

MIST Collaboration

**Discussion Paper
March 18th 2009**

The MIST Collaboration should be an international voluntary collaboration to facilitate the development, evaluation, and sustainability of conservation through the use of Information Management Systems, e.g. MIST.

The overall goal is to strengthen conservation through the use of MIST as an information management system on all levels, and to develop a clear vertical profile accessible to a range of parties which can benefit from and be beneficial to MIST. The concept of such a collaboration should be embedded with the same sustainable project management framework as MIST itself. For to be efficient a collaboration needs to activate and motivate it's members. It is therefore suggested to establish a MIST Collaboration, as a valued added collaboration for all members, to bring various benefits to all participants and which can attract supporters on various levels.

Background

Any step in conservation should ideally be shown to be appropriate and effective. This is in the high interest of the protected areas, the agencies, the involved countries and the supporters of conservation. More and more protected areas are planning their activities based upon collected data using a variety of information gathering methods. A common understanding of how to strengthen the worldwide collection and processing of data in conservation builds a basis for meaningful research and communication in conservation and management. It also helps to avoid duplicate efforts which in turn conserves both fiscal and human resources.

We aim to ensure the ongoing trust in processing data through information managing systems through the exchange of best practices and communication standards. The most successful and cost-effective mitigation and intervention actions that are beneficial for management occur by enabling scientifically valid and rigorous data processing issues to be formulated in an understandable and practicable way for all involved staff. This information in turn can and should be shared and communicated to a wider community, as the effectiveness of conservation efforts are complex and can not always be measured directly at any single scale. Established best practices systems can thus improve the effective use of information for conservation.

The development and use of standardized processes together with flexibility to meet the different needs of the protected areas guidelines for data collection, analysis, and presentation will promote meaningful assessment and enable comparability of conservation data across information management systems.

MIST was developed by Ecological Software Solutions (now ESS LLC) under contract from 1999-2002 from GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) as part of GTZ's support in Uganda development. The MIST concept was developed as a system of integrated information management with an additional set of software tools to implementation and support the storage and communication

of data into useful information and knowledge which was then in turn easily accessible to a wider user group.

MIST is free to use and is currently established in many countries in both Africa and Asia.

The MIST Collaboration

The MIST Collaboration will include the following topics:

The MIST Collaboration is a consortium of diverse parties, including individuals, organizations, government agencies, NGO, and other interested parties which mutually have an aligned interest in management information systems, and together should be committed to develop standardized and widely accepted guidelines on how to establish and strengthen conservation and communication between involved parties through the use of Information Management Systems (MIST), as well as to support and strengthen the development, use and integration MIST in the global conservation community. It does so by the use, promotion and development of MIST in particular as a system both for the collection and storage of data and for transferring such data into usable information and knowledge for management by using the seven (7) software tools currently available in the MIST toolbox, but also by coordinating and promoting best practices in the field of information management in general.

The Management Information System "MIST" is just one Information System of many which should be promoted, as plurality and diversity provide for greater access to information management options. The Collaboration should promote the sharing of information based on proposed standards between all diverse MIST systems.

The MIST Collaboration acts as a sensor to detect challenges when it comes to implement MIST on all levels as general technical, educational or personal needs of Collaboration members will cross all user levels and communities.

The MIST Collaboration will function as a collaboration of volunteers in a global network of individuals, entrepreneurs and organizations as those who are concerned with the sustainable management of transparent information in and for conservation efforts both locally and globally. They equally understand and hold to the concept that information management is a priority in collaborative efforts and necessary for sustainable management of resources.

The MIST Collaboration will include now and future MIST users and will work to facilitate the exchange of information about needs assessment processes between agencies.

Collaboration members can participate either as individuals in working groups (WGs) or as individuals, entrepreneurs or organizations in the reference groups (RGs). The resulting accrual of expertise is to focus on the development of standardized case definitions and guidelines, and the sharing of knowledge within and outside the Collaboration, which will benefit conservationists and wildlife managers by providing efficient solutions in information management. A standardized set of case definitions and guidelines will also benefit investigators and supporters who conduct conservation studies, as well as conservation workers of diverse backgrounds who make decisions on conservation and who need to obtain, interpret, provide and report information on conservation and wildlife management.

The MIST Collaboration should promote transparent methodologies for global consumption with best practices including continuous review and revision work output as integral parts of the Collaboration's mission.

Objectives (DICE)

Development - To develop standardized pilot studies and guidelines for sustainable Information Management in conservation.

Implementation - To raise global awareness of the availability, educate about the benefit of use, facilitate access to and monitor worldwide use of MIST.

Collaboration - To establish a global collaboration of professionals, entrepreneurs and organizations concerned with Information Systems in conservation and wildlife management.

Evaluation - To share experiences in the use and establishment of MIST.

Well known principles of collaboration

- **Altruism:** To serve the needs of the local actors and the global community concerned with conservation
- **Collaboration:** To work effectively by promoting good internal and external communications through open decision making and teamwork
- **Worldwide Participation:** To promote global participation
- **Independence:** To keep the MIST Collaboration scientifically independent
- **Multidisciplinary Approach:** To involve people of different skills and backgrounds, in order to benefit and build upon their contributions
- **Generalization:** To minimize bias by adhering to a strict scientific approach, ensuring broad participation on all levels and avoiding conflicts of interest
- **Relevance:** To maintain MIST documents up-to-date by identifying and incorporating the highest achievable quality of evidence
- **Accessibility of Work:** To facilitate access to MIST documents through strategic alliances and diversified choice of media
- **Responsiveness:** To provide quality information by being open and responsive to criticism
- **Continuity:** To maintain continuity of responsibility for MIST documents and key functions
- **Accessibility:** To allow broad participation in the work of the MIST Collaboration by minimizing obstacles to contributing and promoting diversity

Sources of Support

The work of the MIST Collaboration should be supported by various agencies and entrepreneurs.

Barbara Sallee
Managing Member
Ecological Software Solutions LLC