



External Evaluation of the MapBiomass Initiative

Managers Response

(December 2023)

1. Introduction

Between 2019 and 2022, MapBiomass completed a consolidation cycle as one of the main sources of information on land cover and land use dynamics in the tropics. This period was marked by the creation of new initiatives such as MapBiomass Alerta, Fire and Water, and the expansion to 14 countries covering all of South America and Indonesia.

Following the practice of external independent evaluation initiated in 2019 with an in-depth report prepared to evaluate the first four years of MapBiomass (2015-2018), we commissioned a second external evaluation covering the period 2019-2022.

The reporting process was designed to be an independent evaluation to assess the impacts, functioning and governance of MapBiomass.

MapBiomass team participated in the evaluation process by answering questions and through interviews and workshops. The group had no interference with the content of the draft report itself. We received the draft and had the opportunity to comment and suggest corrections to factual aspects.

This document is MapBiomass' coordination team response to this second external evaluation final report¹, covering general reflections, specific answers to recommendations, and clarifications on critical sections.

Our response is not meant to affect the report but to complement it. Published alongside the report, it offers perspectives on recommendations, underscoring MapBiomass' commitment to openness and collaboration in project development.

¹ Final External Evaluation Report available at: <https://brasil.mapbiomas.org/relatorios/>



2. General Comments

The external evaluation report for 2019-2022 effectively captured the current progress of the MapBiomass project, providing valuable perspectives for its forthcoming stages. Certain sections of the evaluation contain points of potential misinterpretations, which are addressed in the fourth chapter of this response to the external evaluation.

The insights from the external evaluation, particularly those derived from discussions with individuals not directly involved in the project and the suggestions for the implementation of a system to monitor the impacts of MapBiomass, were enlightening and will be very useful in the development of the initiative in the years to come.

3. Responses to the Recommendations

Throughout the report, there are several recommendations for MapBiomass' governance, operation, and monitoring. All recommendations and suggestions will be considered for phase three of the project. Find below the specific comments and reactions to each recommendation and suggestion.

3.1. Recommendations for Monitoring and Evaluation

The report proposes implementing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system considering indicators for four key areas: outputs, outcomes, impact, and community. For each area, it proposes a set of 6-7 indicators, totaling 27 (see pgs 43-47 of report).

Most of the proposed indicators are straightforward to measure (eg., number of technical agreements active in the calendar year), but others would require specific research and include some level of interpretation (ex.: percentage of collaborators who rank high or very high in their sense of feeling part of the network <thermometer>).

The proposed set of indicator areas is objective and relevant. Mapbiomas is committed to implement a M&E system and will carefully consider the valuable proposed set of indicators presented in the External Evaluation Report.

For implementing the M&E system, the report proposes seven tools: User Form, Executive Committee Progress Review, User Impact Survey, Team Thermometer Survey, Annual Report, Strategic Planning and External Evaluation. Five of them are new



implementations and will have to be built from scratch. We intend to implement a stepwise approach between 2024 and 2025.

- 1. Create a Culture of Monitoring and Evaluation: the Executive Committee can meet every six months to review all four sets of indicators, make strategic decisions and course corrections.***

Given the scale of our operations with over 400 people spanning 14 countries and several initiatives, the impact assessment of all these indicators will require a significant investment of time and thus will deserve that Executive Committee review the results of monitoring periodically. The six months suggestion is too short. We will review that initially on an annual basis. The review of the indicators and results will be discussed with the Coordination Committee of MapBiomass for strategic decisions and course corrections.

- 2. Review and Validate the M&E Tools proposed in the report: The Executive Committee needs to take ownership of the findings of this report and responsibility for follow-up, including the adoption of the M&E toolset.***

The Mapbiomas executive team will point one member to lead the implementation of the M&E System at MapBiomass. The Executive Committee will review and approve the M&E Tools with the MapBiomass Coordination Committee.

- 3. Hire or Identify an M&E Specialist within MapBiomass with responsibilities for coordinating monitoring and evaluation activities across the Executive Committee and communicating progress to the network.***

We also agree with the need to have a person partially or fully dedicated to the M&E system. We will decide if it will be necessary to hire a person or identify one person or a working group to tackle this role.

- 4. Complete a Cycle of Indicator Gathering and Review: the publication of this report marks the start of a new cycle of data gathering on progress and impact; this should be reviewed after one year, and adaptations made, as required.***

Starting in 2024, we will organize the first circle of M&E to be completed by the end of the year and be reported on the Annual Report to be published in Q1 of 2025. In Q1 of 2024, we will publish MapBiomass' first Annual Report, including highlights of the external evaluation in 2023.



3.2. Recommendation for Strategy and Engagement

The report points out four findings related to the ability of MapBiomass to continue to succeed in the engagement with users/audience: (1) MapBiomass has played a significant role in making land-use and land-cover data available to an increasingly diverse audience, in an approach that is both transparent and collaborative; (2) Levels of collaborator commitment, connection and clarity are unprecedented; the tool is also widely admired by its users; (3) The approach to users engagement remains broad and could benefit from a more tailored approach to specific user groups; (4) There is a fine line between maintaining a neutral position as an information-driven platform, and fulfilling MapBiomass' objective of combating deforestation.

The first two findings are on spot. The third one suggests that we are not using a tailored/customized approach to engage with different audiences. In fact, MapBiomass now has over 200 institutions that use the platform in a customizable module. It is important to note that since 2021 MapBiomass has been developing a strong process of strategic communication and engagement with the eight priority audience groups. Since then, significant progress has been observed, especially with advances in key audiences related to government agencies, private sector and banks. It may not be sufficient, but surely the segmentation is happening already.

The fourth finding is very sensitive for us. MapBiomass has as its core value to be no-bias (neutral) and not engage in advocacy, and keep its focus as a trusted source of scientifically based data. The suggestion that MapBiomass has a hidden objective to combat deforestation is not accurate². MapBiomass is for sure aligned with the idea of facilitating the use of our data to promote conservation and sustainable management of natural resources but with no political or advocacy voice. To guarantee that MapBiomass Alert, Surveillance Monitor and Annual Deforestation Report are rigidly reviewed to ensure they are focused only on data.

5. ***Adopt a client-centric approach to engagement that involves understanding better each one of the main user groups, their perspectives, needs, and expectations: see, for example, Peter Drucker's work on customer focus.***

Since 2021, MapBiomass' communication evaluation and strategy have constantly evolved, understanding how the public uses and needs MapBiomass data, tools and

² Pg 58 of report



information to improve and guide actions. At the same time, there is a team dedicated to supporting users and facilitating MapBiomass' data access.

Nevertheless, we understand the importance of understanding the struggles and needs of the users in order to improve their experience and facilitate the use of MapBiomass data in decision making, and we still have a long way to capture all of that in a comprehensive and complete way.

We know that our process of active listening and participation needs to be expanded, and more organizations need to participate in the network to bring their needs and, therefore, build solutions together. These solutions will serve others in the same sector and will be improved as new members join the group. We also understand that we need to improve communication channels to address the needs of target groups that are far away. We emphasize this issue because we are not service providers, and our platform is developed to publicly collaborate on challenges with which our key audiences are connected.

6. Inform advocacy partners where gaps and needs exist, thereby allowing partner organizations to be more strategic in their approaches to leveraging change in both the public and private sectors and ensuring that MapBiomass and their partners 'stay within their lanes.'

We understand that we can inform the advocacy organizations about the information and technology available but the formulation of the gaps and needs should come from them to guarantee that we do not cross the line of independence and no-bias source of information. When Advocacy organizations come to us and ask for information they need, if possible, we include the information in the next collection of maps or add a new tool and functionality to MapBiomass' platforms or websites. Another way is that we ask them to formulate the questions in writing, and we respond using technical notes that are made public, basically responding to questions with data and no-opinion in any form.

7. To scale up the use of MapBiomass by business and industry, focus on sectorial initiatives and associations, with a view to 'closing the fence,' whereby the majority or all stakeholders in a sector are making strategic decisions about the sustainable management of natural resources. Supplement this work with capacity building and information sharing.



The work with associations and sectoral initiatives is important and generates scale (e.g., MapBiomass does work with these associations such as IBA, Coalizão Floresta Clima e Agricultura, and Tropical Forest Alliance). We also greatly value the relationships established with business players that are shapers of sectors such as Banco do Brasil and BNDES in the banking system or Marfrig and JBS in the meat sector.

- 8. Develop a strategic plan for MapBiomass globally to guarantee greater alignment across the Executive Committee and among collaborators. The framework can include organizational priorities, decision-making, and M&E. In this way, the Executive Committee can become a strategic decision-making body with clarity of purpose and pathway. Off the back of the strategy, identify priority new 'customers' or partners with whom to engage.***

This recommendation mixes the planning of the network with the role of the Executive Committee which is dedicated to Brazil more specifically. We took this recommendation as a reference to the Coordination Committee of MapBiomass Network. In this end we materialize the strategic planning of the network in three pillars: (i) the definition and revisiting of the values, mission and initiatives of the network; (ii) the strategy to expansion and consolidation of the network and (iii) the completion of the Good Practices Guidelines for MapBiomass Network. Those are the foundations of the alignment across all initiatives and geographies of MapBiomass Network.

3.3. Recommendations for Governance and Funding

The report presents (pg 60) an analysis of the evolution of MapBiomass growth and governance using the Greiner" model published in 1972. In this model, the purpose is that as organizations grow and age, they evolve in six phases - creativity, direction, delegation, coordination & monitoring, collaboration and alliances.

The idea is that between each phase there is a potential crisis (crisis of leadership, autonomy, control, red tape, growth and identity). The report proposes that MapBiomass is somewhere between phases 3 and 4 (delegation and coordination), so it was not in the collaboration and alliances. But MapBiomass was born as a collaborative and alliance-based initiative. So, we don't see ourselves where it was framed in this session of the report.

- 9. Establish a more decentralized decision-making process involving more managers and thereby taking some of the workload from coordinators. Give more clarity to the***



organizational structure and decision-making realms. This can be complemented by capacity-building for managers.

There was a great evolution in this topic during 2023. The Executive Committee was formed in January 2023, involving the general coordination and the coordinators of each area (technology, science, communication, institutional relations, etc) with weekly meetings and a strategic coordination committee (monthly meetings). A Term of Reference for the Executive Committee and governance structures of MapBiomias will be detailed to reinforce the formation of new leadership.

- 10. In third countries, explore more flexible arrangements relating to partner organizations, including non-local partners, if appropriate. A specific partnership model for Africa may make sense, one that reflects the different contexts, needs, and capacities.***

This is a matter of principle for the Network. If we can't find local partners to work in a country/region we should postpone until we can find one. We can have non-local partners as long as we have that as a complement to the involvement of a local partner.

- 11. Develop a robust multi-channel funding strategy for the coming year, with external support if required.***

Agreed. MapBiomias is developing two new approaches for fundraising including the involvement of users. Many options are on the table. However, MapBiomias will not engage in any type of service selling since it tends to solve the problem of sustainable source of funds but decreases the impact in the long run.

- 12. Structure a formal training and education area, potentially as a MapBiomias spin-off that could cater to different levels of complexity and different objectives for engagement with the platform.***

We do see a need to increase the investment in education. However, the great contribution of MapBiomias to education is actively working towards expanding its network to other countries and developing new products, along with enhancing data quality. Even so, the current education approach in MapBiomias is organic and demand-driven, proving successful as there is a growing user base in universities, educational institutions, and schools using MapBiomias' data and platforms.

3.4. Recommendations for Communication



The report doesn't present a specific session on analysis of communication, but throughout the text, it presents some related findings, which include: (i) highlight the importance of a comprehensive communication strategy designed to effectively convey the impact and value of using MapBiomass data, particularly in climate change mitigation and sustainable natural resource management; (ii) note the importance to tailor the communication to specific target audiences; (iii) advocates for the use of impact case studies and success stories such as those on series of videos MapBiomass 30x30; (iv) point out the need to strengthening the online presence of MapBiomass never stopping to optimize the website for user-friendliness and accessibility. These findings are aligned with our focus on communication.

13. Establish moments in the year to share and discuss with the Network the plans for MapBiomass Brazil and the Network as a whole – as opposed to each individual region – in order to strengthen the understanding of the global project and harvest the collective intelligence of the network.

Agreed, the communication strategy has been focused in the first moment on Brazil and supporting other initiatives in countries and regions separately. The first exercise to discuss the communication of all network was in the annual meeting in Bali in 2023. We identified the need to increase the exchanges with international teams, a dynamic successfully initiated during the annual meeting.

We established a rhythm of monthly meetings to amplify alignments and exchanges further. This deliberate approach will facilitate the integration of fresh ideas and perspectives and fortify our global partnerships with the strength of local insights.

14. Draw up and communicate yearly an overall vision of products, network and new initiatives.

We already do that every year. We lay out what we want to achieve in terms of products, network and new initiatives. We don't specify in deep details because the collaborative building process is the venue to do so with flexibility and agility.

For 2023, we will produce MapBiomass' first annual report, which will provide a comprehensive view of the operation, facilitating an understanding of the operation, products, and processes involved. It's planned to be published in Q1 of 2024.



15. *Expand the availability of information on methodology and accuracy beyond the main Collection to include other products.*

Agreed. This is a demand also from the Scientific Advisor Committee. In 2024, we will start to build a map of uncertainty and finish accuracy for all MapBiomass' products. This process should be completed in 2025.

16. *Continue and intensify efforts to make information more available to non-technical audiences by regularly publishing an easy-to-understand explanation of each dataset and its limitations.*

Agreed. Although we have been producing caution notes and tutorial videos to explain the use of data since 2018, there is a lot of room for improvement. To this end, we are testing various approaches, including tailored training courses for different target audiences and demand-driven, online practice sessions, talks in different events, guidelines for users and others. In every meeting about a specific product, we give an introductory presentation of all MapBiomass products.

17. *Explore ways to improve internal communication, including the results of the coordinators' meetings.*

We use the first 30 minutes of the weekly calls with all teams to report and inform how things are progressing in the network over each week. This is recorded in the minutes that are available to everyone in the network and is sent weekly. In those meetings, we report any significant decision taken on coordination committee' meetings. We do not share the coordination minutes with all since sometimes we may treat sensitive issues related to the functioning of the team.

4. Responses to the Recommendations

This section is dedicated to specific comments, corrections and clarifications to the text of the report, which includes: (i) factual corrections; (ii) clarifications of concepts; (iii) additional information that helps to contextualize a topic; (iv) new developments from the phase 3 (2023 ->) of MapBiomass that complement/clarify/address points raised in the report.

The comments follow the sequence of chapters in the report.

4.1. Introduction and context



- a) Pg 5/§2 - In the question: how is it possible to demonstrate with confidence that the data made available by the MapBiomass network is contributing to climate change mitigation, should include not only to climate change mitigation but also to sustainable management of natural resources and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- b) Pg 7 - It highlights that the focus of the report is focused in Brazil but also presents opportunities and challenges for the expansion of the platform to new territories. It should be read "the evaluation also includes a review of the opportunities and challenges of expanding the platform beyond Brazil".
- c) Pg 8/§1 - where it reads "The MapBiomass Evaluation took place over a three-month period from February to July 2023" should be six-month.
- d) Pg 8/§2 - where it reads "Together, these collaborators form a network (currently involving some 250 people globally) that forms the basic organizational structure of MapBiomass" it should read in the end "that represents the basic organization structure of MapBiomass".
- e) Pg 9 - on the second column there is a mix of products and maps under products. For example, mining and irrigation are part of the Land Cover & Land Use product. Its mission also Annual Report on Deforestation.
- f) Pg 11 - the table has a series of mistakes in the second and third roles:
 - Assuming that row 2 is to highlight when a product was launched, the Annual deforestation report was launched in 2020, MapBiomass Geocovid also was 2020.
 - Fire and Water 1st Collections should refer to MapBiomass Fire and MapBiomass Water.
 - The table misses the important additions of modules of Infrastructure (2017), Mining (2022), Pasture Quality (2019), Accuracy Analysis (2019), Irrigation (2020).
 - Assuming row 3 is for the initiatives outside Brazil it is inconsistent in how it describes each initiative. For example, it mentions sometimes only the name of the country or region and others include MapBiomass. The name of the initiative Pampa, for example, is "MapBiomass Pampa Tri-National".
 - MapBiomass Pan-Amazonia Collection 1 was launched in 2019.



- It is missing the number of classes mapped in MapBiomias Peru and Bolivia.
 - In MapBiomias Soil, a C is missing in the collection.
 - This timeline would be better divided into three parts: collections of MapBiomias Brazil, Other MapBiomias' products, and Other collections of countries and regions.
- g) Pg 14 - graphic is missing a title and units.

4.2. Users and Impact

- a) Pg 17 - In Impact it is missing Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation.
- b) Pg 18 - The choice to separate the different user profile in two lines makes it difficult to compare them.
- c) Pg 20 - It is worth mentioning that this internal MapBiomias' database of cases is not systematic and represents interesting cases reported by users. For example, in the academic profile, MapBiomias monitors scientific peer-reviewed papers, which are more than two thousand.
- d) Pg 21 - not clear what is "biomes collection" on Sankey diagram.
- e) Pg 26 - In the Users part, in the first sentence about who uses MapBiomias, "although this is largely led by "early adopters," and is not yet standard practice across the sectors", it is worth mentioning that eight of the ten biggest banks for rural loans, the three biggest meat companies and two of the biggest paper companies in Brazil use MapBiomias data.
- f) Pg 26 - In Strategic application, §5 at the end of the phrase, "TV channel, Globo" should be "and media outlet in general"
- g) Pg 24, 25 and 27 - is lacking the source of the data.
- h) Pg 33 - The 11k requests of Banco do Brasil are also noteworthy.
- i) Pg 34 - In How is MapBiomias used, §1, land-use data is not from MapBiomias Alert, but from MapBiomias Land Cover & Land Use Collection.



- j) Pg 46 - table 3.2.3 - the first roll refers to % of stakeholders but the following lines don't explain the indicator. It seems it should be read as *Number of TCA in signed and in place*.
- k) Pg 47 - table 3.2.4 first row - the baseline data exist with a lot of details in RAD. Also all the data in this table listed as baseline in 2023 should specify from where the data is (ex. In the last line the data refers to the increase in emissions between 2020-2021).

4.3. Institutional Evaluation

- a) Pg 55 - all four bullets in the left side (out of the table) are missing an end point (.).
- b) Pg 55 - 5th line / last column refers to a need for a "multi-channel funding strategy to complement the donor fund". It is not clear what it means.
- c) Pg 62 - last paragraph recommend to "Establish moments in the year to share and discuss with the Network the plans for MapBiomass Brazil and the Network as a whole". In fact this already happens with the Annual Network Meeting (Lima, 2022 and Bali, 2023).
- d) Pg 65 - all organizations on the table have already some relationship with MapBiomass data. MapBiomass was born at the same time as the Coalizão Brasil Clima Florestas e Agricultura and the products of MapBiomass are extensively used by this network.

* * *