



CONSERVATION
FINANCE ALLIANCE



Protected Area Finance Capacity Needs: Results of a Global Survey

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Protected Areas Finance Working Group Conservation Finance Alliance and Global Park Solutions 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Nature underpins the global economy and is essential for human life on the planet. Protected areas (PAs) are widely recognized as the cornerstone of conservation policy and action and are essential to maintaining ecosystem functionality.² Regardless of the value of nature and the fact that protected areas have been shown to be extremely effective at maintaining nature, the world is in the midst of a global biodiversity crisis where 1 million species are at imminent risk of extinction due to human activities.³ In 2010, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, and its 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, including specific targets on protected areas expansion and management, to inspire broad-based action in support of biodiversity and to reverse negative biodiversity trends. But as of 2021 none of the Aichi targets had been achieved.⁴ The world has another opportunity to define and act upon a roadmap to address the biodiversity crisis through the CBD when countries will convene once again in Kunming, China, to establish a set of new biodiversity targets for 2030. Among these goals may be a target to expand protected areas to cover 30% of both land and sea, which over 50 countries have already voluntarily agreed to.⁵

Although these ambitious targets are essential for maintaining nature, historically efforts to protect biodiversity in protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures are constrained by a lack of sufficient and/or reliable financial resources. Many PAs lack capacity for even basic financial accounting and reporting, let alone expertise to evaluate and implement effective and innovative sources of finance.⁶

Protected area management effectiveness and finance are inextricably linked. A 2017 study by Gill et al.⁷ showed that limited staff and budget capacity were the greatest hindrances to Marine Protected Area (MPA) effectiveness. This was the first large-scale empirical study that rigorously demonstrated the clear connection between PA finance and PA conservation outcomes. These financial constraints are not limited to developing regions and other studies have demonstrated that the majority of MPAs in the Mediterranean (64%) also lack sufficient funds to implement their management plans.⁸ The classic studies

² Bicknell, Jake E., et al. "Designing protected area networks that translate international conservation commitments into national action." *Biological conservation* 214 (2017): 168-175.

³ IPBES. 2019. Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. S. Díaz, J. Settele, E. S. Brondizio E.S., H. T. Ngo, M. Guèze, J. Agard, A. Arneth, P. Balvanera, K. A. Brauman, S. H. M. Butchart, K. M. A. Chan, L. A. Garibaldi, K. Ichii, J. Liu, S. M. Subramanian, G. F. Midgley, P. Miloslavich, Z. Molnár, D. Obura, A. Pfaff, S. Polasky, A. Purvis, J. Razzaque, B. Reyers, R. Roy Chowdhury, Y. J. Shin, I. J. Visseren-Hamakers, K. J. Willis, and C. N. Zayas (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. XX pages.

⁴ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2020) *Global Biodiversity Outlook 5*. Montreal. ISBN: 9789292256883

⁵ The Campaign for Nature, 2021. 50 Countries Announce Bold Commitment to Protect at Least 30% of the World's Land and Ocean by 2030. <https://www.campaignfornature.org/50-countries-announce-bold-commitment-to-protect-at-least-30-of-the-worlds-land-and-ocean-by-2030>

⁶ MPA News, 2021. Why we should be optimistic about the future of MPA finance: Interview with Amílcar Guzmán Valladares and Viviana Luján Gallegos of Wolfs Company. <https://mpanews.openchannels.org/news/mpa-news/how-post-covid-world-will-be-different-mpas-and-how-practitioners-can-plan-ahead-next>

⁷ Gill, David A., et al. "Capacity shortfalls hinder the performance of marine protected areas globally." *Nature* 543.7647 (2017): 665.

⁸ Binet, T., Diazabakana, A., "Hernandez, S. 2015. Sustainable financing of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean: a financial analysis". Vertigo Lab, MedPAN, RAC/SPA, WWF Mediterranean. 114 pp.

of protected area finance from Balmford and colleagues⁹ revealed that most protected areas considered their funding status to be insufficient for successful implementation of the PA objectives. In parallel, there has been an explosion of innovation and success stories of different conservation finance mechanisms globally – especially those that can address the PA finance gap¹⁰ and better align incentives of government, private companies and individuals, and civil society to reduce pressures on PAs and thus reduce the financing needs. The question arises then, do PA practitioners have adequate training and capacity in conservation finance tools and methods to improve their situation for the future?

A survey of protected area practitioners was developed to better understand their needs for training and capacity building for protected area financing. Questions included demographic information, attitudes about protected area finance, and the importance of certain protected area finance skills, including proposal and grant writing, accessing international donor financing, business planning, etc. Finally, the survey asked respondents how likely they would be to access or make use of several tools and trainings to advance their skills in protected area finance.

About the Conservation Finance Alliance

The Conservation Finance Alliance (CFA) exists to promote awareness, expertise, and innovation in conservation finance globally. The newly reformed CFA Protected Areas Finance Working Group is a leading group of practitioners advancing global thinking and planning for sustainable financing of protected area systems. To better inform the future work of the CFA Working Group on Protected Areas Finance and the wider conservation community, a needs assessment was developed in early 2019 to identify gaps in the capacity of protected area practitioners (including managers, academics, NGOs, policy makers and other important stakeholders) in fundraising, business planning and proposal writing among practitioners.

The results of the survey presented in this report will support the CFA Working Group on Protected Area Finance (WGPAF) to develop targeted protected area finance capacity development and training programs. The global community may also use these results in their own capacity building and training programs for protected area finance. As noted at the end of the report, the CFA is launching a call for partnerships at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille in 2021 to develop and implement a global initiative to build capacity in protected area finance.

⁹ E.g. Balmford, A., P. Gravestock, N. Hockley, C.J. McClean, C.M. Roberts, 2014, The worldwide costs of marine protected areas, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 101 (26) 9694-9697; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.0403239101

¹⁰ Meyers, D., Bohorquez, J., et al., 2020. Conservation Finance: A Framework. *The Conservation Finance Alliance*.

THE SURVEY AND RESPONDENTS

Survey and sampling

A draft survey was developed in English and then distributed to a group of self-selected members of the CFA Working Group on Protected Area Finance for comment. A final version was developed based upon the comments and then translated into Spanish and French. The three surveys were then converted to an online format using Google Forms and opened for respondents on March 1, 2019.

Emails directing potential respondents to complete the survey were then sent through the CFA's communication network and various global, regional, and national email listservs in the appropriate regional and national languages. The survey was closed to respondents on July 20th, 2019.



Figure 1. The online survey

Survey responses

A total of 130 valid responses were received for the survey: 105 in English, 17 in Spanish and 8 in French. 25% of respondents are members of the CFA. A further breakdown of respondents follows based upon geographic representation, organizational affiliation, and other responses. As respondents were self-selected and not a random sample, the results of this survey do not necessarily represent all protected area practitioners. Conclusions derived from the survey reflects the 130 respondents and can be extrapolated only with caution.

Description of respondents

Geographic representation is widely distributed (Figure 2). The majority of respondents to the survey live in North America (23%), Europe (17%), Africa (16%), Asia (15%), and Latin America (13%). The remainder came from the South Pacific (8%), Caribbean (5%), and Indian Ocean (2%), and the Middle East (1%). This representation parallels neither population levels nor protected area coverage and was likely influenced by language limitations, with the survey not having been translated to any Middle Eastern, Central or East Asian languages (Arabic, Russian, and Chinese namely). There was comparatively strong representation from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

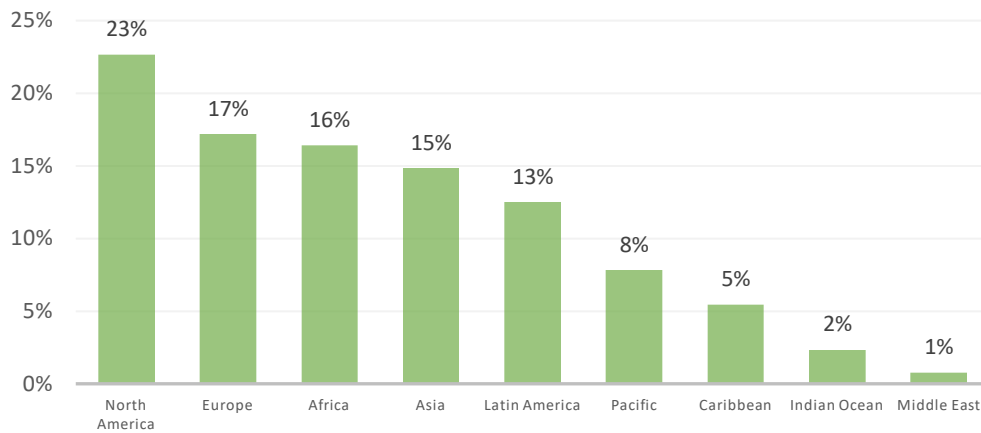


Figure 2. Regions where respondents live

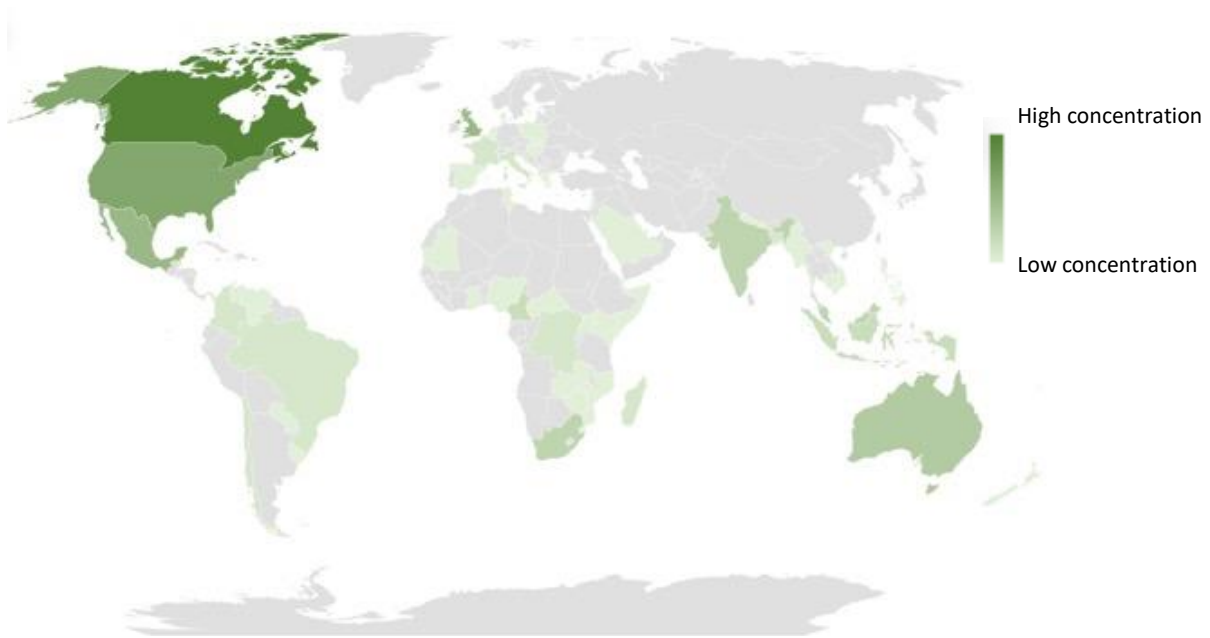


Figure 3. Countries where respondents live

Respondents were asked in which countries they work. They could list up to 3 countries, so the total number of responses exceeds the number of total respondents. Responses were weighted, placing a greater value on the first country of work, less value on the second country and less value again for the third country (Figure 4).

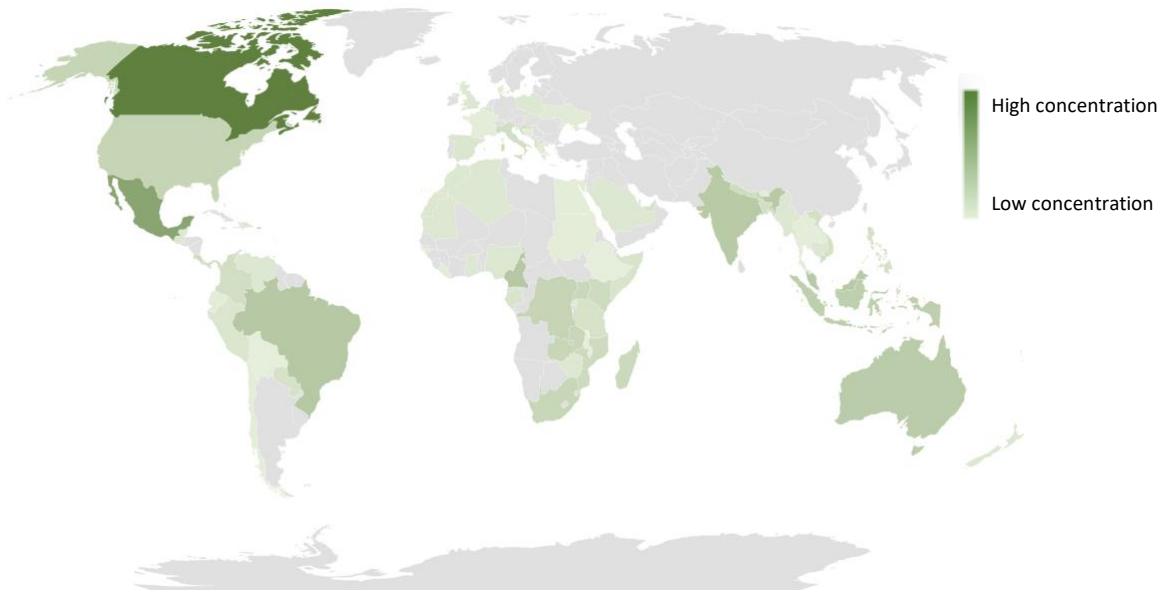


Figure 4. Countries where respondents work

Aggregating these respondents into regions, we find that Africa is the most common work location for respondents (n = 180), followed by North America (n = 123), Asia (n = 118) and Latin America (n = 94). See Figure 5.

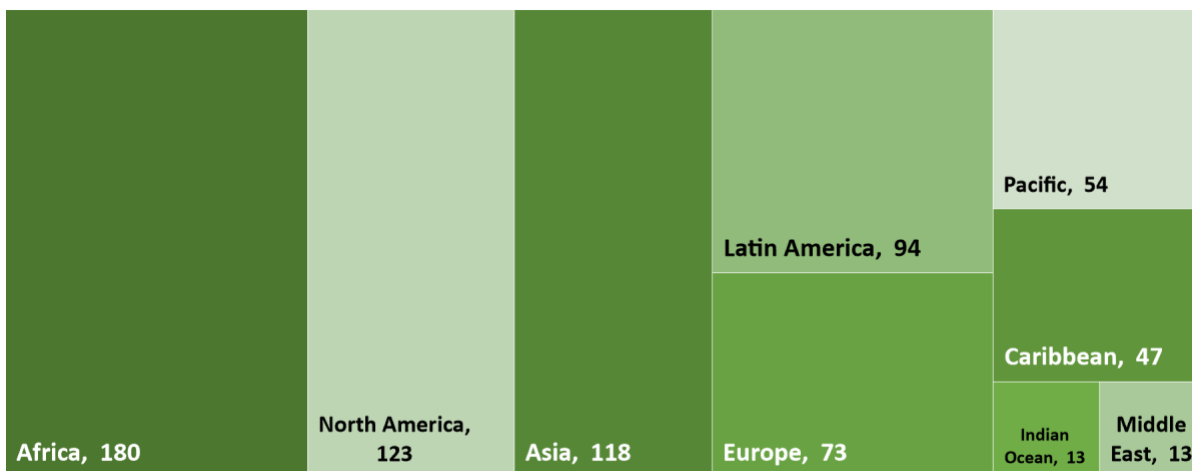


Figure 5. Region where respondents work

Among the 130 respondents, the most common area of residence is North America, and the most common area of work is Africa.

In terms of the type of organization respondents work for, the highest percentage (34%) worked with NGOs, the next most common organization type was government (20%), followed by consultants (18%), university or research institutions (8%), and intergovernmental organizations (8%, see Figure 6). The NGO group mainly work in Asia (31%), Africa (27%) and Latin America (16%). The majority of government

respondents work in North America (49%) and Latin America (17%). Respondents identifying as “Consultant” work globally – Asia (28%), Africa (26%) and Latin America (16%).

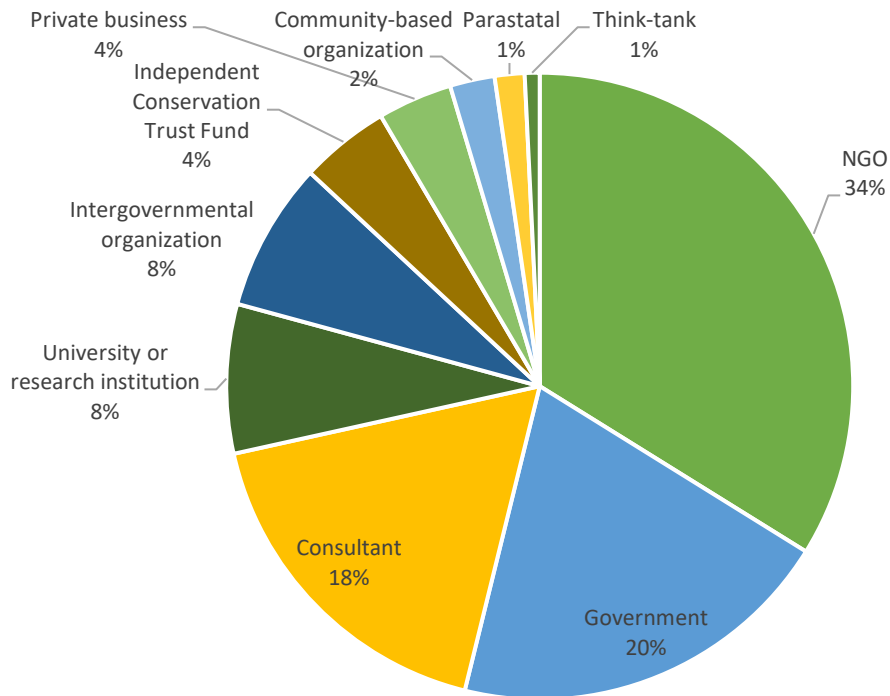


Figure 6. Organizational affiliation of respondents

Respondents were asked to list protected area activities they are involved with in their work (respondents could select multiple activities). The most common activities were “Management planning” (63%), followed by “Capacity development” (57%), “Project development” (54%) and “Community based conservation” (54%).

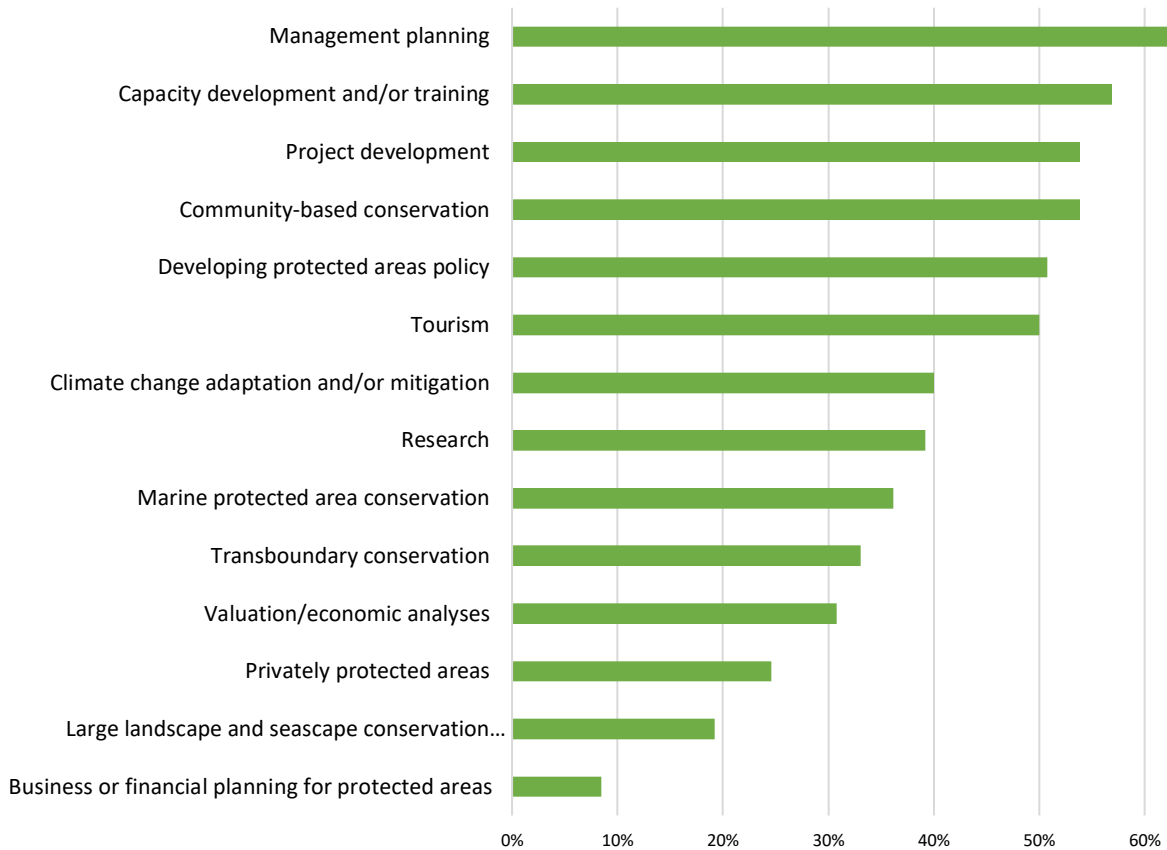


Figure 7. Respondent activities

Respondents generally had significant professional experience working in nature conservation. 75% of respondents had at least 10 years of professional experience and more than half (57%) had 15 years or more years of experience.

Although respondents had strong tenure working in PA management, their experience with PA finance was more limited. About a half of the respondents had 5 or fewer years with finance while roughly ¼ had 15 years or more. Regionally, respondents from Latin America had the greatest experience (measured as those with 15 or more years' experience), followed by North America and Africa. See Figure 9.

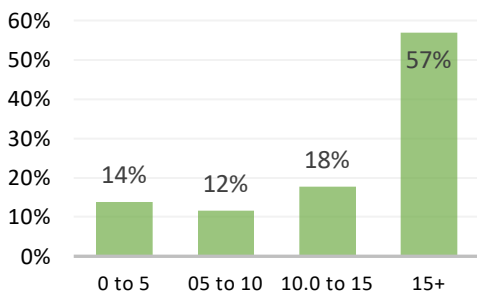


Figure 8. Years working in nature conservation

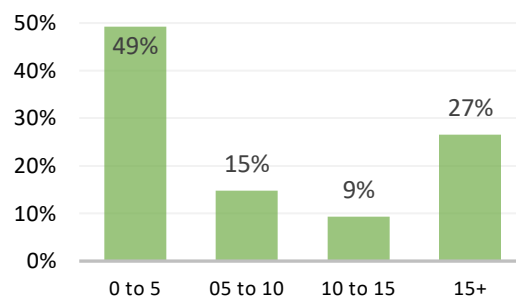


Figure 9. Years working in protected area finance

SURVEY RESULTS¹¹

Adequacy of funding for protected areas

Similar to the comprehensive global studies cited in the introduction, an overwhelming percentage of PAs likely do not receive adequate financing. A total of 92% of respondents stated that the primary protected area where they worked had insufficient financing to achieve their goals and objectives. The remaining 8% stated that there is sufficient financing (

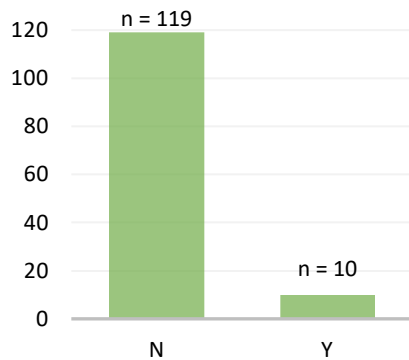


Figure 11).

Of the 92% of respondents reporting funding inadequacy, 80% of them (or 74% of the total sample) reported that funding levels were at or below 50% of the target funding needed for effective PA management (see Figure 10).

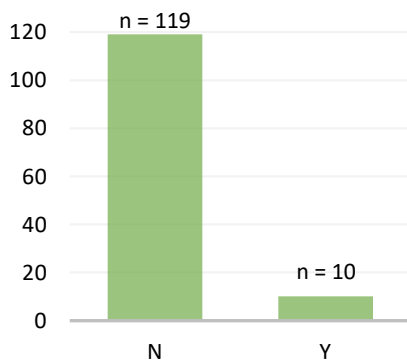


Figure 11. Funding adequacy

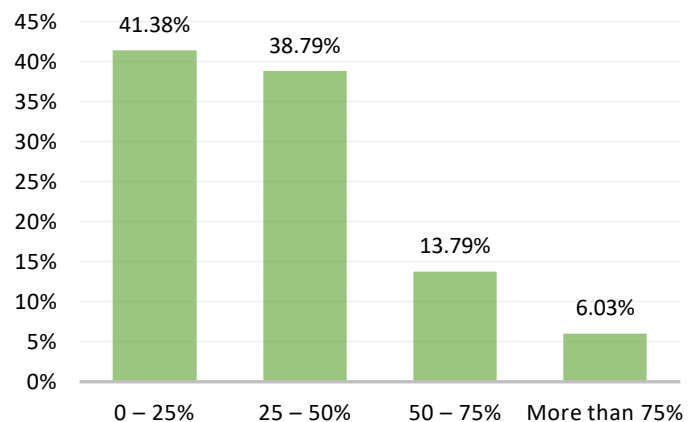


Figure 10. Funding levels

¹¹ Note: Due to the low response rates from the Indian Ocean and Middle Eastern regions (n=2 for each region), these regions have been removed from all regional analyses, but they are retained for all global analyses.

Regional variation

100% of respondents from the Pacific (n=9) and North America (n=21) reported inadequate financing for the primary protected areas where they work. Other regions also reported inadequate funding for protected areas including Africa (n=24), Latin America (n=15), Asia (n=17), the Caribbean (n=6) and Europe (n=8). The Middle East and Indian Ocean only had 2 responses each and are not included.

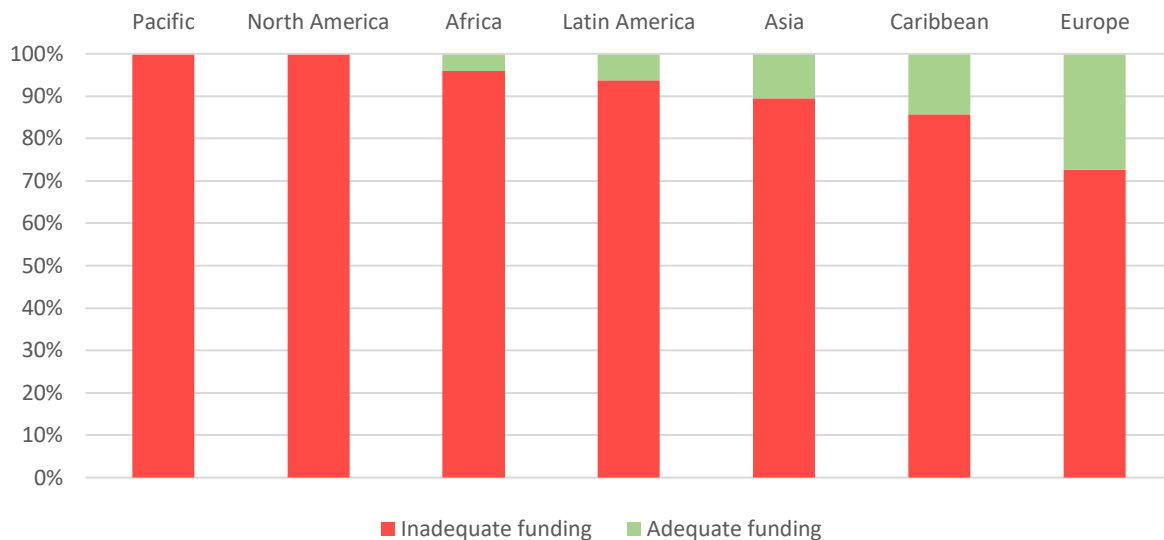


Figure 12. Regional variation in adequacy of funding for protected areas

Attitudes about protected area finance

When asked what is more important to achieving your conservation goals in the protected area(s) where you work, “Increasing funding” or “Reducing pressures on the protected area(s) such as mining, deforestation, poaching, overfishing, etc.”, there was a nearly even split between the importance of “Increasing funding” (48%), and the importance of “Reducing pressures” (52%). This indicates the clear need to address both primary issues with PA finance and PA finance capacity development.

Regional variation

All respondents working in the United States and Canada reported that increasing funding was more important than reducing pressures, while in Mexico it is a lower 70%. In contrast, respondents working in Europe would rather reduce pressures (66.8%) than increase funding (33.2%), but they also reported significantly higher funding levels. Lastly, respondents working in Africa reported they are more concerned with reducing pressures (64.6%) than increasing funding (35.4%) despite their also reporting less adequate funding (Figure 13).

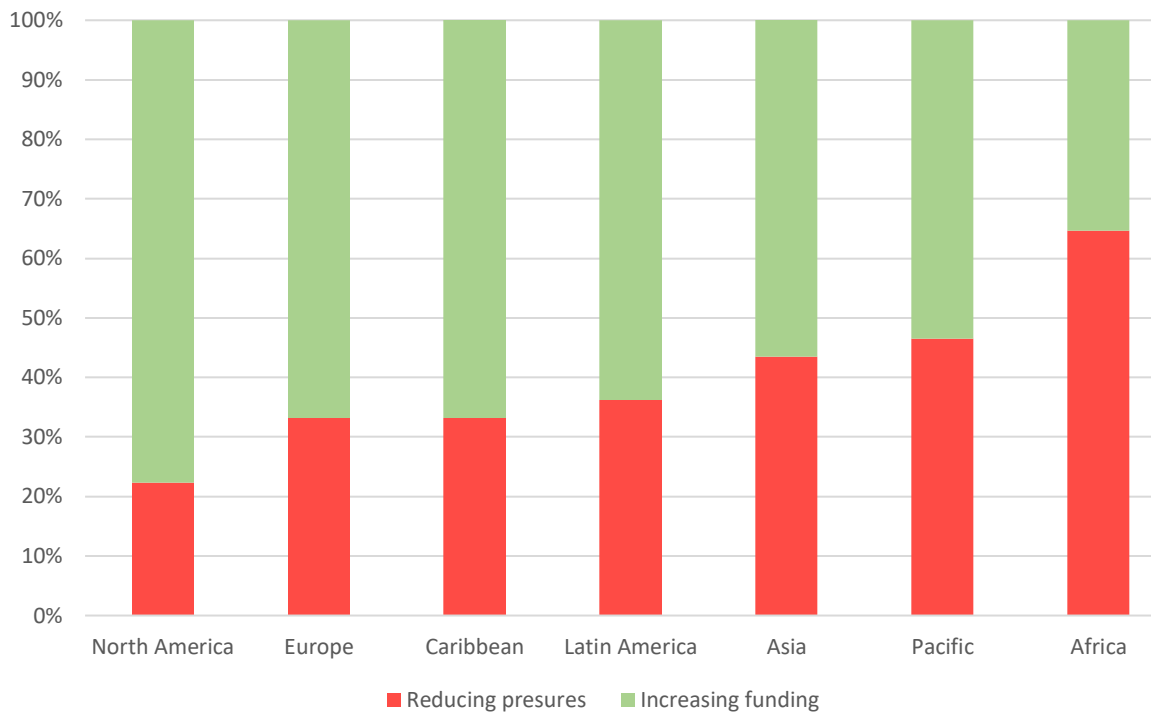


Figure 13. Regional variation in attitudes about protected area finance – reducing pressures vs. increasing funding

Perspectives to achieving effective conservation and financial sustainability

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of several approaches to achieving effective conservation and financial sustainability in the protected areas where they work on a scale from 1 to 4, from not important to very important. Respondents provided ratings for each approach separately. The results show that “managing funds in a cost effective and efficient manner,” “building a diverse funding portfolio,” and “factoring finance into protected area planning and management” as the three most important approaches (Figure 14).

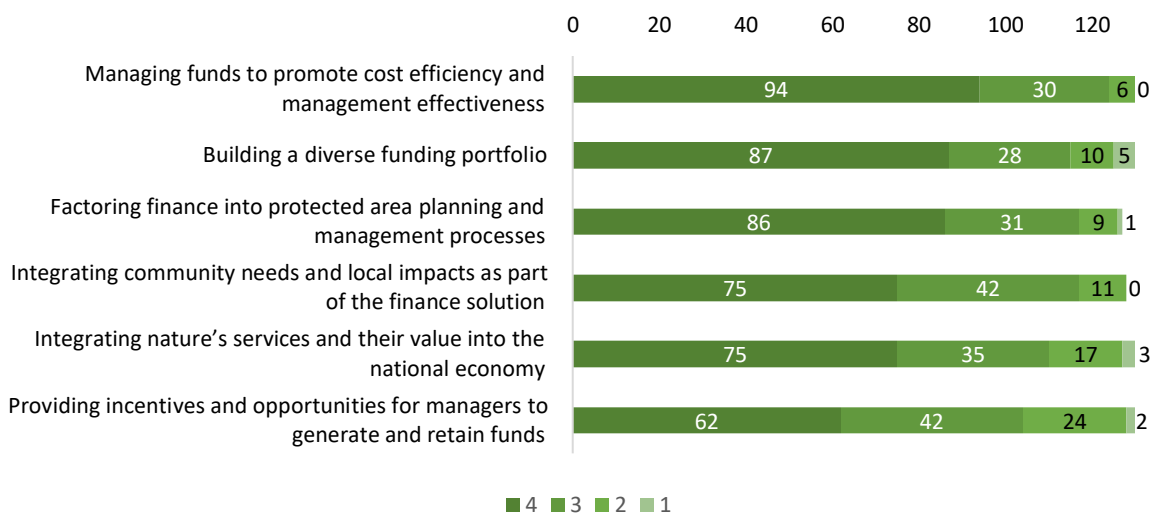


Figure 14. Importance of approaches to achieving effective conservation and financial sustainability in protected areas where respondents work. Darker green colors represent higher ranking.

Skills needed to strengthen protected area finance capacity

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of different protected area finance skills for strengthening protected area finance in the areas where they work, and the results are presented in Figure 15. The top 2 skills rated as most important include “Annual budget planning” (n=75) and “Management plan development” (n=74). Although the rankings show broad interest in almost all skills, it is interesting that some general planning topics are included in the top scores. Other strongly ranked skills included “Proposal and grant writing” (n=72), “Establishing public/private partnerships” (n=71), “Business and finance plan development” (n=70), “Accessing international donor financing” (n=69), and “Working with private sector/business” (n=66, see Figure 15). All these skills represent very practical tools that could greatly enhance the management effectiveness and financing of protected areas.

Specific mechanisms or sources of income, like entry and activity fees (n=49), tourism development (n=47) and developing concessions (n=41) were scored less highly among respondents. There could be several explanations for this pattern. For example, many practitioners may already have a strong baseline understanding of tourism-based approaches, or that broader administrative and planning expertise may be relevant for a wider diversity of financing approaches and therefore applicable to a broader diversity of PAs, many of which may not be candidates for tourism at all. Exploring these potential outcomes should be the focus of future research. But nonetheless, there is still clear demand among many practitioners for further capacity building and education on these specific tourism-based approaches, and they should not be overlooked.

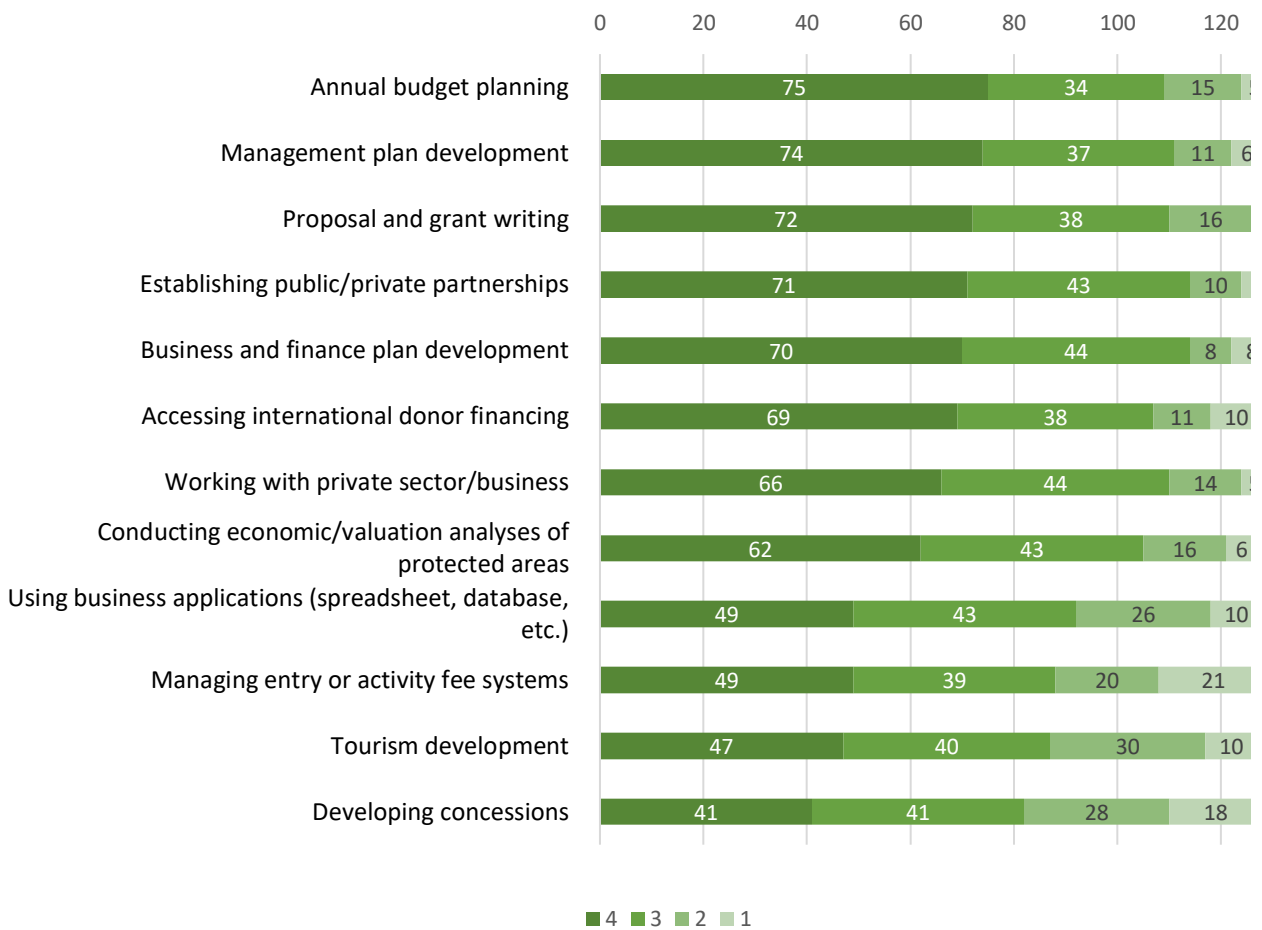


Figure 15. Importance of financing skill topics. Darker green colors represent higher importance levels.

Regional variation

Error! Reference source not found. depicts survey responses for the top two skills needed to strengthen PA finance capacity across each region with corresponding survey sample sizes. Top skills for each region are depicted with two dots and second highest rated skills are depicted with one dot. Most regions had skills that tied for either first or second place. Skills that were not ranked as first or second were excluded from this table.

While sample size is limited for many regions, regional variation in priority needs demonstrates that a single global approach to enhancing PA finance capacity among practitioners may not be as effective as regionally catered approaches. For example, accessing international donor financing was the second-lowest priority need for North America, but was the most highly desired skill in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. These results can therefore help deliver more focused programs and initiatives for advancing PA finance skillsets and capacity in these respective regions.

Skills	Pacific (n=9)	Africa (n=25)	Latin America (n=16)	Asia (n=19)	Europe (n=11)	North America (n=21)	Caribbean (n=8)
Establishing public-private partnerships	✓✓	✓	✓				
Proposal and grant-writing	✓		✓	✓			✓✓
Management plan-development	✓		✓	✓	✓✓		
Working with private sector	✓	✓					
Business applications	✓						
Annual budget-planning						✓✓	✓✓
Conducting economic/valuation analyses					✓		
Business and finance-plan						✓	
Accessing international donor financing		✓✓	✓✓	✓✓			✓

Table 1. Skills needed to strengthen protected area finance capacity (2 checks were highest rating and 1 check next highest).

Preference for protected area finance training material and approaches

Respondents were asked to rate the likelihood of utilizing training materials and approaches in a particular subject matter area. The training materials and approaches of most interest were “Best practice guidelines,” “Toolkits of mechanisms to fund protected areas,” and “Training and capacity building workshops.” At the time of the survey, there was a preference for in-person training as remote methods such as “Webinars” and “On-line training” were rated the lowest (Figure 16). It is important to note that the survey was conducted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic at a time when in-person trainings were more prevalent, and many practitioners were likely less experienced with online methods.

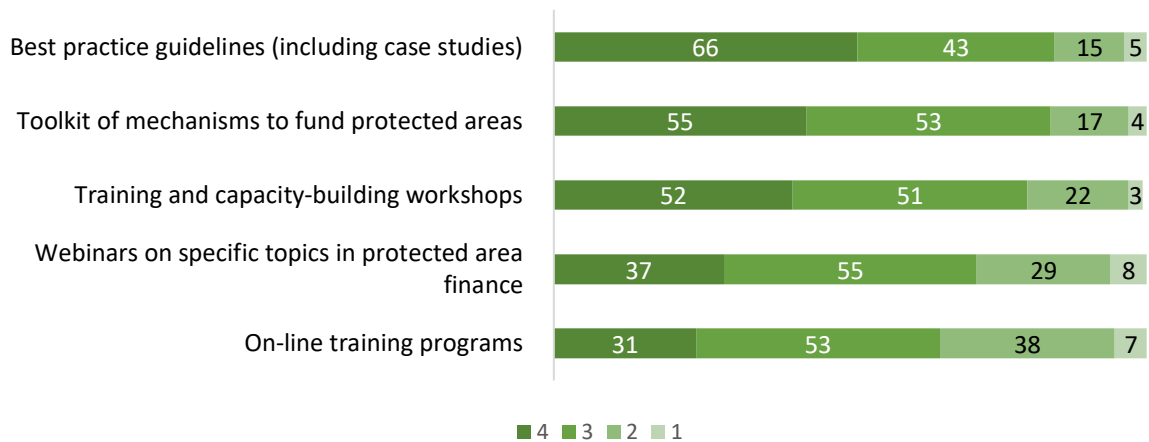


Figure 16. Preferred training material and approaches

Regional variation

Respondents working in Asia stated the highest likelihood to access most of the resources and training types listed, while respondents working in European protected areas were least likely to access the resources. This may reflect different existing capacity levels.

DISCUSSION

Funding gap

Not surprisingly, and consistent with other studies on this topic, this survey supports the widely held belief that there is a significant shortfall in funding for protected areas. Like previous studies on protected area finance, PAs systemically lacked adequate funds even across wealthier regions such as Europe.^{12,13}

Application of finance approaches and tools

While more financial resources would be useful for every protected area, finance mechanisms can be used not only to finance operations (staffing and equipment), but also to address specific pressures on protected areas. When asked, “What is more important to achieving your conservation goals in the protected area(s) where you work, increasing funding or reducing pressures on protected areas such as mining, deforestation, poaching, overfishing, etc.?” different regions prioritized these options differently.

African respondents prioritized reducing pressures (64.62%) over increasing finance. While some of these pressures can be mitigated through better law enforcement where increasing financial resources could have a profound impact (assuming underlying conditions are in place, i.e., judiciary), other pressures come from development and other external pressures that encroach on protected areas. Finance approaches such as better integration of community livelihoods, better capture and sharing of returns from tourism, economic instruments that align private sector incentives, could be deployed to best effect in these situations. A holistic conservation finance approach¹⁴ that uses systems thinking, strong government and private sector engagement, and better alignment of market and social incentives could greatly improve conservation outcomes while lowering pressures, and thus costs, on protected areas. Some of the best mechanisms combine reducing pressure with generating resources for PA management (user fees, green taxes, fisheries certification, etc.) Laws and policies that clarify ownership and management responsibility over local biodiversity resources are essential to incentivize sustainable behaviors and practices and these are relatively inexpensive.

¹² Gill, D.A., Mascia, M.B., Ahmadi, G.N., et al. 2017. Capacity shortfalls hinder the performance of marine protected areas globally. *Nature*. 543:7647. 665-669.

¹³ Femmami, N., Le Port, G., Cook, T., et al. 2021. Financing mechanisms: A guide for Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas. BlueSeeds, MAVA Foundation.

¹⁴ Meyers et al., 2020, Conservation Finance: A Framework, CFA.

TOWARDS AN AGENDA FOR PROTECTED AREA FINANCE GLOBAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Based on the results from the survey that prioritized strategies, skills and approaches to protected area finance capacity building and training, we have an ideal starting point to align and synergize global, regional, and national efforts to build financial capacity among PA staff and practitioners. The findings in this report present an important opportunity to develop partnerships and further articulate how we can join together to raise global standards for capacity and expertise in PA finance.

The Conservation Finance Alliance, through its Protected Area Finance Working Group, also invites interested parties who wish to align capacity building efforts on PA finance to contact the authors through this email: pafinance@cfalliance.org.