MONITORING EVALUATION ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING PLAN

THE GREATER VIRUNGA LANDSCAPE TRANSBOUNDARY STRATEGIC PLAN

1st July 2024 to 30 June 2033

Key Partner Organisations:

Governmental (Protected Areas Authorities):

Non-Governmental Organisations supporting the TSP development process, among others:

Table of Contents

ABBREVIATIONS IV
1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND 1
1.1 Overview of the Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning Plan 1
1.2 Background and context of the Transboundary Strategic Plan 2
1.3 Rationale of the Greater Virunga Landscape Transboundary Strategic Plan 4
1.4 Purpose of the Transboundary Strategic Plan 4
2. SCOPE OF MONITORING EVALUATION ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING PLAN 4
2.1 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MEAL PLAN 4
2.2 Framework elements of the MEAL plan 6
2.3 Guiding principles for the MEAL 8
3. OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSBOUNDARY STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRAM LOGIC 9
3.1 Results framework 10
3.2 Theory of Change 11
3.3 Key assumptions of the Theory of Change 12
3.4 Development Hypotheses 13
4. MONITORING PROCEDURE 14
4.1 Data Management Processes 14
4.2 Feedback Mechanisms 16
4.3 Data Quality Assurance and Control 16
5. EVALUATION AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE 19
5.1 Establishment of Baseline Information 19
5.2 Mid-Term and End-Term Evaluations 19
5.3 Research 20
6. COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEAL PLAN 21
6.1 Management of the MEAL plan 21
6.2 Coordination mechanisms 21
6.3 Reporting 21
7. SKILLS AND CAPACITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN 22
8. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND UTILISATION 24
9. MEAL WORKPLAN AND MATRIX 26

9.1 Costed MEAL work plan 27
9.2 MEAL matrix 28
ANNEX 1 Indicator reference sheets.....35

ABBREVIATIONS

GVL	Greater Virunga Landscape
GVTC	Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration
ICCN	Institut Congolais pour la Conservations de la Nature.
IGCP	International Gorilla Conservation Programme
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OECD – DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OWODAT	Online Wildlife Offenders Database
QI	Quality Improvement
SMART	Spatial monitoring and Reporting Tool
ToC	Theory of Change
TORs	Terms of References
TSP	Transboundary Strategic Plan

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Overview of the Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning Plan

The Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration together with state and non-state partners across Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) developed a Transboundary Strategic Plan (TSP) for the Greater Virunga Landscape (GVL). This Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL) plan is developed for the Greater Virunga Landscape Transboundary Strategic Plan (TSP) for the period 2024 to 2033. The plan provides for systematic processes for data and information generation for evidence-based decision-making, ensuring that interventions are effective and efficient. The plan will ensure that there is accountability to stakeholders by demonstrating the impact and effectiveness of the implementation of the TSP. It will support mechanisms for continuous improvement of the TSP through the identification of areas for improvement and optimization.

The plan contains several elements organised under different sections, including overview of the TSP, Scope of MEAL plan, monitoring plan, evaluation and research plan, coordination and implementation of the MEAL plan, skills and capacity for implementation of the plan, knowledge management and utilisation, summarised MEAL matrix, summarised costed MEL work plan and MEAL matrix.

The MEAL plan provides a framework for stakeholders to measure results of the TSP guided by the following vision, goal, mission and objectives.

Vision: Greater Virunga Landscape sustainably conserved for the benefit of people and nature.

Mission: To enhance the sustainable conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity and improve people's well-being through peaceful, strengthened transboundary collaboration in the Greater Virunga Landscape

Goal: A resilient and sustainable ecosystem and quality of life of people in the Greater Virunga Landscape by 2033.

The objectives include:

1. Strengthen transboundary collaboration and coordination for effective natural resource management in the GVL.
2. Improve community advocacy and empowerment.
3. Support the development and implementation of innovative finance and investments for effective conservation of GVL.
4. Improve governance and effective management of transboundary natural resources in the GVL.

The TSP was developed through an extensive stakeholder consultative process with technical inputs provided by various stakeholders from DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. This was followed by the development of this MEAL plan by the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) technical working group in May 2024. The implementation of this plan will be the responsibility of GVTC and other key partners in the Greater Virunga Landscape, as described under section six (6).

1.2 Background and Context of the Transboundary Strategic Plan

The GVL stretches across the borders of the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. The landscape covers the areas around seven protected areas and one wildlife reserve that straddles the boundaries of the three countries. The protected areas include Virunga National Park in DRC, Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, and the following national parks in Uganda: Queen Elizabeth National Park, Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Rwenzori Mountains National Park and Semuliki National Park.

The landscape is characterised by transboundary ecosystems and cross border protected areas (Figure 1). There are three World Heritage Sites (Rwenzori Mountains NP, Bwindi Impenetrable NP and Virunga NP), a Man and Biosphere Reserve (Queen Elizabeth NP), and a Ramsar Site (Lake George and Kazinga Channel). Within this landscape is the Virunga NP, which is Africa's oldest park, gazetted in 1925, and is one of the most biodiverse landscapes in Africa. The Virunga-Queen Elizabeth NP savannas support a large biomass of wild ungulates. The rich biodiversity is a result of diverse habitats, which are determined by the

elevation which ranges from 600 - 5,100 metres. This biodiversity hotspot is home to more than 150 Albertine Rift endemic species. The landscape plays a crucial role in regulating regional water resources and supports the livelihood of millions of people living within its boundaries.

The natural resources found in the GVL drive the three countries' national socio-economic development through agriculture, forestry, wildlife tourism, fisheries and provide many other ecosystem goods and services. However, the landscape is currently experiencing multiple pressures, which include habitat loss, armed conflict in eastern DRC, poaching and illegal trade in wildlife and timber products, human-wildlife conflict, inadequate coordination at policy and site levels, climate change, extractive industries and infrastructure development, wildlife diseases, and invasive species, among others.

Recognising the urgency of addressing these challenges, Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration (GVTC) partnered with government agencies of three Partner States, World Wide Fund for nature (WWF), development partners and civil society organisations to develop a comprehensive strategy for the GVL. The GVL TSP builds upon previous efforts, acknowledging both successes and challenges. It represents a renewed commitment to safeguarding the GVL's natural treasures while ensuring the well-being of its communities.

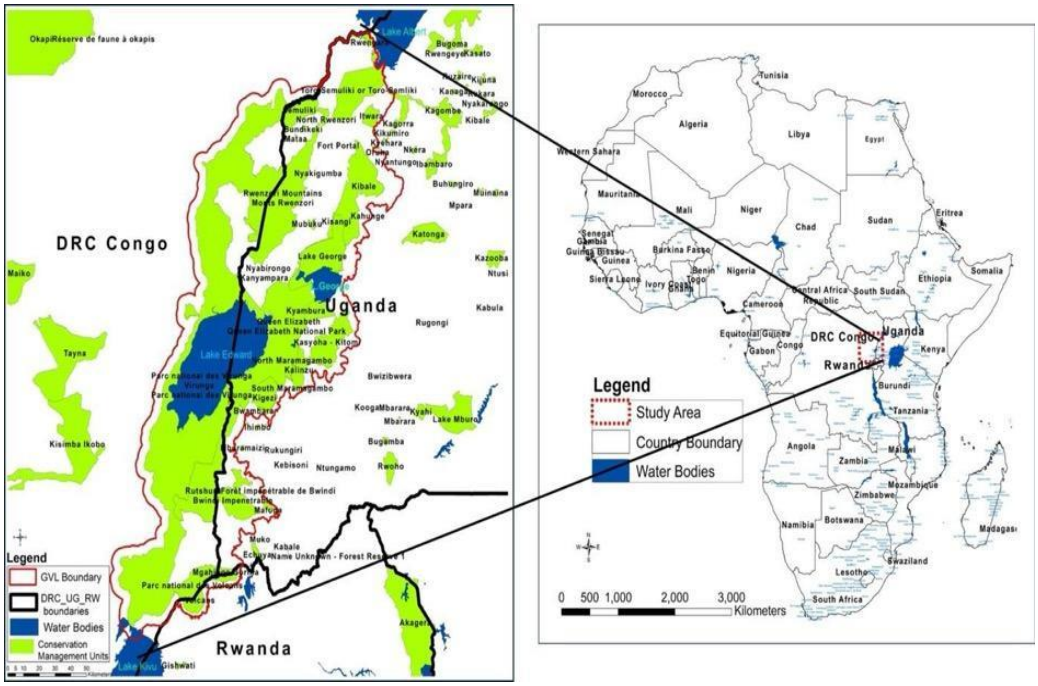


Figure 1. Location of the Greater Virunga Landscape in Africa.

1.3 Rationale of the Greater Virunga Landscape Transboundary Strategic Plan

The rationale behind the GVL TSP is multifaceted, driven by the urgent need to address converging threats and capitalise on emerging opportunities. Without immediate and unified action, the future of irreplaceable natural resources in the GVL hangs in the balance. The GVL TSP recognises the interconnectedness of the landscape and prioritises a collaborative, transboundary approach for sustainable management. The Plan seeks to tap into the potential of GVL to promote sustainable development that empowers local communities to participate and benefit from conservation.

This TSP does not reinvent the wheel. It builds upon the foundation laid by previous TSPs and the efforts of stakeholders, acknowledging past successes and learning from shortcomings. By incorporating feedback from stakeholders and utilising the latest knowledge, the plan strives to chart a more effective and inclusive path for the future of the GVL.

1.4 Purpose of the Transboundary Strategic Plan

The purpose of the GVL TSP is to provide a framework for coordinated implementation of strategic interventions among different partners and stakeholders to ensure effective conservation and sustainable development in the GVL. It builds on previous strategies for the landscape and priorities through, 1) Stakeholder Inclusivity, 2) Joint Effort and 3). Strategic Coordination: The TSP strengthens coordination among GVTC and its partners, ensuring alignment for maximum impact. This collaborative approach aims to secure a long-term commitment from stakeholders for lasting impact.

2. SCOPE OF MONITORING EVALUATION ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING PLAN

2.1 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MEAL PLAN

The purpose of the MEAL plan is to establish a strategic framework that guides the collection, analysis, utilisation, and dissemination of data. This framework is designed to

facilitate the monitoring of progress and to support informed decision-making throughout the execution of the strategy.

Specifically, the MEAL plan will serve the following objectives:

1. **A tool for assessing the implementation progress of the GVL strategy:** This MEAL plan is developed to enable GVL actors to systematically assess the progress of the GVL strategy and take corrective action where necessary. Some components of the plan, such as the evaluation and learning plans will help in articulating issues to do with learning and adaptation. A review of annual performance data will assist the GVL actors in Quality Improvement (QI), where the team will constantly pause to review how well the GVL initiatives are being implemented and what can be done better. This culture of continuous QI will be a helpful approach to evaluate the ongoing systems and processes geared toward achieving the GVL goal.
2. **Evidence-based decision making:** The overall purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to provide information and data that will facilitate continuous performance improvement and help achieve planned results through informed decisions. Therefore, the MEAL plan is designed to ensure that management decisions are informed by the best available performance information. Consequently, progress will be measured at all levels of the result framework with more focus on outcome and goal levels.
3. **Communications.** The MEAL plan will generate information that can be used to communicate the impact of the conservation initiatives in the GVL, challenges, strengths, and adaptive management measures to various stakeholders. In addition, the MEAL plan also describes information products such as reports and other written documentation that the project will produce and disseminate to its stakeholders, internal and external audiences.
4. **Learning and Adaptive Management.** The MEAL plan is a vital tool for informing learning and for designing interventions that address the actual conservation needs in the GVL. It will help identify lessons of general applicability, learn how different approaches affect outcomes and impacts, and identify what works well or what does not work.

2.2 Framework elements of the MEAL plan

The MEAL plan comprehensively addresses the essential elements of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning. It facilitates a unified understanding of the limits of the various components of the plan.

Monitoring

Monitoring will be carried out primarily for the benefit of the GVTC, Rwanda Development Board (RDB), Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), non-state partners and other stakeholders to facilitate improved performance and help achieve planned results. Monitoring will specifically.

- Enhance accountability, credibility, and transparency with external donors and other accountability bodies/stakeholders.
- Strengthen ownership of the work by partners and stakeholders, and therefore sustainability of the work for the future.
- Support the overall effort to professionalise GVTC work and help raise funds, build brand awareness, and publish informed results.
- Help GVTC actors assess their total contribution to the conservation effort in the GVL.

Much of the monitoring resources will be focused on Result Based monitoring, which allows the partners to determine progress achieved in relation to the planned vision, goals, objectives, and assumptions. This will help answer questions like: *Have we made any difference, and can we demonstrate it? Is our theory of change working?*

Monitoring will be done at both partner and landscape level. At partner level, each organisation will follow-up on the progress of implementation of their milestones which will be aggregated at the landscape level.

Evaluation

The evaluation process will consist of both scheduled/ pre-determined periodic evaluations and ad hoc assessments. The periodic evaluations will commence with baseline assessments to establish benchmarks linked to outcome and goal level indicators, which will serve as the foundation for ongoing performance measurement. A mid-term evaluation

will occur after five years of implementing the TSP, and an endline evaluation will be at the end of the 10-year implementation period. These evaluations will be conducted by highly competent external entities, which will be jointly identified by all partners and will use a utilisation-focused approach. Additionally, these evaluations will include a review of critical assumptions to assess their relevance and to identify any new assumptions that may be necessary for optimising the strategy's Theory of Change. Ad hoc evaluations will be conducted as specific needs arise during the implementation process.

Evaluations will adhere to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD–DAC) criteria, which encompass efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, coherence, and relevance. A comprehensive explanation of these criteria is provided in the evaluation plan. The findings from these evaluations will generate vital lessons for adaptive management.

Accountability

Accountability will be promoted through transparent communication with all stakeholders, alignment of operations with both partner and donor compliance standards, responsiveness to stakeholder feedback, ideas, suggestions, complaints, and commitment to providing information on how decisions are taken; and participation of stakeholders in initiating and/or defining the parameters for conducting MEAL.

Accountability will ensure transparency, integrity, and responsiveness in program management, enabling stakeholders to demonstrate results, address challenges, and uphold ethical standards.

Learning

Learning involves the process of generating knowledge and insights from monitoring and evaluation activities, incorporating lessons learned into program design and implementation. Learning facilitates adaptive management and continuous improvement by using evidence-based insights to enhance program effectiveness, inform decision-making, and promote innovation and best practices.

Monitoring, and in particular, evaluations, are vital elements for informing learning in the organisations and for designing future projects of similar geographic or thematic scope. It will help identify lessons of general applicability, how different approaches affect outcomes and impacts, and what works well or does not and why.

Learning will be deliberate and guided by a learning plan/matrix detailing the learning themes, questions, sources of information, methods of data collection, analysis, and dissemination as indicated in the learning plan.

2.3 Guiding Principles for the MEAL

The MEAL plan has been developed taking into consideration the following principles:

Mainstreaming*:* MEAL will be mainstreamed into the GVL strategy and individual programs/ projects, and initiatives. All these initiatives will define routine indicators and reporting formats that will guide tracking the progress made, which will eventually be merged and reported at the strategic plan level.

Decentralisation: Analysis and storage of data will take place at the level where it is collected. Simple analytical tools will be introduced for this purpose.

Simplicity: The ease with which data are collected, analysed, and reported remains crucial. Data collected at different levels will be entered into a database. However, data collection will also benefit from modern technology to facilitate national data aggregation, analysis, and report generation. In this case, mobile data collection will be preferred, where smartphones will be used to collect the data for efficiency and real-time data access.

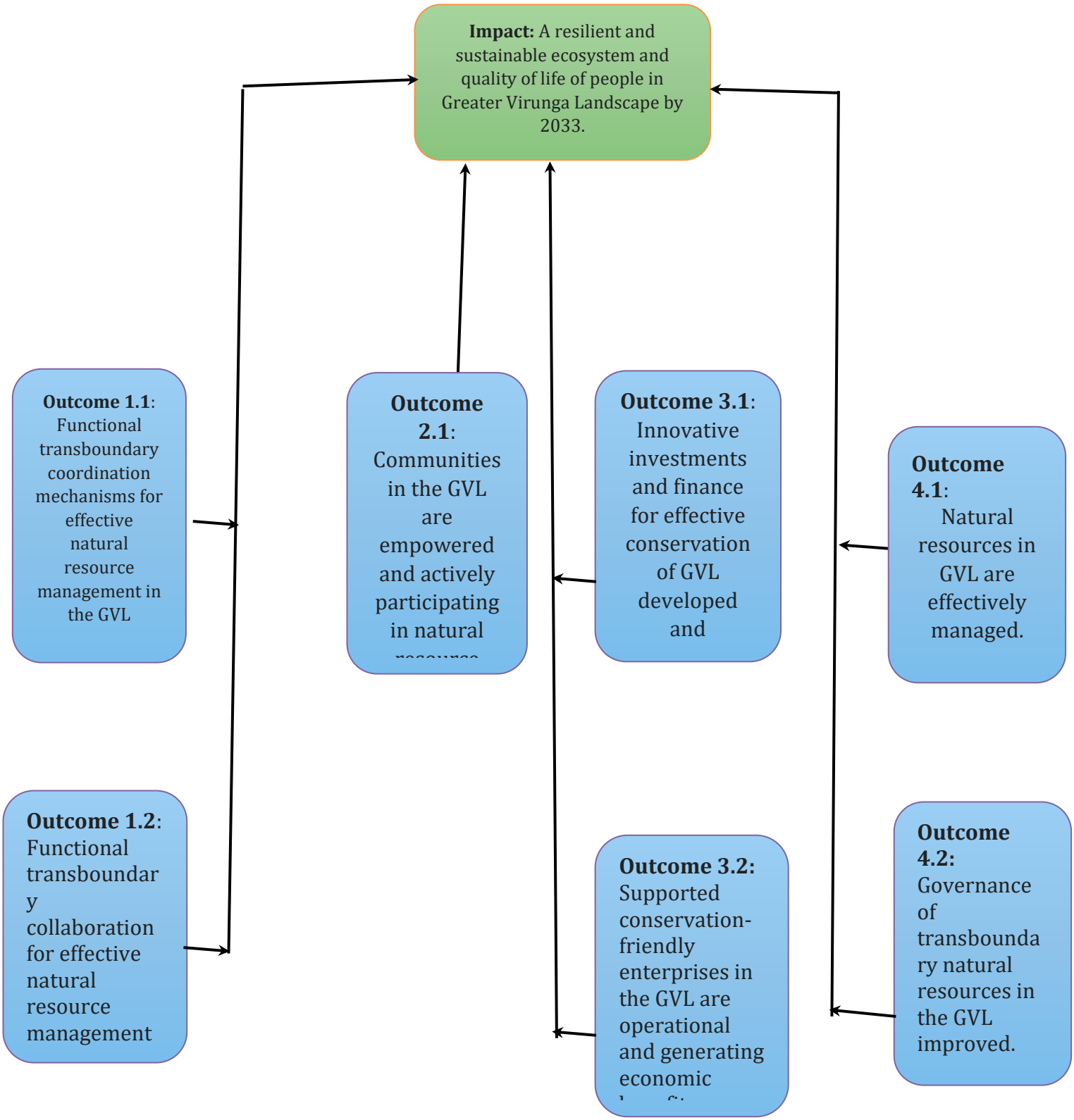
Adaptive management: The data collected will be used for programmatic and technical decision-making. There will be a direct link between data collection, analysis, reporting, and decision making at all levels.

Transparency and Accountability: Data analysis and reports will be open and participatory for stakeholders and participants at all levels through program review meetings, communication materials, regular reporting, results sharing, publications, etc. Those in charge of data collection, analysis, reporting, and policy decisions will ensure that the reports meet the minimum quality requirements for informed decision making.

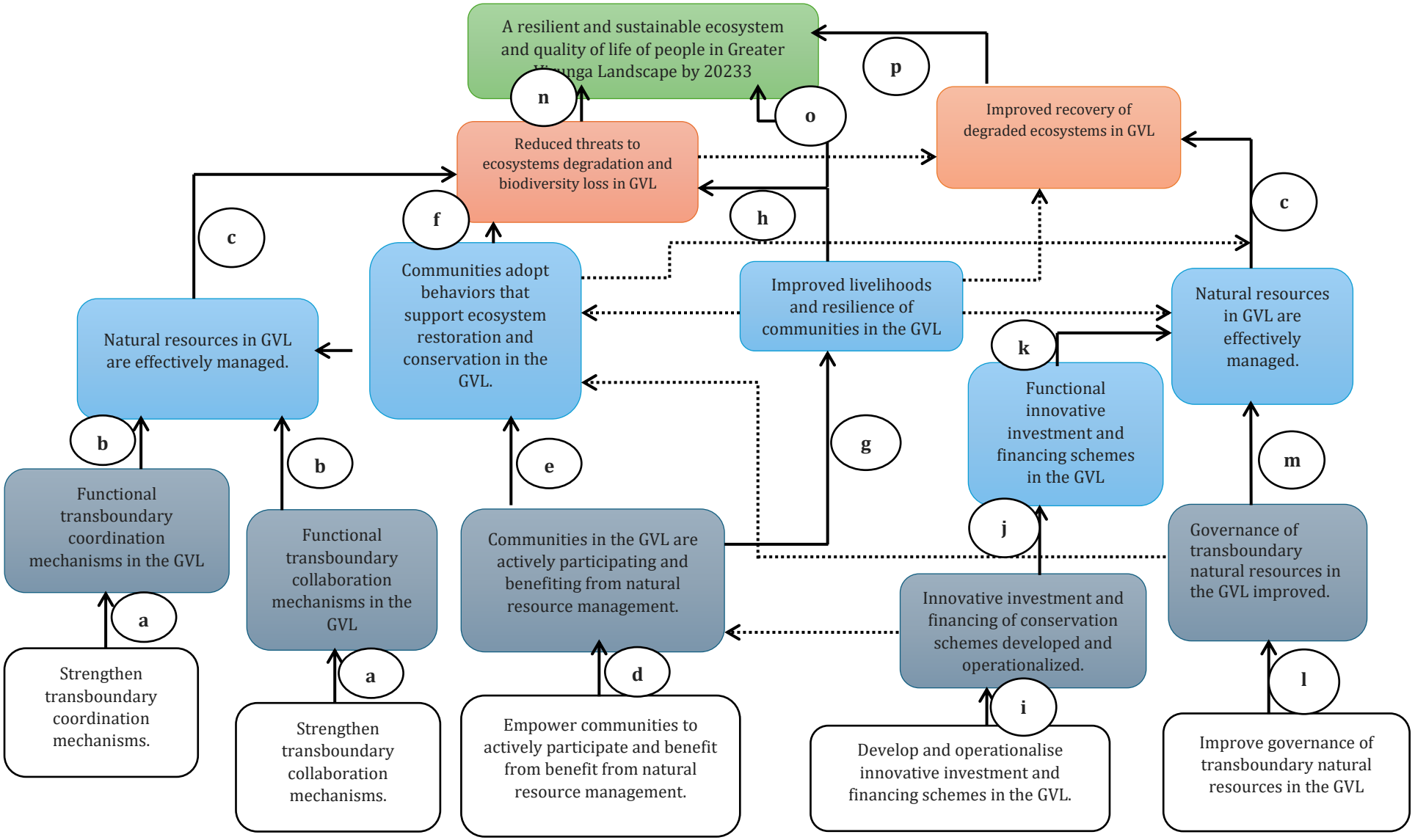
3. OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSBOUNDARY STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRAM LOGIC

The results framework and theory of change (ToC) in the following sections provide an overview of the program. The results framework shows the outcomes contributing to the impact. These outcomes are linked to the objectives stated in section 1.1. The ToC diagram highlights the different pathways to achieve the overall goal of the TSP. The pathways follow from interventions through the different intermediary results. The assumptions that can enable the results to be achieved are denoted in the ToC. The development hypotheses providing a narrative description of the ToC is also provided.

3.1 Results Framework



3.2 Theory of Change



3.3 Key Assumptions of the Theory of Change

a. All stakeholders are willing and participate in transboundary coordination and collaboration engagements.
b. All stakeholders will provide the necessary support required to sustain the coordination and collaboration efforts.
c. Effective natural resource management practices will be adopted and sustained across the three countries.
d. Communities are willing to participate and engage in natural resources management.
e. Community attitudes will positively change towards natural resources and biodiversity conservation.
f. Pro-conservation practices adopted by the community will be sustained to significantly reduce reliance on the ecosystem to survive.
g. Community participation will generate for them economic benefits that they will diversify.
h. Communities will have access to sustainable alternative livelihood sources to reduce reliance on ecosystems for survival.
i. The business community, private sector, and financial institutions will be willing and motivated to support the investment and financing of innovative conservation enterprises.
j. The required amount of funding will be generated to sustain innovative conservation enterprises.
k. The business community, private sector, and financial institutions will be willing to collaborate with all stakeholders in GVL to effectively manage natural resources through innovative investment and financing.
l. The responsible stakeholders will have the minimum resources to effectively monitor and strengthen systems, structures and policies required to effectively manage resources.
m. The effective monitoring and strengthening of systems, structures and policies required to effectively manage natural resources will be sustained by the relevant stakeholders.

n. The GVL will experience minimal threats to the ecosystem and biodiversity loss for a prolonged period of time.
o. Communities will have access to sustainable and resilient livelihood options.
p. The restoration activities will encounter minimal threats for a prolonged period.

3.4 Development Hypotheses

If transboundary coordination and collaboration in Greater Virunga Landscape (GVL) are strengthened, then there will be functional coordination and collaboration mechanisms in GVL and then natural resources in GVL will be effectively managed, leading to a reduction in threats to ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss in GVL and finally a resilient and sustainable ecosystem and quality of life of people in GVL.

If communities in the GVL are empowered to participate and benefit from natural resource management, then they will adopt behaviours that support ecosystem restoration and conservation, leading to a reduction in threats to ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss and, finally, a resilient and sustainable ecosystem and the quality of life of people in GVL.

If communities in the GVL are empowered to participate and benefit from natural resource management, then they will adopt behaviours that support ecosystem restoration and conservation, leading to a reduction in threats to ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, then improved recovery of degraded ecosystem and finally, a resilient and sustainable ecosystem and the quality of life of people in GVL.

If communities in the GVL are empowered to participate and benefit from natural resource management, then there will be improved livelihoods and resilience of communities, leading to improved recovery of degraded ecosystems and finally, a resilient and sustainable ecosystem and quality of life of people.

Improved livelihoods and resilience of communities in GVL will lead to a reduction in threats to ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, improved recovery of degraded ecosystems and finally, a resilient and sustainable ecosystem and the quality of life of the people in GVL.

If innovative investment and financing conservation schemes are developed, then there will be functional innovative investment and financing conservation schemes and an

improvement in the livelihood of communities in GVL, leading to reduced threats to ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss and finally, a resilient and sustainable ecosystem and the quality of life of people in GVL.

If innovative investment and financing conservation schemes are developed, then there will be functional, innovative investment and financing conservation schemes, and natural resources in GVL will be effectively managed, leading to the improved recovery of the degraded ecosystem and, finally, a resilient and sustainable ecosystem, and the quality of life of people in GVL.

If governance of transboundary natural resources in GVL is improved, then there will be effective management of natural resources in GVL leading to improved recovery of the degraded ecosystem and, finally, a resilient and sustainable ecosystem, and the quality of life of the people in the GVL.

4. MONITORING PROCEDURE

The Monitoring Plan details data management processes and procedures that will be employed to collect, process, analyse, report, and utilise information. Performance monitoring data, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative data, will be generated throughout the implementation of the GVL Strategic Plan to track progress and achievement of strategic objectives, reflecting on challenges, and guiding adaptive management.

4.1 Data Management Processes

Data Collection Procedures:

Data will be collected systematically at regular intervals to determine the progress on implementation of the TSP. Regular progress data collection will primarily be on input, activity, and output level indicators. This will involve generating progress implementation reports detailing the interventions implemented, resources utilised, and results achieved. Periodic data collection will concentrate on measuring changes at the outcome level, including progress in transboundary collaboration and coordination, reductions in threats to ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, enhanced recovery of degraded ecosystems, and improved community livelihoods and resilience. Some of these

assessments will include the MET, Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP) surveys, Socio-Economic Survey, and periodic qualitative learning studies, among others. However, certain data for monitoring outcome-level changes will be routinely generated using existing electronic systems and platforms like the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) and Online Wildlife Offenders Database (OWODAT), with reports compiled annually. All tools for data collection, analysis, and reporting will capture disaggregated data in line with the requirements of the performance indicators. GVTC will take the responsibility of overseeing the collection, analysis, and reporting of all this information, with support from various partners and stakeholders.

Data Storage

Data generated on progress and results during implementation of strategic plan will be stored safely and electronically. Quantitative data will be stored in password-protected digital systems including SMART, OWODAT, Mobile Applications and other MS-Excel created databases, and only those authorised to access and use this data will have the access rights. In addition, soft copy program folders for filing all progress reports and documents will be created and clearly labelled to allow easy access to only those authorised. The GVL Coordinator, Programme Coordinator and Monitoring Evaluation Learning Advisor will be responsible for the safety and integrity of all progress data and information. Clear guidelines to access and use of this information will be developed as part of the data management standard operating procedures and protocols and used to restrict or prevent unauthorised access and use.

Data Analysis and Reporting

The data will be managed and analysed using electronic systems including MS-Excel and other digital systems such as SMART, OWODAT and Mobile Applications to generate reports. Further analysis will be conducted in Excel to generate descriptive and inferential analyses for both progress data and results. Qualitative data from both routine and periodic data sources will be analysed using qualitative analysis software. The data collected during implementation of the strategic plan will be reported in the form of updates on a quarterly and semi-annual basis by various partners including GVTC to inform corrective actions and any necessary adjustments. Comprehensive progress reports will be generated annually to

document progress and achievement of outcomes and inform planning, learning and reflection, and decision making.

Data Dissemination and Use

The teams will share data and information to facilitate effective utilisation of information for corrective action and making any necessary adjustments to increase the likelihood of achieving outcomes and the goal. This will be through semi-annual, and annual review and reflection meetings, and by sharing quarterly updates and annual progress reports with partners and donors. Further, routine progress updates will be shared on email and discussed using online platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Zoom.

The reviews and reflections will generate knowledge and insights that will be used for adaptive programming, corrective action and decisions regarding budget and funding streams modifications, adjustments to indicators where necessary, targets and interventions or strategies, contract modifications and other emerging issues or contextual changes.

4.2 Feedback Mechanisms

GVTC and partners will employ semi-annual, and annual review meetings to provide feedback relating to progress and achievements, emerging and contextual issues, gaps and challenges to partners and stakeholders including donors and propose strategies to address them on a continuous basis. For accountability, these feedback mechanisms will be documented and action plans with strategies, timelines, and institutions responsible will be developed to ensure commitment in following up and addressing existing gaps and challenges. Online engagements such as emails, phone calls, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Zoom will also be used to provide feedback to support instant corrective actions and decisions.

4.3 Data Quality Assurance and Control

TSP Implementing Team with technical guidance from the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisor, will conduct internal data quality assessments on all indicators defined in the MEL Matrix to ensure data quality assurance. This will entail a set of internal and external mechanisms and processes to ensure that data meets the dimensions of data quality

including validity, reliability, precision, timelines, and integrity. Data quality assessments measures will include planning for quality, controlling quality, and implementing remedial actions to improve quality. To ensure data meets quality standards, Data Quality Assessments (DQAs) shall focus on the availability of M&E structures and capacities both at partner and GVTC level, a clear understanding of indicators, data collection tools, data management processes and feedback mechanisms. Specifically, to achieve quality assurance, the team will ensure the following are in place.

Components required to ensure data quality	**Component description**
I. MEAL structure, functions, and capabilities	GVTC will encourage partners to assign a MEAL focal person with clearly defined MEAL responsibilities to support implementation of the TSP MEAL Plan.
	GVTC and partners will ensure that M&E and data management staff receive regular capacity building support to strengthen skills in data management including data collection, entry, analysis, reporting, sharing and utilisation.
II. Indicator definitions and reporting guidelines	Operational indicator definitions for all indicators are established in the Performance Indicator Reference Sheets, continuously reviewed, and updated based on available evidence. Partners will ensure that all staff managing data have a common understanding of the indicator definitions.
	GVTC and partners will also ensure that there is clear documentation of what is reported, to who, and how and when reporting is required.
III. Data collection and reporting forms/tools	GVTC with guidance from the MEL Adviser will ensure there are standard data collection and reporting forms that are systematically used by both GVTC and partners.

Components required to ensure data quality	Component description
	The team will also ensure that data collected is recorded into the forms and databases with sufficient precision and detail to measure relevant indicators.
	All source documents will be kept in soft copies and made available following clearly defined protocols to increase access to information by authorised users.
IV. Data management processes	There will be clear documentation of steps for data collection, aggregation, and manipulation.
	Data quality challenges will be continuously identified, and mechanisms put in place for addressing them.
	GTVC and partners will put in place and follow clearly defined procedures to identify and reconcile discrepancies in reports.
	GTVC and partners will put in place and follow clearly defined procedures to identify and reconcile discrepancies in reports.
V. M&E capacity and system feedback	Efforts will be made to ensure all MEAL actors have a clear understanding about the roles and how data collection and analysis fits into the overall program logic.
	The Program Coordinator and MEAL Advisor will ensure the team has a clear understanding of the theory of change and MEAL Plan.
	Clearly defined feedback mechanisms to improve the quality of data and reports will be established.

5. EVALUATION AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Evaluation will be conducted to provide systematic and periodic review of progress towards achievement of GVL TSP objectives, outcomes, and impact. One off evaluations/ studies may also be conducted to answer specific emerging questions. This will involve systematic processes of collection, analysis and reporting of data and information collected from stakeholders as may be determined. Baselines, mid-term progress evaluation and end-term of TSP evaluation will be conducted.

5.1 Establishment of Baseline Information

A baseline will be conducted at the start of the TSP implementation to establish benchmark information upon which progress will be determined. It will be conducted by GVTC and partners, with technical oversight from the MEAL working group. The MEAL Expert/Advisor will design an appropriate methodology to be presented to the MEAL working group for consideration. This will involve reference to existing reports and other readily available information from different sources/partners, data collection and analysis, and reporting. The final baseline report will be reviewed by the MEAL working group and presented to GVL stakeholders for validation.

5.2 Mid-Term and End-Term Evaluations

At the end of year 5 of the TSP implementation, an external mid-term evaluation will be conducted. The main purpose will be to assess the continued relevance of the GVL TSP, and the progress made towards achieving planned interventions, outcomes, goals and impact. This will provide an opportunity for GVTC and partners to document lessons learned, highlight major challenges, and create opportunities for adaptive management within the remaining lifespan of the TSP.

Relatedly, at the end of implementation of the GVL TSP in year 10, an external end-term evaluation will be conducted to assess the results and impact of the TSP, document new knowledge and innovations, and draw lessons learned for future GVL TSP.

The evaluations will follow the OECD-DAC Evaluation Criteria[1]. The terms of references (TORs) developed by the MEAL Experts will specify the evaluation criteria.

- **Relevance of the interventions in the TSP:** This will assess the extent to which the design of various interventions was appropriate to bring about the desired change in targeted elements of the GVL TSP.
- **Efficiency:** This will examine how resources/inputs such as funds, expertise, and time have been converted to results. It will also assess the relationship between deliverables and inputs including 'value for money.'
- **Effectiveness:** This will measure the extent to which GVL TSP objectives and outcomes have been achieved. It will assess the robustness of TSP results and key factors (internal/external/enabling conditions) affecting the TSP targets.
- **The Impact:** This will be a measure of all significant effects of TSP interventions, positive or negative, expected, or unforeseen for biodiversity and people.
- **Sustainability:** This will assess whether the benefits of GVL TSP interventions are likely to continue after the implementation period.
- **Coherence:** This will determine whether TSP interventions are compatible with both internal and external frameworks such as national and international strategies, guidelines, and policies.

5.3 Research

From time to time, the MEL working group will commission research activities to establish facts and lessons to be incorporated in implementation of the GVL TSP in line with a clear learning agenda. GVTC and partners will identify relevant topics as well as relevant partners to undertake the research including associated funding requirements. The research may focus on topics around key issues such as climate change, species conservation, livelihoods, land-use, illegal wildlife trade, Human Wildlife Conflict, and freshwater management, among others. Products from the research work will be validated by relevant stakeholders

[1] https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm

and will be disseminated through official publications, journals, GVTC and partner websites, the media, and any other platforms as may be determined.

6. COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MEAL PLAN

6.1 Management of the MEAL plan

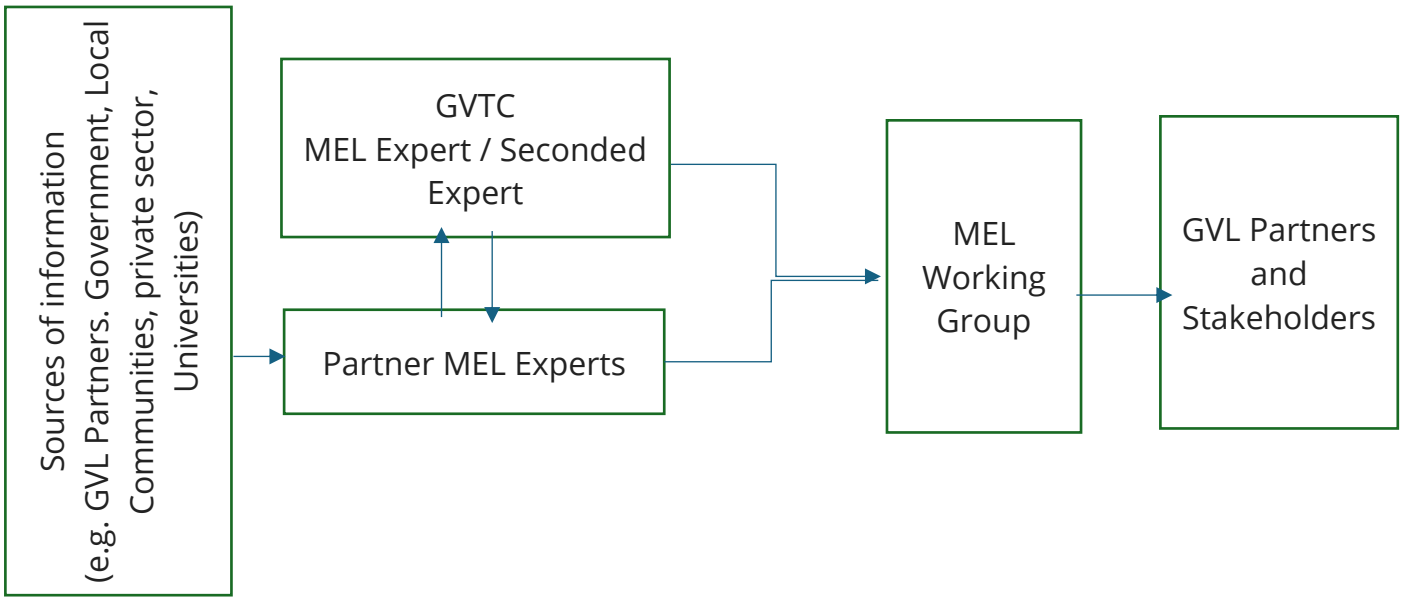
GVTC will be responsible for day-to-day implementation and management of the MEAL plan under the oversight of the Executive Secretariat. The day-to-day execution of the MEAL plan will be managed by a MEAL Expert to be hired/located in GVTC. Collaborating partners will equally second a MEAL expert to support GVTC to deliver on the implementation of the MEAL Plan, working alongside the MEL focal person in the GVTC secretariat. Each partner will assign a MEAL focal person who will be in regular contact with designated MEAL experts within/ seconded to GVTC. Based on specific activities, GVTC may also seek expertise from different partners to support different elements of the MEL plan such as surveys, creation of database and data collections tools, analysis, and reporting, among others.

6.2 Coordination mechanisms

A MEAL working group composed of GVTC, government institutions and partners will be established to regularly discuss MEAL plan implementation, including planned activities, lessons learned and challenges requiring collaborative interventions. This group will be convened by GVTC on a quarterly (virtually) and annual basis (physically) with financial and technical support from different partners. The MEL working group will ensure that appropriate quality assurance mechanisms are established and operational during all stages of MEL plan implementation. In particular, GVTC and partners will establish mechanisms for data and information sharing and dissemination, to enable timely decision making for effective monitoring of implementation of the TSP.

6.3 Reporting

A schematic flow diagram has been developed to provide a clear visual flow of information and reporting among key constituencies for the MEAL plan. The primary sources will be from diverse sources, including government institutions, local governments, local communities, universities, private sector and GVL partners.



7. SKILLS AND CAPACITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

The operationalization of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Plan for the Greater Virunga Landscape (GVL) requires a coordinated, transboundary approach to enhance its capabilities and solidify practices. This effort is central to the strategic objectives laid out in the Greater Virunga Landscape Transboundary Strategic Plan (TSP) and the MEL framework, both of which emphasise the importance of regional cooperation and capacities for effective natural resource management.

Capacity building will occur on three levels: organisational, systems, and individual. At the organisational level, MEAL capacity strengthening will be decentralised, with the MEAL Focal Person disseminating the MEAL plan among management teams to secure necessary buy-in. Additionally, an organisational level capacity building program may be developed to augment the capabilities of GVTC and partner organisations, focusing on their systems, personnel, and resources to ensure comprehensive support for the TSP MEAL work. Moreover, the MEAL plan includes provisions for equipping the secretariat with essential tools and financing to establish a central platform for simplified data access. The previously established but currently inactive GVL Centre of Excellence will be revitalised to serve as a centralised hub for collecting, storing, and accessing all GVL data and information.

Recognizing that capacity building is an ongoing, non-linear process, the MEL plan will explore various strategies to enhance the ability of partner staff to effectively implement the TSP MEAL plan. These strategies include:

Central MEAL coordination: A dedicated MEAL Expert will be based at the GVTC Secretariat to oversee and synchronise MEAL activities across all GVL partners. This expert will be responsible for ensuring robust data collection, storage, analysis, reporting, and dissemination standards are maintained across board. This role is crucial in maintaining a high standard of data integrity and facilitating informed decision-making.

Assignment of MEAL Focal persons: Each GVL partner will designate a MEAL Focal Person to facilitate MEAL activities locally and report to the MEL Expert at the Secretariat. This strategy aims to decentralise MEAL responsibilities, thus enhancing efficiency and ownership at the partner level. The MEL plan will detail the expected level of effort from these focal persons, considering their roles and responsibilities within their respective institutions.

Development and standardisation of MEAL tools: In collaboration with all GVL partners, standardised and digitised data collection tools will be developed to ensure consistency and accuracy in data gathering. These tools will allow for real-time data access and integration across the landscape. This initiative will also support partners with essential equipment like smartphones and GPS devices for field data collection.

MEAL Capacity needs assessment: Following the establishment of staffing and MEAL frameworks, a comprehensive capacity needs assessment will be conducted for all partners involved. This will include the development of an automated capacity needs assessment tool, which will be administered virtually. Insights from this assessment will guide a detailed capacity building plan, highlighting skill gaps, priority training areas, and timelines for capacity development initiatives.

Annual multi-stakeholder MEAL capacity building workshops: Annual multi-stakeholder capacity building workshops are integral to the GVL MEAL plan, designed to enhance the capabilities of strategy implementers in effectively tracking and evaluating the GVL strategy's progress. These workshops will serve as vital platforms for unveiling and discussing MEAL tools with a broader range of stakeholders, ensuring comprehensive engagement and feedback. Additionally, they provide a crucial opportunity to review and

refine the operationalization of the MEAL plan, allowing for the identification and integration of necessary adjustments or additional tools to optimise the strategy's implementation. On completion of each workshop, a MEAL action plan will be developed and tracked in the subsequent workshops.

External MEAL Consultant: GVTC will engage external consultants to perform a comprehensive data needs assessment, identifying specific data requirements and recommending a system capable of effectively managing GVL TSP data. The consultant will collaborate with all partners to review existing data management systems and determine the most suitable system for integration. Thereafter, an external consultant will be periodically enlisted to evaluate the effectiveness of the data management systems and processes, pinpointing gaps, and devising strategies to enhance data management capabilities.

Technical Backstopping: Led by the Secretariat's Expert, the MEAL team will undertake follow-up visits to review the GVL interventions executed by various partners. These visits aim to provide essential MEAL technical support to the implementing teams, ensuring that their activities are strategically aligned with the TSP goals.

Knowledge exchange and network building: The GVL will foster continuous learning and networking through organised workshops, training, and events focused on MEAL practices. This initiative will promote knowledge sharing on adaptive management, systems thinking, and the integration of MEAL into organisational learning processes, thereby strengthening MEL capacities across the GVL network.

8. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND UTILISATION

Learning and adaptation will form the cornerstone of TSP Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning processes. Knowledge will be derived from the analysis and reflective discussions based on both monitoring and evaluation data. The learning process will be ongoing throughout the strategic plan's implementation and will commence at partner levels during their quarterly review and reflection meetings. The matters deliberated and actions agreed upon during these partner-specific learning and reflection sessions will be documented by the partners, including the progress of implementing the agreed-upon actions. These issues and actions will then inform the joint GVL TSP semi-annual review and reflection meetings.

The topics discussed and actions decided upon during the joint GVL Strategic Plan semi-annual learning and reflection meetings will also be documented, including the progress of implementing the actions.

Additionally, at the start of each implementation year, an annual learning and reflection meeting will be convened, bringing together various stakeholders within GVL, including partners, government institutions from the three countries, and donors. The issues and actions arising from the partners specific and joint GVL Strategic Plan learning, and reflection meetings will constitute most of the discussions during the Annual Learning and Reflection Meetings. GVTC will ensure that the recommendations and/or actions formulated during these sessions are systematically and structurally implemented and followed up on by employing innovative approaches, such as developing action plans with clear recommendations, implementation strategies, and designated responsible individuals or institutions, tailoring information products to suit different target audiences, emphasising the problem and the necessity for action using evidence, and fostering trust by generating credible information and evidence.

Furthermore, a systematic learning process will be implemented, guided by a set of learning questions developed across the four pillars. Terms of reference will be crafted to steer learning activities, encompassing data collection, analysis, reporting, sharing, reflection, and utilisation. In-depth learning studies and other research endeavours will be commissioned as needed to generate insights, with midterm and end-term Evaluations reinforcing this process at five-year and ten-year intervals, respectively. GVTC will rigorously uphold an evidence-based approach to foster continual improvement and decision-making, as well as to adapt and respond to evolving issues and contextual shifts. The learning and reflection events will yield knowledge and perspectives utilised for adaptive management, corrective measures, and decisions regarding adjustments to budget allocations, modifications to funding streams, refinements to Theory of Change (ToC), GVL TSP, indicators, targets, interventions or strategies, contract adjustments, and other emerging issues or contextual changes.

9. MEAL WORKPLAN AND MATRIX

The MEAL work plan provides a schedule of key activities to implement and the cost to achieve the objectives of the MEAL plan. The key activities include baseline survey, routine and regular monitoring, special surveys, review meetings, mid-term and end of term evaluations. This plan also provides a MEAL matrix which summarises what will be monitored and evaluated and how. The matrix covers the results to measure, performance indicators, their baseline values and targets over the ten-year period. In addition, the matrix also shows the frequency of data collection and the method that will be applied, data source and the partner institutions responsible for collection and analysis.

9.1 Costed MEAL work plan

Activities	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Cost (USD)
Baseline survey, and	X										
Routine/regular monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	350,000
Special surveys			X			X			X	X	100,000
Review meetings	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	300,000
M&E capacity building	X	X				X	X				150,000
NEAL data bases		X	X								50,000
Mid-term					X						172,000
End of term evaluations										X	173,000

9.2 MEAL matrix

Results hierarchy	Indicators	Baseline	Overall Target	Frequency of data collection	Data collection method	Data source	Person/Institution responsible
Impact: A resilient and sustainable ecosystem and quality of life of people in the Greater Virunga Landscape by 20233.	Percentage change in the population of selected flagship species.	Lions- To be determined (TBD) Elephants- TBD Gorilla - TBD Chimps- TBD Hippos- TBD	Targets for each species will be determined after the baseline is established	After 5 years	Large mammal census	Census Report	Protected Area Authorities (PAAs)
	Percentage change in species richness	TBD	Target will be determined after the baseline is established	After 5 years	Indicator Species Surveys	Indicator Species Survey Report	PAAs, WCS, DFGFI, ITFC, WWF
	Percentage change in vegetation cover	TBD	Target will be determined after the baseline is established	After every 2 years	Remote Sensing and GIS Analysis (RSGA)	RSGA Report	GVTC, PAAs, WCS, DFGFI, ITFC, WWF

Results hierarchy	Indicators	Baseline	Overall Target	Frequency of data collection	Data collection method	Data source	Person/Institution responsible
	Change in wellbeing Index.	TBD	Target will be determined after the baseline is established	After 5 years	Wellbeing Survey	Wellbeing Survey Report	Partners
Outcome 1.1: Functional transboundary coordination mechanisms for effective natural resource management in the GVL	Number of formal agreements on transboundary conservation initiatives.	1 (Gorilla Tourism Revenue Sharing Agreement)	4 (Information sharing, data sharing protocols, GVTC & NGOs Collaboration MoU, Wildlife Conflict Management)	Annually	Review of developed agreements	Progress Report	GVTC
	Number of joint actions/operations between partner states and other stakeholders	2	6 per year	Annually	Review of actions/operation report	Progress Report	GVTC and Partners

Results hierarchy	Indicators	Baseline	Overall Target	Frequency of data collection	Data collection method	Data source	Person/Institution responsible
Outcome 1.2: Functional transboundary collaboration for effective natural resource management in GVL.	Number of Member States that have ratified the treaty at Head of State level.	0	3	After every 2 years	Review proceedings of the Council of Ministers Meeting	Council of Ministers Meeting Proceedings	GVTC
	Number of functional transboundary information sharing platforms	1(Forest Monitoring Tool)	3 (E.g. IWT, Centre of Excellence (COE))	Annually	Review of progress report	Progress Report	GVTC, WWF and WCS
	Proportion of interviewed GVL stakeholders reporting an improvement in collaboration.	TBD	60%	After every 3 years	Satisfaction Survey	Survey Report	GVTC and Partners
Outcome 2.1: Communities in the GVL are empowered and actively participating in natural resource management.	Percentage of community groups actively engaged in conservation decision-making processes.	TBD	60%	After every 3 years	Survey	Survey Report	GVTC and PAAs
	Number of community-led conservation-friendly initiatives implemented.	TBD	TBD	Annually	Review of progress report	Progress Report	PAAs and partners

Results hierarchy	Indicators	Baseline	Overall Target	Frequency of data collection	Data collection method	Data source	Person/Institution responsible
	Proportion of Households satisfied with their level of involvement in Natural Resource Management	TBD	80%	After every 3 years	Survey	Survey Report	PAAs and partners
	Number of policies and / or key decisions positively influenced by community groups.	3 (Gorilla levy from 5% to 10% in Uganda, Revenue Sharing from X% to 30% in DRC, Free electricity within the GVL)	6	Every 2 years	Review of progress report	Progress Report	PAAs and Partners
Outcome 3.1: Innovative investments and finance for effective conservation of GVL developed and functional.	Number of innovative investment and financing mechanisms developed and/or identified.	3 (Payment for ecosystem services, BMCT Trust Fund, Virunga Alliance)	6 (E.g. Carbon, Wildlife credits, Eco-tourism, Impact investing etc)	Every 3 years	Review of progress report	Progress Report	WCS, WWF

Results hierarchy	Indicators	Baseline	Overall Target	Frequency of data collection	Data collection method	Data source	Person/Institution responsible
	Amount of funding raised from diverse sources for conservation and sustainable development in the GVL.	TBD	TBD	Every 3 years	Review of progress report	Progress Report	GVTC, PAAs and Partners
Outcome 3.2: Supported conservation-friendly enterprises in the GVL are operational and generating economic benefits.	Proportion of targeted households with improved economic benefits generated from conservation-friendly enterprises.	TBD	60%	Every 3 years	Socio Economic Survey	Survey Report	GVTC and Partners
	Percentage change in incidences of human wildlife conflict.	TBD	TBD	Annually	Review HWC Reports	HWC Reports	GVTC, PAAs and Partners
	Proportion of special interest persons (women, youth and PWDs) participating in conservation enterprises.	TBD	TBD	Annually	Review of progress report	Progress Report	GVTC and Partners

Results hierarchy	Indicators	Baseline	Overall Target	Frequency of data collection	Data collection method	Data source	Person/Institution responsible
Outcome 4.1: Natural resources in the GVL are effectively managed	Percentage change in incidences of poaching of flagship species (Lions, Elephants, Pangolins, Hippos, Gorillas, Chimps).	TBD	TBD	Annually	Review of Wildlife crime reports from TRAFFIC	Wildlife Crime Reports from TRAFFIC	GVTC, WWF and WCS
	Percentage change in incidences of trafficking of wildlife and wildlife products of flagship species. (Lions, Elephants, Pangolins, Hippos, Gorillas, Chimps).	TBD	TBD	Annually	Review of Wildlife crime reports from TRAFFIC	Wildlife Crime Reports from TRAFFIC	GVTC, WWF and WCS
	Percentage of wildlife trafficking cases successfully prosecuted	TBD	TBD	Annually	Review of Wildlife crime reports from TRAFFIC	Wildlife Crime Reports from TRAFFIC	GVTC, WWF and WCS
	Percentage change in area encroached	TBD	TBD	Annually	Remote Sensing and GIS Analysis (RSGA)	RSGA Report	GVTC and Partners
	Area in square kms maintained.	TBD	TBD	Annually	Remote Sensing and GIS Analysis (RSGA)	RSGA Report	GVTC and Partners

Results hierarchy	Indicators	Baseline	Overall Target	Frequency of data collection	Data collection method	Data source	Person/Institution responsible
	Degraded area in hectares restored.	TBD	TBD	Annually	Remote Sensing and GIS Analysis (RSGA)	RSGA Report	GVTC and Partners
Outcome 4.2: Governance of transboundary natural resources in the GVL improved	Transboundary frameworks for Natural Resource Management established and operational.	2 (Chief Wardens Forum, Regional Technical Committees)	6	Annually	Review of progress report	Progress Report	GVTC and Partners
	A Framework for conflict management in place and functional.	0	1	Annually	Review of progress report	Progress Report	GVTC and Partners
	Number of land use and zoning plans developed and/or reviewed and implemented.	TBD	TBD	Annually	Review of progress report	Progress Report	GVTC and Partners
	Number of key conservation issues addressed through a multi-sectoral and/or multi-stakeholder approach.	TBD	TBD	Annually	Review of progress report	Progress Report	GVTC and Partners

ANNEX 1 Indicator reference sheets

(Refer to a separate booklet of indicators)