering local agency, such as multi-year planning sessions and participatory processes. National WWF offices, such as WWF Kenya, strive to assert their agency within this structure, engaging in planning, partnership development, and conflict resolution. While they work to adapt overarching strategies to their local contexts, they must navigate institutional norms and constraints that challenge their agency.

Examining the dynamics of power "over" < > power "to" provides more profound insights. WWF Sweden wields significant power "over" local partners due to its strategic and financial dominance, influencing the priorities and activities of recipient CSOs. However, the program attempts to emphasize power "to", empowering local partners through capacity-building, multi-stakeholder workshops, and participatory planning, which aim to enhance their influence and capabilities in decision-making.

Yet, despite these efforts, transparency and accountability remain hindered by structural constraints. One example is the absence of a conflict resolution framework within the program, which in turn represents a missed opportunity for growth and development of the partnership and leaves space for inequitable power dynamics. The interview with the WWF Kenya Community Development Officer acknowledged that partner CSOs sometimes feel compelled to follow centrally set strategic goals despite consensus-building attempts. Additionally, centralized funding and strategy reveal donor dominance, where regulations set by Sida and the Swedish government can shift priorities or terminate the program, overshadowing local needs.

The analysis offers broader insights into international development partnerships. While the program shows efforts to decentralize power and foster inclusive decision-making, achieving meaningful transformation is challenging in donor-driven structures. Initiatives like the Equitable Partnership Learning Review aim to redefine power relationships by advocating for "gate openers" rather than "gatekeepers," yet these must be paired with structural and institutional changes that promote accountability, transparency, and mutual agency, in order for a power shift to take fruition.

Through supporting programs such as LtC, Sweden garners considerable international credibility by adhering to their aid regulation, reinforcing its role as a forerunner in the EU in progressing towards the SDGs (EESC, n.d.). However, these intentions should not overshadow the necessity of genuinely amplifying local agency and empowering partners to shape their development narratives. The complexity of power sharing in development requires continuous negotiation and reflexivity. Frameworks like CIAD and Avelion's power scheme can deepen empirical analysis by focusing on structural inequalities and agency relationships.

The issue of development aid and power dynamics can and should be tackled from various perspectives. Researchers in international development and relations should maintain a thorough and systematic use of diverse concepts in their studies as they continue exploring the nature, role, and significance of power. This thesis underlined the importance of scrutinizing partnerships through a critical institutionalist lens. However, future studies could also benefit from analyzing the problem of development aid in conservation partnerships via the lens of theories such as neocolonial dynamics, global economic relations, or institutional dynamics across global conservation entities in order to gain further insight for academics as well as practitioners to learn and take into account in implementation. Regardless, there is a need for additional emphasis on how strong partnerships can steer and move a vision forward, while equitable partnerships can ensure the vision is shared and sustained.

This research adds to the existing body of research on power dynamics within conservation partnerships in understanding the nuanced interactions between Global North and Global South

stakeholders within transnational initiatives. The research helps to bridge the gap between existing studies on power differentials and institutional arrangements and how political contexts and economic disparities influence structural power and decision-making processes.

In conclusion, the LtC program embodies the interplay between structural power and agency. While its framework enables and constrains local CSOs, it reveals the nuanced dynamics of development partnerships. Although progress has been made in fostering equitable decision-making, further efforts are needed to decentralize structural power genuinely and ensure local partners can lead their development processes. Future iterations should emphasize mechanisms for conflict resolution, accountability, and learning, underscoring mutual responsibility and equitable power sharing to dismantle historical imbalances between the Global North and the Global South and achieve transformative change.

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- WWF (2022) *Leading the Change 2 WWF proposal to Sida Civsam* [PDF]

WWF (2023) *Leading the Change Final Report* [PDF]

WWF (2020) *Good Practice Standard* [PDF]

WWF (2021) *WWF Sverige strategi 2021-2025* [PDF]

WWF (2022) *Kenya proposal* [PDF]

WWF (2023) *Final report LtC Kenya* [PDF]

WWF (2023) *Equitable CSO Partnership Learning Review within the programme Leading the Change* [PDF]

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## 9. Appendices

### Appendix I: Interview guide WWF Kenya

- Can you please state your title and/or describe your job description
- Can you please describe your relationship with WWF/CSO?
- Can you describe the process by which decisions are reached within the partnership?
  - What mechanisms or practices are in place to ensure transparency and inclusivity throughout the decision-making process
- How are the policies formulated within the partnership translated into actionable plans and initiatives?
  - Can you explain the process of translating these strategic plans/ policies into actionable plans and initiatives within the partnership?
- To your knowledge, have there been instances where stakeholders (wwf-kenya or partner csos) experienced marginalization or exclusion from decision-making processes? If so, could you provide examples?
  - How were these instances of marginalization or exclusion identified and addressed by the partnership?
- In your experience, what strategies have been effective in ensuring that feedback leads to meaningful improvements within the partnership?
- How do institutional norms and practices influence power dynamics within the partnership, particularly in decision-making processes?

- Can you provide examples of how these norms and practices shape the exercise of power within the partnership?

## Appendix II: Interview guide WWF Sweden Program Manager #1

### **Understanding roles and responsibilities:**

- Can you describe your role and responsibilities within WWF?
- Kan du beskriva din roll och ditt ansvar inom WWF?

### **Institutional context:**

- Please describe the decision-making process within the program
- Can you describe the formal and informal rules that guide decision-making within WWF?
- Kan du beskriva beslutsprocessen inom programmet?
- Kan du beskriva de formella och informella regler som styr beslutsfattandet inom WWF?

### **Decision-making process:**

- How are decisions generally made within LtC? Who is involved in the decision-making process?
- Hur fattas beslut i allmänhet inom LtC? Vilka är involverade i beslutsprocessen?
- Hur påverkar den institutionella strukturen inom WWFs LtC's beslutsprocess?

### **Power and agency:**

- In what ways do power dynamics within the LtC influence decision-making processes?
- På vilka sätt påverkar makt dynamiken inom LTC beslutsprocesserna?

### **Conflict and Consensus:**

- What mechanisms exist for resolving disputes or disagreements in decision-making processes?
- Vilka mekanismer finns för att lösa tvister eller oenigheter i beslutsprocesser?

## Appendix III: Interview guide WWF Sweden Program Manager #2

### **Understanding roles and responsibilities:**

- Can you describe your role and responsibilities within WWF?
- Kan du beskriva din roll och ditt ansvar inom WWF?

### **Institutional context:**

- How does WWF Sweden's centralized decision-making affect the agency of local offices and CSOs?
- Hur påverkar WWF Sveriges centrala beslutsfattande autonomi för lokala kontor och CSOs?

### **Decision-making process:**

- Can you give examples of when local initiatives or decisions were overridden by central directives?
- Kan du ge exempel på när lokala initiativ eller beslut åsidosattes av centrala direktiv?

### **Power and agency:**

- In what ways do power dynamics within the LtC influence decision-making processes?
- På vilka sätt påverkar makt dynamiken inom LTC beslutsprocesserna?

### **Conflict and Consensus:**

- What conflict resolution tools are most commonly used within the LtC program?
- Vilka mekanismer finns för att lösa tvister eller oenigheter i beslutsprocesser?

## Appendix IV: Consent form

Hello,

My name is Quinci Croall, and I am currently enrolled in my second and final year of the Master of Science in International Development and Management (LUMID) program at Lund University, Sweden. The aim of my research is to understand the power dynamics of decision-making within multistakeholder partnerships, and I have chosen WWF's Leading the Change program as a case study. It is important to note that although I recently completed a five-month internship with WWF-Sweden as part of my LUMID degree program, I am not affiliated with any entity or section of WWF, Sida, or any other agency or government. Therefore, this study has no bearing on your standing with WWF.

The interview is expected to last between 15 and 20 minutes. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have full autonomy to choose how long and in what conditions you participate. You can withdraw from the study at any moment without any adverse effects or consequences.

All collected information, including data that could personally identify you, is solely for research purposes and will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a password-protected service and accessed only by me. The information will not be utilized for any purposes outside of this research, including commercial or non-research related activities. Should the results of this study be considered for use in government or non-governmental programming, you will be informed and asked to provide new consent. Upon the completion of this research, all data will be securely destroyed.

Consent will be asked for and given verbally on the day of the interview.

Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix V: MoU

Memorandum of Understanding  
Between Quinci Croall and Leading the Change WWF  
5 th of February 2024

*This memorandum of understanding (MoU) is an informal document detailing the collaboration and expectations between Quinci Croall (the researcher) and the World Wide Fund for Nature Sweden (WWF Sweden) (the collaborator) in Stockholm, Sweden during the researchers engagement with the collaborator, from 07.01.2024 to 15.05.2024.*

### 1. Background

The researcher is studying the MSc in International Development and Management (LUMID) at Lund University. LUMID provides its students with a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge, with the aim to give them the best qualifications for continued work within the fields of international development and management.

During the last term of the program, students will be conducting an independent piece of work that addresses development issues from a social science perspective within the context of the contemporary developing world. The student will be enrolled in a distance course at Lund University: LUMID MIDM19 Thesis Course.

## 2. The Researcher

The researcher is currently in the second year of LUMID. She holds a B.A. in Psychology and has a profound interest in questions concerning the role of human rights and labor conditions, promoting human rights within conservation programs, protecting the vulnerable, and the intertwined dynamics of human rights and environmental conservation and policy. It is also within these areas she will collect her field data and write her master thesis where she aims to research and analyze power dynamics within multi-stakeholder partnerships. She has previous experience interning at WWF as part of the global corporate partnership team. She is convinced a collaboration and engagement with the WWF will provide her with valuable insights for data collection to conduct science-based research.

## 3. Collaborator

WWF is an international non-governmental organization that works for wilderness preservation and the reduction of human impact on the environment. WWF's Leading the Change program works in partnership with local Civil Society Organisations to deliver inclusive and sustainable development and find the most effective solutions to the most pressing environmental problems, working to support local communities on conserving the natural resources they depend upon; transform policies toward sustainability; and protect and restore species and their habitats.

## 4. Obligations of the Researcher

The thesis will be conducted full-time between January 8<sup>th</sup> and May 15<sup>th</sup>. During this time, the researcher will conduct research and collect data supervised by her professor at Lund University. The researcher has ownership of collected data.

### 4.1 Obligations of the Collaboration Organization

The collaboration organization will provide the researcher with access to agreed-upon material needed for research to be conducted, as well as be the contact person between the researcher and potential interviewees. The researcher has an appointed supervisor at Lund University. This follows the WWF guidelines for thesis collaborations.

## 5. Confidentiality and Data Handling

### 5.1 Confidentiality Agreement

Both parties acknowledge the sensitivity of certain information involved in this collaboration. Any information deemed confidential, including but not limited to organizational strategies, personal data, or proprietary knowledge, shall be handled with utmost confidentiality by both Quinci Croall and WWF.

### 5.2 Data Collection and Handling

The researcher retains ownership of all data collected during the research period. Measures will be taken to ensure secure storage and limited access of this data. The data will be secured using password protected drive and all participants will be presented with a consent form prior to interview. Anonymity will be offered to each participant. If anonymization is wanted, personal information will be removed or replaced from the data. Participants will be offered a debriefing session after their involvement, explaining how their data will be handled and reassuring confidentiality. Only authorized personnel from both parties will have access to collected data, which will be used exclusively for this collaboration.

6. Other Notes

The MoU may be updated or revised before it is finalized in January 2024.

After submission and opposition the thesis will be published on LU and Diva portal. WWF Sweden can share and publish the thesis internally. External publication may be granted upon request.

The signatures below do not constitute agreement to a binding contract but signify a commitment towards the arrangement between the intern and the host outlined above.