

## **Return on investing in Conservation Leaders**

by Diederick Stoel

**WWF's Corporate University [WWF College for Conservation Leadership] conducted a study to evaluate the impact of its Conservation Leadership Programme. Is it possible to measure the impact of a leadership training on nature conservation? This article describes the attempt to answer that question. It will show how rewarding investing in human talent can be.**

### **WWF's Corporate University**

The WWF College for Conservation Leadership is the corporate university of the World Wide Fund for Nature. WWF is one of the world's most active and professional conservation organizations. Since 1961, WWF has been involved in programmes around the world to try and restore the balance between human activity and nature.

WWF's conservationists face increasingly complex and large-scale challenges. They need to excel in technical areas but must also be able to engage and motivate partners: civil society, local and national governments, business and industry, the media and local communities. WWF needs to develop and motivate their teams and networks. In short, conservationists need a complex set of skills to carry out their jobs effectively.

The WWF College for Conservation Leadership was conceived in 1998 to help WWF and its partners meet these challenges. This unique CU works to achieve WWF's mission by challenging conservation leaders to discover and develop leadership talent in themselves and others. The Conservation Leadership Programme is an 18-month blended learning programme covering Leadership and Management, Strategy and Planning, Campaigning and Advocacy, and Communication and Networking.

### **The research**

The data for the evaluation study were collected by means of an extensive questionnaire sent to 61 graduates of the Conservation Leadership Programme. These participants, are located in 30 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, Central and South America. The main questions to the alumni in this evaluation study were:

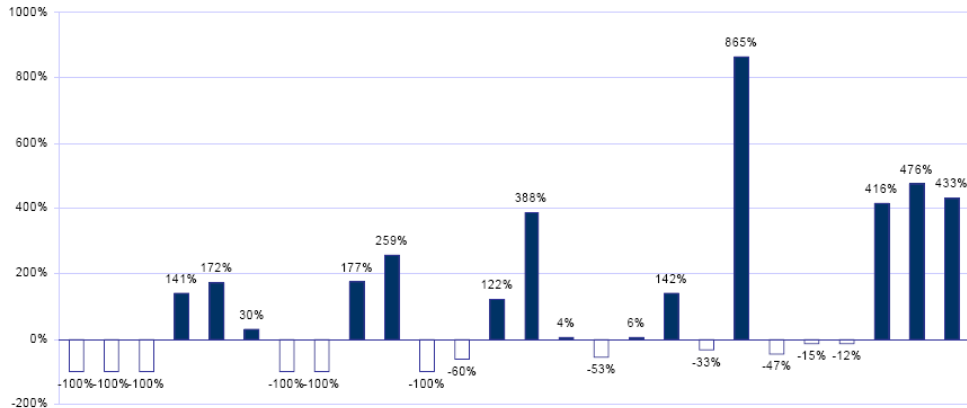
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- Did you meet the learning objectives?
- Are you applying the acquired skills in your work?
- What is the impact of the WWF College on WWF's critical organizational measures? and
- What is the monetary value of these results?

Twenty-six participants responded and generally reported reaching learning objectives in all competencies of the programme and applying their acquired skill Leadership and Management. Respondents reported a positive impact on key indicators of organisational measures, such as new products developed, project proposals approved, new strategic partnerships, time savings, cancellation of projects, and effects of new training programmes implemented. Twenty of these responded also reported a return in financial terms as well as sound argumentation for their estimation.

The financial impact on the organizations was the basis for determining the Return on Investment (ROI). The ROI measures the return value of each dollar (or euro) spent on participating in the WWF College bearing in mind both time of participants and actual costs of the programme. To calculate the ROI, respondents completed several steps, these included; determining the monetary benefit or impact of their effort, estimating the percentage of that monetary impact that could be attributed to the training program and judging the degree to which they were confident in their estimates. The final monetary benefit used in the calculation of the ROI was the product of all three values; financial benefit, percent due to training, and percent confidence. On average 58% of financial benefits were due to participating in the WWF College. Participants are very confident about their estimations. The average level of confidence 76%.



As a result, fourteen alumni report a positive ROI. This means that their financial benefits due to the program exceeds the costs of participating in the college programme. Six alumni reported a return that was less than their actual costs, their ROI was negative. Six respondents were not able to calculate an ROI, so we assumed no benefit and as a result, their ROI was negative 100 %, meaning a 100% loss in financial terms. The graph below shows the ROI of the 26 respondents.

### Building a chain of impact

Further detailed analysis showed that those respondents who calculated an ROI benefitted more from the college than those who did not calculate an ROI. The ROI respondents were more likely to apply the knowledge and skills learned at the college and to do so to a greater extent. With current economic uncertainties and an increasing emphasis on accountability, the ability to clearly indicate the impact of (learning) processes on achieving organizational targets could become an essential competency every Conservation Leader should have.

### Evaluation and measuring techniques

As a result of the success of the evaluation program, the The WWF College has started to include evaluation and measuring techniques in the leadership programme. While the techniques we have described here are important for determining the value of training programs, the techniques are applicable to the work of the WWF in the field. The main goal of this session is to provide a framework for linking internal processes through measurable achievements to sustainable stakeholder value creation.

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### Sustainable stakeholder value creation

Recently in Senegal, a session that included evaluating the impact of programmes was conducted. As an example of sustainable stakeholder value creation, Dr. Papa Samba Diouf worked through the specific questions in the evaluation questionnaire. Dr. Papa Samba Diouf recently graduated from the Conservation Leadership Programme.

*“The Campaigning Module, helped me to make a clear distinction between stakeholders and how to approach them as different target audiences. We used the module to design a campaign to establish a marine protected area (MPA). As a result of the campaign we managed to set up not one, but four MPAs along the coast of Senegal involving the authorities, scientists, industrial and artisanal fisheries’ representatives, NGOs and the president of Senegal. Thanks to this approach, active dialogue has been established between all these key actors.”*

Dr. Papa Samba Diouf – Group 7



Artisanal pirogue with local fishermen passing Spanish trawler in their fishing grounds, Senegal. © WWF-Canon / Jo Benn

In the field, in the Saloum delta: Dr Papa Samba Diouf, Marine Conservation Officer and Head of WWF-WAMER. © WWF-Canon / Olivier van Bogaert

Dr. Papa together with a WWF economist, forecasted the economic value of the four Marine Protected Areas to be \$32 million in the next five years. The Marine Protected Areas are expected to boost Senegal’s national income per capita with 1%. As a result of this session, Papa Samba Diouf has an even better business case, which he is going to present to Abdoulaye Wade, Senegal’s president.

This case shows that by evaluating learning, the College’s participants will not only become aware of the value of their learning. At the same time they are learning methods to put across the value of

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their work. We argue that this will enable them to develop better business cases and achieve more conservation results.

### **Demonstrating the benefit for the donors**

While the participants calculate a positive ROI for their personal, local conservation efforts, the WWF College has more costs than benefits from these participants. The deficit is funded by donors in WWF's Global Network. The research clearly showed why the College donors should continue to fund the program. While donors could decide to fund individual projects or offices directly, the evaluation of the WWF College shows that participating in the College has long-term benefits that surpass onetime financial injections. Graduates from the WWF College work more efficiently and are able to generate new funds themselves through partnerships, and other funding agencies.

The short-term investment—participating in the WWF College, leads to long-term benefits for Conservation. The old Chinese proverb “Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime” stands ground in more than one way.

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