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## **MID-TERM EVALUATION**

# **CONSERVING MOUNTAIN BIODIVERSITY IN SOUTHERN LESOTHO (CMBSL)**

Project Number LES/97/G31/B/1G/99

## **FINAL REPORT**

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**ACRONYMS AND TERMS**

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBNRM	Community-Based Natural Resource Management
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CMBSL	Conserving Mountain Biodiversity in Southern Lesotho Project
CNR	Community Nature Reserve
CTA	CMBSL Chief Technical Advisor
DIT	District Implementation Team
DPO	CMBSL District Project Officer
DS	District Secretary
DSC	District Steering Committee
EU	European Union
GEF	Global Environmental Facility of the United Nations
GoL	Government of Lesotho
GS	Grazing Scheme
ICDP	Integrated Conservation and Development Project
LHDA	Lesotho Highlands Development Authority
LHWP	Lesotho Highlands Water Project
M & E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDTP	Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project (GEF/World Bank project)
MSc	Master of Science degree
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
MTEC	Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture, Lesotho
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NES	National Environment Secretariat (Lesotho)
NEX	National Execution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPM	CMBSL National Project Manager
NSC	National Steering Committee
PA	Protected Area
PDF	GEF Project Development Funding
PIR	Project Implementation Report
PS	Principal Secretary (Head of Government Ministry)
QWDT	Quthing Wildlife and Development Trust
RMA	Range Management Area
SABONET	Southern African Botanical Diversity Network (GEF/UNDP project)
SABSP	Southern Africa Biodiversity Support Project (GEF/UNDP project)
SDTFCA	Southern Drakensberg Trans-Frontier Conservation Area (private initiative)
STAP	The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the GEF
TPR	Tripartite Review
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDP CO	United Nations Development Programme Country Office
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USD	United States dollar
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
ZAR	South African Rand

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Mid-Term Evaluation of the UNDP/GEF Conserving Mountain Biodiversity in Southern Lesotho project (LES/97/G31) was carried out by two independent evaluators between 15 July and 5 August 2004. This five-year project, with a GEF budget of USD 2.485 million, sought to ensure the conservation and sustainable utilisation of unique montane biodiversity in southern Lesotho through the involvement of local communities, who would also be beneficiaries. There were two complementary interventions - firstly to work with government and communities to create a network of small protected sites targeting specific biodiversity values, and secondly to incorporate biodiversity values in rangeland management systems. The project is nationally-executed and situated in the National Environment Secretariat of the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture of the Government of Lesotho. The evaluation took place towards the end of the project, which is scheduled to terminate around mid-2005.

Evaluation of the background and design of the project shows that although the concept was sound, the loss of capacity early on in the National Environment Secretariat, where it is based, resulted in insufficient oversight, especially given the problems the project later faced. In addition, the lack of a technical backstopping agency or source of advice on conservation issues, and insufficient technical supervision from the GEF, caused severe problems during implementation. The project implementation plan was revised in 2002, adding two further objectives and two extra districts for activities, but without additional resources or adequate thought as to the consequences of this revision.

The project has had more than its fair share of personnel problems, with a high turnover of National Project Managers (4), Chief Technical Advisors (2) and District Project Officers (2 in each district), always without transition periods. There has also been no consistent "champion" to guide project development and direction. These factors resulted in the project losing sight early on of its stated GEF objective: instead of focusing on significant biodiversity conservation values it moved towards conservation of widespread natural resources at sites of little conservation significance. In addition, any potential biodiversity value of each site was not articulated.

Implementation has been problematic in a number of areas - high staff turnover, weak leadership, lack of a team spirit, very slow rates of implementation, opportunistic decision-making, weak monitoring, evaluation and reporting procedures. Although these factors were widely recognised, insufficient was done to rectify the situation. It is not clear where the main responsibility lay. Problems have been significantly greater at national than at district level. Financial planning by the project, NES and UNDP has been poor, with numerous revisions changing the proportion of expenditure away from activities. Expenditure has not been

adequately tracked. Large, unbudgeted expenditures, such as a game fence at Letseng la Letsie, have made forward planning difficult. In addition, various activities have not been carefully considered as to their consequences, impacts, cost-effectiveness and sustainability. The approach has too often been opportunistic rather than goal-orientated.

There have been some commendable achievements by the project, notably the increased awareness of resource conservation issues and the level of self-motivation apparent in a number of the communities where it has been active. Appropriate training, both in quantity and diversity, was good. The project has a strong presence in three districts, and appears integrated into local decision-making structures. But there is a perceived legacy of "unfulfilled promises", with communities believing that the project has not delivered the developments they had come to expect.

Apart from this, there has been a very low level of project achievement and very little conservation impact so far. Only three areas have been semi-formally designated for conservation, out of the many planned, although the criteria on which these were selected is unclear, as is their conservation value. There has been a dearth of sound conservation advice, resulting in some inappropriate decisions, such as the game fence, and the project has been weak on synthesising its own consultants' findings and conclusions and using these to inform decision-making. Advocacy and awareness-raising at national level have been weak, and there has been minimal linkage to other similar projects, either within Lesotho or outside.

The Evaluators recommend that a rapid exit strategy be adopted, whereby the gains made by the project are consolidated within the next 6 or so months (depending on available funds). Twenty recommendations towards this are given. Substantive attention should focus on three sites of significant conservation value (Letseng la Letsie, Tsatsane, Qobong), but attempts should be made at the remaining sites to create linkages to other sources of support; communities should not just be abandoned. Linkages should be made with projects such as the GEF/World Bank-funded Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project with a view to that entity taking over some activities at the significant sites. In Quthing District, an NGO, the Quthing Wildlife Development Trust, might be able to take on other activities. The project should also ensure better documentation, both of its own rather haphazard records, and particularly of the consultancies and studies carried out under it. A synthesis of the biophysical studies should be done, with clear conservation conclusions drawn, and should be documented and disseminated to all interested parties; likewise with the economic valuation and user studies. Strong efforts should be made to have recommendations from the ecotourism study taken up by developers and similar agencies. The remaining project resources appear adequate for this, as long as there is a significant change in project management attitudes and practices. Some suggestions are made towards this, involving less bureaucratic procedures and enduring better adherence to targets and work plans.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The UNDP/GEF Conserving Mountain Biodiversity in Southern Lesotho (CMBSL) project is nationally-executed with a GEF budget of USD 2,485,000 over five years. It has been operational since May 1999, but owing to a late start it has been effectively extended for one to two years until around May 2005. The overall objective or goal is "*To ensure the conservation and sustainable utilisation of unique alpine and montane landscapes in Lesotho*", premised on the presence of globally significant biodiversity values (the Drakensberg-Maloti montane centre of plant endemism). This goal was to be achieved through full involvement and ownership by local communities, so that they could manage their environment to the benefit of both conservation and themselves. In many respects, CMBSL was designed as an integrated conservation and development project (ICDP), and in the Lesotho context was regarded as somewhat experimental in nature. The project was originally based in one district (Quthing), but after revision in 2002 was expanded to three (with the addition of Mohale's Hoek and Qacha's Nek). CMBSL is based at the National Environment Secretariat (NES) in the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture (MTEC) of the Government of Lesotho (GoL).

### 1.1 Objectives of the Evaluation

As part of standard project reporting procedure, as laid down in the Project Document, UNDP/GEF projects require a mid-term evaluation (MTE) as well as a terminal evaluation. The MTE normally takes place around the mid-point of project implementation, although this one took place much later, close to the revised project termination date. An MTE focuses on the effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of project implementation; highlights issues requiring decisions and actions; and presents initial lessons learned about project design, implementation and management. Full Terms of Reference for the present evaluation are given as Annex 1.

The overall objectives of the mid-term evaluation are to:

- Validate the project design in terms of its stated objectives, strategy, and activities.
- Assess progress towards and the likelihood of achieving the intended impact.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in implementation.
- Make recommendations regarding specific actions that might be taken to improve the project.
- Identify opportunities for learning and sharing lessons.

During briefing it was apparent that the project has had many delays, most obviously from high staff turnover. Hence the effects of this on achievements was of special concern.

The project is here evaluated against its own stated objectives. The developing national context is looked at, but not in great depth owing to time constraints and limited documentation.

### 1.2 Methodology

The evaluation was carried out over the period 14 July to 6 August 2004 by a team of two independent consultants – Mr Jonathan Timberlake (International, Team Leader) and Mr Benedict Mateka (National Consultant). After an initial briefing by Dr Nik Sekhran (GEF Co-ordinator for Southern Africa, Pretoria), Mr Timberlake travelled to Maseru, Lesotho, where he and Mr Mateka were given an initial briefing by senior project staff. A number of government departments (principally those that sit on the National Steering Committee) and other relevant

institutions, including the UNDP Country Office, were interviewed over the next few days using a structured set of questions. On 21 July both consultants undertook a week-long field trip to all three districts that the project operates in (see Annex 2). During this trip they were accompanied for three days by the Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) and later for three days by the National Project Manager (NPM). In each District the consultants met the respective District Project Officer, the District Secretary, members of the District Steering Committee, and some of the community representatives at the project sites, all of whom were interviewed (see Annex 3). In all, 10 sites where the project has been involved (some only peripherally) were visited. An account of these visits is given as Annex 4.

Preliminary findings were discussed with senior project staff on 30 July, and more formally with members of the National Steering Committee on 3 August. This was followed by two further briefings on 4 August – to Ministry staff (including the MTEC Principal Secretary) and later to UNDP Country Office staff. The Team Leader was debriefed by the GEF Southern Africa Co-ordinator in Pretoria on 6 August.

A draft report was finalised over the following two weeks and submitted through UNDP/GEF to participants for comment on 7 September. Limited comments were received in early October, and the revised Final Report was submitted on 15 October 2004.

### **1.3 Structure of the Report**

Firstly the context of the project as it was originally formulated is described, followed by an account of its history, objectives and institutional basis (Section 2, Project Concept and Design). These are briefly analysed as they seem particularly pertinent in this project, and conclusions are given. Section 3 (Project Implementation), looks at modalities of execution and the effectiveness of the Project Management Unit and District staff, participation by other agencies and departments at various levels, the role of UNDP, and monitoring and evaluation modalities. The next section (4) on Project Outputs looks at what has been achieved to date and addresses reasons for any shortcomings. An overall assessment of achievements to date is given, along with potential impacts of project activities and their sustainability.

Finally, there is a Conclusions section that summarises the main findings of the evaluation. Here we also suggest what could realistically be achieved before project termination. A number of Recommendations are given, aimed basically at formulating a rapid project exit strategy. Finally, various Lessons Learned are listed.

Four annexes are attached covering Terms of Reference, itinerary, list of persons met, and brief accounts of the field sites visited.

## 2. PROJECT CONCEPT AND DESIGN

### 2.1 Background

The Conserving Mountain Biodiversity in Southern Lesotho project was under formulation from around 1995. It was premised on: (a) the presence of globally significant biodiversity values (the Drakensberg-Maloti Montane Centre of Endemism) with a large proportion of this Centre occurring in Lesotho; (b) the very low proportion (0.4%) of the country under formal conservation protection<sup>1</sup>; and (c) the perceived threat to these floral and habitat values by overgrazing, over-frequent burning and, in the case of wetlands, by erosion. The main target of the project was high-altitude grasslands (where most of the endemic plant species are) and small wetlands or upland bogs. Generally land is held communally in Lesotho, with resource use regulation originally through a system of hereditary chiefs, although more recently through village development councils. Resource use was becoming unsustainable, as seen in (i) the increasing numbers of livestock being found in the Maloti (Highlands) in areas which are essentially for summer grazing, (ii) the loss of wetlands through erosion, overgrazing and trampling, and (iii) the loss of the few remaining small wooded areas. The justification of values and threats to them is well described in the 1999 Project Document.

At the time the project was being developed, the capacity for conservation in Lesotho was low. In addition to having the smallest extent of formally protected area in Africa, the communal land tenure system and human pressures made it difficult to increase this extent. Development of the Lesotho Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan<sup>2</sup>, also funded by the GEF, was being carried out at the same time as CMBSL (although it was only published later) and clearly lays out the legal and institutional framework for conservation in the country and the limits to national capacity (pp. 99-114). It also highlights the unique components of biodiversity and threats to them. However, little knowledge on the biodiversity of this area was residing in Lesotho. The National Herbarium (being supported through Sabonet, another GEF-funded project) is embryonic, and much of the plant expertise for the area lay in research institutions in South Africa or in individuals (such as Hilliard and Burt) now living in the UK. National institutions in Lesotho were weak and not well capacitated to handle technical biodiversity issues. Together, these constraints provided the main justification for GEF funding.

At the same time that the CMBSL project was being formulated there were other ongoing and relevant conservation initiatives. (1) The Lesotho Highlands Water Project (funded by the World Bank, among others) was modifying hydrology across a large portion of the central and northern Maloti, and also creating some small protected areas and botanic gardens. (2) The EU were developing a Drakensberg-Maloti Mountain Conservation Programme in 1995/96, which did not reach implementation. However, in many respects the activities proposed were taken on by the World Bank/GEF Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project (MDTP), which commenced in Lesotho in early 2003. (3) At the same time, the newly-created National Environment Secretariat (NES), which then fell under the Prime Minister's Office, was gaining momentum and environmental issues were coming to the fore. UNDP was putting much support into NES at this time, which was taken as part of the GEF baseline and rationale for support to the CMBSL project. Unfortunately, the UNDP Country Office (UNDP CO) cut back support to NES quite substantially around 2000. This loss of support significantly reduced NES's capacity to handle moderately large and complex projects, as demonstrated by the requirement for the National

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1 At that time, just Sehlabathebe National Park at 68 km<sup>2</sup>

2 "Biological Diversity in Lesotho: a country study" (National Environment Secretariat, 2000).



Biodiversity Officer to be funded by CMBSL in 1999/2000 as the post was no longer being supported by UNDP.

The project deliberately selected the southern highlands as its focus (specifically, Quthing District) so that there would be no geographical overlap with the other two large Maloti projects described above, and possibly also because the southern districts were economically poorer and often ignored in development activities. The projects were planned to be complementary.

Issues of the environment were becoming influential in determining Government policy and direction in Lesotho as CMBSL was being designed. However, around the time the project started, after its design phase, there was a drought in the country and major rural food crisis. Also at this time, the HIV/AIDS pandemic became a major issue for both government and donors. Neither, of course, could have been foreseen during project development. It is not clear what impact this had on subsequent implementation, although the attentions of UNDP, the Lesotho Government and others to environmental and conservation issues were obviously lessened.

The paradigm of conservation adopted in the formulation of CMBSL was that of community responsibility, involvement and ownership. It was not intended to 'alienate' land for further national parks, but to see if highland communities could be encouraged to regulate their use of biological resources for conservation purposes, and to obtain some return for this through income from such activities as ecotourism, or through less degradation (which would otherwise lead to increasing impoverishment and marginalisation).

In 1995 the project received a GEF PDF A allocation of USD 25,000 for formulation. It has not been possible to locate the STAP Technical Review, although one is mentioned in the Project Document. The major points arising from it were stated to be: (i) the project should address the poor information base on biodiversity in Lesotho, (ii) the necessity to work within regional biodiversity frameworks and with other regional initiatives, (iii) that good leadership is critical to its success, and (iv) the need for frequent interaction with other biodiversity initiatives in the country.

The project proposal was approved by GEF Council in October 1997, and the Project Document was signed around March 1999 for a five-year period (estimated to run until mid-2004). The project officially commenced on 11 May 1999. Some staff, including the first National Project Manager (NPM) and at least one District Officer (the Economist) were certainly in place by mid-1999. After the resignation of the first NPM in December 1999, and because of delays in recruitment both of a replacement and of the first Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), the project suffered a marked loss of momentum and direction. The full complement of key personnel was only in place by January 2001 (third NPM in November 2000, first CTA in January 2001).

## **2.2 Project Objectives and Activities**

The project attempted to address the threats to globally-significant biodiversity by getting communities under the prevailing customary land use to be actively involved in its conservation. In that regard the project was something of an experiment, breaking new ground in the Lesotho context and attempting to see if community-conservation initiatives such as CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe could work there.

The Project Document succinctly states that the project will cover "... two distinct but complementary interventions. The first is to work with government and communities to create a

network of small protected sites, targeting specific biodiversity values. The second objective addresses conservation more broadly, by seeking to incorporate biodiversity values in rangeland management systems. This will require inputs to policy review as well as developing incentive and regulatory systems within central, district and community organisations."

The overall project goal is "To ensure the conservation and sustainable utilisation of unique alpine and montane landscapes in Lesotho". Under this there were originally two Immediate Objectives:

- A. A planned and rational network of Protected Areas is in place which adequately covers the extent of Lesotho's biodiversity.
- B. Improved resource management systems reduce the rate of biodiversity loss outside formal Protected Areas.

These were later (May 2002) modified to four Purposes (below). The transboundary aspects were made more explicit, and (for some unclear reason) project implementation also became an objective. The Evaluation is being done against these revised Objectives.

- A. A planned and rational network of Protected Areas is in place, which adequately covers the extent of Lesotho's biodiversity (*4 Activities*).
- B. Improved grazing and resources management systems resulting in reduced rate of biodiversity loss outside formal Protected Areas (*5 Activities*).
- C. An integrated bioregional approach (also trans-border) to biodiversity conservation and watershed management is established (*5 Activities*).
- D. A functional project organisation, management and co-ordination system for the implementation of biodiversity conservation programs established at central, district and community levels (*8 Activities*).

There were also four stated Outcomes:

- 1. A more complete Protected Area network for biodiversity, managed with local people.
- 2. Mechanisms in place to protect biodiversity resources outside Protected Areas and participatory range management area plans implemented. It is expected that the policy regime will have been reviewed to reinforce these community initiatives.
- 3. A stronger network of biodiversity institutions in place at regional, national, district and community levels.
- 4. An integrated bio-regional approach to biodiversity conservation and watershed management in place to reinforce the integration of community development, biodiversity conservation and watershed management.

Under the four revised Objectives or Purposes there are 22 Activities (8 for Purpose D on functional project management) which are listed in Table 4.2. Each had stated its means of verification, along with assumptions and risks. Project achievements have been evaluated against these (see Section 4.4). In some cases, activities under an objective were not sufficiently linked to the stated Outcomes. For example, the Outputs relating to protected areas (Purpose A) do not explicitly depend on whether any PAs are actually created.

### **2.3 Project Design**

The project is located in what is now the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture (MTEC), and implemented under the guidance of the National Environment Secretariat. The

formal Executing Agency is the Government of Lesotho under what was then evolving NEX (national execution) modalities, whereby activity implementation is by national institutions of comparative advantage. These institutions included, at the time of design, the Range and Conservation Divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture (now both Departments under the Ministry of Forestry and Land Reclamation), the National University of Lesotho at Roma, and NGOs (specifically the Quthing Wildlife Trust). NES would provide oversight and co-ordination, and the project CTA and NPM are based there. Other key stakeholder ministries are the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Local Government.

At the time of formulation, NES was a semi-autonomous body under the Prime Minister's Office, but it subsequently became absorbed into the Ministry of Environment, Gender and Youth Affairs, which later became the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture. This move seems to have played a significant role in reducing project impact.

The UNDP Country Office in Maseru is responsible for disbursement of all funds through NEX, and for overall accounting to GEF, the funders. UNOPS in Nairobi is responsible for recruitment of the two international staff and for procurement of external (i.e. non-national) consultancies.

GEF input is done through the UNDP CO, mostly in the form of approval for particular major expenditures and by being part of the recruitment process for senior staff. These modalities were not particularly clear to the Evaluators. The UNDP/GEF Southern African Advisor based in Pretoria backstops the project for GEF. Formerly this was done by the GEF East African Advisor based in Arusha, Tanzania.

At one time (1999-2000), there were suggestions from GEF that instead of UNOPS, a technical backstopping agency should be involved in (a) recruitment of international staff, and (b) providing technical input and oversight. The institution mentioned was The Mountain Institute (TMI) based in Virginia, USA. However, this suggestion was not implemented, apparently because it was considered too expensive. In retrospect, a number of the technical problems the project later faced could have been avoided if TMI had been involved.

For guidance during project implementation various steering committees were proposed (Terms of Reference in 1999 Project Document). The National Steering Committee (NSC), chaired by the Ministry of Finance, would oversee project execution at all levels. It would include senior project staff, UNDP CO, and representatives from the main collaborating government departments. More practical management and technical guidance would come from a Project Management Committee which, however, never appeared to be functional. At a district level, a District Steering Committee (DSC) would be formed (later, one for each operational district) chaired by the District Secretary and comprising representatives from involved departments, projects, NGOs and communities.

## **2.4 Project Budget**

Total GEF funding was for USD 2,485,000, with an additional USD 25,000 for the PDF A phase in 1995. A breakdown of budgets (that given in the original 1999 Project Document and that given in the latest UNDP budget Revision N, December 2003) shows significant differences in proportions. In particular, the amount going to international staff has almost doubled, while that allocated to subcontracted activity (which was the means for much of envisaged project activity) has fallen to about a third of that originally planned. Under Revision N, a high proportion of project funding goes to international staff, administration and support (48%), with only about 26% going to direct activities (training and subcontracted activity).

Item	USD		% total budget	
	1999	2003 (Rev. N)	1999	2003 (Rev. N)
International staff	460,000	848,125	18.5	34.1
National technical staff	363,000	252,370	14.6	10.2
Subcontracted activity	664,000	234,752	26.7	9.4
Training/Tours	320,000	408,562	12.9	16.4
Equipment /Maintenance	258,623	389,219	10.4	15.7
Admin/Missions/Miscellaneous	419,378	351,972	16.9	14.2
TOTAL	2,485,001	2,485,000	100.0	100.0

Revision N shows no allocation of funds for the year 2005 all having being expended, implying that the project will finish by the end of 2004, although it is generally stated to be terminating around March-May 2005.

## 2.5 Project Revision

In early 2002 the project shifted focus, but it appears that insufficient thought was given – by GEF in particular – to the detail and consequences of this. Broadly there are four areas of concern:

1. The project rephrasing, which commenced in May 2002, changed the two Immediate Objectives to four, one of which (Purpose D) was solely concerned with project execution modalities. Inclusion of this objective may have helped focus project management activities and justify formal attention being paid to them, but cannot be regarded as contributing towards biodiversity conservation.
2. The more explicit incorporation of transboundary activities, based on the sound premise of linking up with transboundary conservation initiatives then coming on stream, required additional resources and an additional demand on project management time. There was no clear indication of what form this activity would take or result in, or whether it would detract from other activities.
3. Project activities spread from the initial target of Quthing District, where three staff members were based (DPO, Project Economist, Project Sociologist), to two other districts. (The two technical posts were converted to DPOs in the two new districts.) This necessitated the establishment of two additional district offices (plus vehicles and support staff), with all the associated problems of communication and co-ordination. As a consequence of staff changes, there was also reduced technical input into the project in economics and sociology. Project management became over-stretched, and each district started to take on more sites.
4. Perhaps most importantly, the project tacitly (or with no stated justification) moved from focussing on globally-significant biodiversity (the justification for GEF support) to conservation of biological resources of significance to local communities. This move did not seem to be noted or questioned, apart from a brief mention in the report *Interim Assessment of Project Implementation Progress: October 2001* ("Experience that the project has gained so far seems to indicate that communities sometimes would like to conserve what they believe is flora and fauna that has significant biodiversity [sic] values at their local level and may not necessarily be of

global significance. In this respect, it is probably prudent to broaden biodiversity conservation to include aspects that are not necessarily of significance globally but are highly valued by local communities as worthy conserving"). In effect this decision nullified the conservation concern that justified its original GEF status (conservation of "...globally significant plant diversity, with unique habitats and high endemism..."). This shift would be more acceptable if it was more explicitly stated, and if project objectives were addressed later by transference of the findings to areas of greater significance, i.e. if a strategy were in place to link conservation at project sites to that at sites of significant conservation concern. However, neither of these was done. Another reason given for the change in focus was that CMBSL was, in effect, acting as a pilot for the larger GEF/World Bank Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project then coming on stream, and should come up rapidly with clear lessons with regard to community involvement and motivation.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

Various conclusions can be drawn from the above observations, coupled with those on project history and progress to date:

First, more thought should have been given to clearly articulating the actual problem the project sought to address. How severely threatened were the endemic and special species of the highlands given the inaccessibility and inhospitability of much of the area and the presence of a significant extent of protected area in South Africa? What were the actual threats, and their levels? While it was probably true that the upland wetland habitats and remaining patches of woody vegetation were under significant threat from over-utilization, and the over-frequency of fire was also having a detrimental effect, many of the endemic species are found in open grassland and are less susceptible to such threats. In retrospect, poor articulation of the actual threats, coupled with the lack of identification of the specific areas where these were compromising biodiversity conservation values, was a weakness in project design. It helped lead to widely differing interpretations of activities and to loss of direction.

Second, the low conservation baseline and institutional weaknesses in the country were perhaps under-emphasized during project development. It was hoped that the newly-formed NES, and a biological "hub" at the National University (NUL), could spearhead progress. But these did not materialize in the envisaged manner. In retrospect, more attention or resources should have gone into building up institutional capacity rather than using assumed capacity to carry out tangible conservation activities. The institutional framework was not yet sufficiently supportive.

Third, NEX modalities were still evolving and the project was something of a 'guinea pig'. The capacity of the Government of Lesotho to implement what was a rather large and experimental project, especially in light of the greatly reduced UNDP support to NES, was over-estimated. Problems of lack of oversight, lack of technical knowledge, and poor choice of project staff, were never overcome, and project performance overall greatly suffered.

Fourth, the institutional setup within which the project was formulated changed significantly around the time of project initiation. The project adapted its modalities to these changes, but the institutional change and loss of momentum were too deep for this to be effective. In particular, NES, the coordinating body, became significantly less capacitated and influential at this time. In retrospect the project should have been reformulated with a different institutional structure, rather than simply adapt to the new one.

Fifth, there was a significant lack of technical input and oversight into the project as it evolved, especially in the early stages of implementation. Initially it was suggested that a technical agency be contracted to procure and backstop/advise international project staff. Instead a procurement agency, UNOPS, was used. Given the recognized lack of capacity in GoL departments, the only person thus providing technical conservation/biological input was the project CTA. The late arrival of the first CTA (1.5 years after project start) and the lack of any formal handover to the second CTA, helped lead to loss of technical focus and intent.

Lastly, but perhaps most significant, there was no project 'champion'. When problems arose no one person or institution seemed to be willing to take on responsibility. In part this came from the loose institutional framework and design, with oversight and input split between different persons or bodies. A major compounding factor was the high staff turnover and loss of institutional memory. For example, people involved in the project at present seem unaware or uncertain about the reasons for a number of early decisions, and hence do not feel responsible. Determined effort by a consistent project champion, whether an individual or institution, could have overcome to a marked degree the limitations given above.

### 3. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

#### 3.1 Roles & Responsibilities

The role of the various institutions is outlined in Section 2.3. As mentioned previously, NES, the national institution charged with oversight on execution, was less capacitated when the project started than during its formulation. If the project had strong, consistent and dynamic leadership, this weakness could have been overcome. The various institutions involved, such as the Department of Range Management, were able to handle their planned activities, but as there was no leadership and direction from the project for much of its life, the inevitable disagreements that could have been readily solved, remained unsolved.

There was no project champion - someone who could provide a sense of direction and commitment. Hence activities and initiatives stopped and started frequently. The project appeared to have made quite a bit of progress when the first CTA was in place (training courses, etc.), and latterly there has been a marked increase in activity. But in general the rate of implementation has been agonisingly slow. Decisions have all too often appeared to be arbitrary, with no clear link to stated project objectives or to laid-down workplans, where these existed. This, coupled with the lack of sanctions or timely remedial action when progress was unacceptably slow or mistakes made, helped cause the project to lose its impetus and direction.

Staff turnover has been very high; the Evaluators are not sure why key staff moved on, although some were asked to resign. In part the turnover may have been due to a feeling that there was too much interference and/or that the project was not getting anywhere. The present NPM (in place since June 2003 after the previous one was dismissed that March) is effectively the fourth, there have been two CTAs in less than four years (CTA 2 since February 2003), and two of the three current DPOs have been in post for less than 6 months (the third for only 16 months, and DPO Mohale's Hoek was previously with the project as Economist from 1999-2002).

The Evaluators found little team spirit within the project, or any sense of pulling together. The project is generally recognised to have had more than its fair share of personality conflicts. Such a complex situation has greatly affected project activities and progress, and probably led to the situation where no one body wants to take on responsibility for getting things back on track again.

The contracts of the DPOs and NPM are due to finish in November 2004, that of the CTA in February 2005, and that of the Project Economist in September 2004. None is clear on whether these will be extended, or for how long. Staff morale is low.

In late 2003 the Government required NEX staff (NPM, DPOs, and support staff) to sign a contract with GoL rather than, as previously, with UNDP. This created resentment as most became effectively less well remunerated. At least two staff resignations may be attributable to this change. With current uncertainties as to the possible remaining life of the project, a number of NEX staff are already looking towards other employment. If they leave at short notice, as is quite likely, this will severely compromise implementation of proposed project activities.

The UN Environmental Economist, who arrived in October 2002 on what was meant to be a series of short-term assignments (he has remained in post to date), was allocated a national counterpart economist in January 2003. This worked quite well, although it was uncertain if the counterpart was under CMBSL management and oversight or that of NES, which led to critical

unavailability at times. The counterpart left in January 2004 and has not been replaced. The Economist has been very productive on a number of topics and in fieldwork, having prepared a number of reports and overseeing some of the consultancies. There has, however, been minimal guidance from project management, apart from the original ToRs which specified only short-term inputs. There have been no other formal counterparts for any project staff, although the National Biodiversity Officer in NES has been frequently involved in advising the project and in decision-making.

At district level, the DPO leads project activities, many of them through the District Implementation Team (DIT) comprising the DPO, Rural Development Officer, Physical Planner, and Range Management Officer. Although there have been some personality problems (Qacha's Nek) and unfortunate incidents (e.g. loss of community's substantial DSA monies by the previous DPO Quthing during a study tour of Zimbabwe, which led to cessation of activities in Letseng la Letsie for 4 months and distrust for over 12), activities at a district level have been a lot less problematic than at national level.

The National Steering Committee (NSC) have been meeting quarterly since February 2001 (it is not clear why they didn't meet before). They claim to have been following progress, and on occasion have expressed disquiet over its very slow pace. However, this does not seem to have had much impact. There is also a problem in that the individuals attending on behalf of departments vary significantly from meeting to meeting, thus detracting from consistency - part of the loss of institutional memory.

Major changes to project activities or budgets are normally made through a Tri-Partite Review (TPR), where the project, GoL, UNDP and GEF meet. The last TPR was in January 2003 when the rephrasing document and revised budget (Revision J) was approved. The NSC (on which all parties, except GEF, sit) now appear to have taken on this role, although the minutes do not refer to any budgetary decisions being made. Presumably UNDP, in conjunction with the project and NES, is now making budget decisions.

Part of the reason for slow implementation is the excessive bureaucracy that now goes with all financial disbursements. Project management has to make all requests in writing, with full supporting documentation, through the Director NES to the PS MTEC. After signature the request is forwarded to UNDP for payment. This level of oversight seems excessive and, coupled with the often lengthy delays and errors, certainly detracts significantly from actual project activities.

In conclusion, the high staff turnover, lack of team spirit, inappropriate decision-making and consequent loss of staff morale, appear to have shackled this project since its early days. Such factors tend to be self-reinforcing, and it is difficult to break the vicious circle. The situation has been compounded by excessive bureaucracy. Lack of a project champion has allowed this to occur, and no one person or institution appears to be fully responsible.

### **3.2 Country Ownership & Involvement**

The project is operated under NEX modalities, hence is executed by the GoL through NES, while a number of activities were meant to be undertaken by other government departments (e.g. Range Management). It is effectively "owned" by the country. Some of the project studies are undertaken by external consultants procured through UNOPS, but only with the approval of GoL and UNDP CO. The NSC, on which a number of government (although not non-government) stakeholders sit, and chaired by the Director of Sectoral Programmes in the Ministry of Finance,



is supposed to ensure a sense of ownership and a means of co-ordinating activities. Unfortunately, it seems that some are more involved than others, and the NSC has not always been able to make itself felt.

At district level, the project has a significant profile in three districts, namely Quthing, Qacha's Nek and Mole's Hoek. A District Steering Committee (DSC), chaired by the District Secretary, meets regularly in each district to review progress and to co-ordinate the activities of Government departments regarding the project. Also sitting on it are chiefs, local community leaders, NGOs, and representatives from participating communities. It was not clear to the Evaluators how well this is functioning, although no significant problems were brought up. The frustration expressed by district staff and DSC members was that decisions made at district level were often not supported by required action at national level. There appears to be very little link between national and district steering committees.

A particular concern of ours was the apparent lack of co-ordination in Qacha's Nek between the two GEF projects, MDTP and CMBSL, with both attempting to achieve very similar things in this one district. Each project has its own DSC, with very similar membership, but with little apparent co-ordination.

The project has little link to other national initiatives. For example, there are no formal links, and apparently little interchange, between CMBSL and MDTP at national level, despite both having similar objectives in similar environments. Sabonet (Southern Africa Botanical Network), also a GEF project, was hardly involved in project activities, although CMBSL required botanical inventory of the target areas. The Southern African Biodiversity Support Programme (SABSP), also GEF funded, had limited funding available for developing conservation initiatives that fell within certain criteria. CMBSL could readily have developed a proposal to utilise that source of support. The project should have used these other initiatives to fulfil its objectives, and likewise NES (through which they were being co-ordinated) should have enforced collaboration.

The GoL has maintained its financial obligations to the project as far as we could determine. This is through provision of fuel for project vehicles, office space, etc.

### **3.3 Stakeholder Participation**

Stakeholders here are taken to be communities in the project area, CBOs and NGOs, rather than Government.

Generally there has been good and active involvement by many communities and CBOs. A wide range of people in each have been involved in training, and it is they themselves that determine who should participate. They have been encouraged to take on responsibility, and in a number of instances have done so commendably (construction of rondavels, etc.).

Likewise at district level, the DSC has a number of stakeholders. There are very few NGOs in Lesotho, and most are comparatively weak and need much support. QWDT has signed a contract with CMBSL for support of construction of vulture restaurants, but frustrations are building up as the money is still not forthcoming. They were meant to be project partners from 1999.

Stakeholder participation at national level seems much weaker (addressed partly in Section 3.2). Apart from through the NSC, very few other departments, institutions, other projects or relevant NGOs are involved. The resultant lack of advocacy and discussion has contributed to loss of impact. However, it is recognised that there are few other appropriate partners in the country.

### **3.4 Role of UN Agencies**

The various roles of UNDP CO, UNOPS and GEF were outlined earlier (Section 2.3).

UNDP is responsible for disbursing and accounting for all funds, which are held in trust for GEF. Normal procedures are followed, except that recently, in common with other UN projects in Lesotho, existing imprest accounts were closed down and a system of direct payments from UNDP CO instituted. This has proved problematic. More details are given in the following section. It has also not been possible for the project, or the Evaluators, to get a clear indication of what funds remain in the project, or under what budget line. This has led to obvious difficulties for project management, and also for the Evaluators in determining an Exit Strategy. This is elaborated upon in the next section.

UNOPS, which procures and services the two international staff members and any international consultancy (including the Mid-Term Evaluation) has performed satisfactorily. No issues were raised.

Occasional backstopping visits have been carried out by GEF and some substantive queries made. For example, the GEF Advisor for East Africa (backstopping the project at that time) visited a couple of sites in Mohale's Hoek in mid-2001 and noted that some sites were not appropriate for project activities. A brief report was prepared, but it has not been possible to find a copy at the project office, although it is mentioned in the NSC minutes. The GEF Southern Africa Advisor also queried the justification for erection of the Letseng la Letsie fence, which did not fill GEF criteria (i.e. no funding for infrastructure). However in both cases decisions and activities went ahead. Queries have also been made on at least two occasions regarding recruitment procedures, which sometimes by-passed GEF.

The lack of direct technical input into the project from an outside agency has been problematic and has helped to lead to both loss of direction and impact.

### **3.5 Financial Planning**

This has also proved problematic. As mentioned earlier, for almost two years it has not been possible for the project to get a firm indication from UNDP of what funds remain, and what expenditure has been by budget line. Quite how this came about is not clear to the Evaluators, although the recent move of UNDP to the Atlas system of accounts has created problems in many UN offices worldwide. This is recognised and is no doubt partly to blame for the inability of UNDP over the last few months to give up-to-date figures, but there should have been some manual system that could be used to give at least indicative figures to within a month or two.

In the last few days of the MTR, the Evaluators obtained a figure (unfortunately without documentation or by budget line) that USD 1.9 million had been spent; presumably leaving around USD 550,000 remaining. It was not stated whether recent large expenditures (e.g. fencing) had been included, or how much of current staffing through UNOPS. The last budget revision seen (Revision N, December 2003) stated that only USD 469,006 would be available in 2004, with no allocation remaining for 2005. Expenditure in 2003 was presumably less than anticipated by some USD 200,000 (given that two full-time international staff have been in place for 7 months of 2004). Under Revision N, 63% of the proposed expenditure for 2004 was for international staff and only USD 26,000 (9%) for on-ground activity (training, subcontracts, but excluding local staff and support), which seems disproportionate. There is a worry that there will not be sufficient funds remaining for some of the staff and activities required for the recommended Exit Strategy.

The other point concerns the contract for construction of the fence at Letseng la Letsie. Part of this was paid in 2003 (ZAR 1.15 million for materials), but a contract for ZAR 1.1 million has just been signed for erection, to come from budget line 21.03 - subcontracts (local). However, in Budget Revision N the total amount allocated to both local and international contracts from 1999-2004 was only USD 234,752, while the costs of the fence alone (materials + construction) would be around USD 315,000. Meanwhile, a number of other local and international contracts have already been paid for out of these budget lines (e.g. biophysical baseline, ecotourism and Trust Fund, user rights). It is not clear how or where the discrepancies arose, or what sums actually do remain, but it is clear that Revision N does not bear much relation to reality now.

Also mentioned in Section 3.4 is the issue of closure of the imprest account and reversion to direct payments from UNDP. Initially, the project held an imprest account that was reported upon and replenished quarterly. This was closed by UNDP CO in late 2003, along with those of a number of other UN projects, owing to accounting irregularities and the lack of financial capacity of some projects. In the direct payment system, the project needs to supply all documentation in a request through the Director NES for the signature of the PS MTEC - a procedure which has led to delays of weeks and even months. This system operates from relatively minor purchases to major expenditures and contracts. Payments made have, at times, been incomplete. The project's financial credibility to suppliers (e.g. hotels for workshops) is sometimes being called into question in light of these experiences. The whole procedure has strained the project's limited management capacity.

The Evaluators understand that UNDP is now (August 2004) reverting to the old imprest system, which should speed things up significantly.

### **3.6 Monitoring & Evaluation**

Initially, there appeared to be no internal M&E (Inception Report of March 2001, states no workplan or budget available to date, no systematic progress reports (except DPO Quthing), and no indicators shown for monitoring). More detailed work plans and M&E framework were established by May 2002, including lists of objective verifiable indicators, means of verification, assumptions and risks for each of the 21 activities.

Based on the new planning, a logframe necessary for designing annual plans was developed, but what has been lacking is the design of plans such that monitoring and evaluation of implementation could result, i.e. an annual plan with objectives, activities, duration and target outputs, along with reporting showing any variance and its management. As a result, management could not be informed whether there was a variance at monthly, quarterly or annual reporting levels, such that there would be a basis for corrective measures. Project management, the NSC and the oversight authorities could thus not detect where project progress was in relation to the overall plan, and what needed to be done to keep it on track. Stated outputs have tended to be long-term and not readily quantifiable. They needed to be broken down into more readily handled short-term targets.

Management, as mentioned earlier, was too often ad hoc in nature, leading to what work plans there were being rendered ineffective quite quickly. Time-lines were not adhered to. Little seemed to be done when things were not going according to plan - ameliorating actions too often weren't taken, or additional resources applied. The NSC monitored declining progress, but did not seem to be able to do much about it.

The reports - both from districts and at a national level - were often in different formats, and too often narrative. It proved hard for the Evaluators to determine exactly what progress had been made overall, what the problems were, and whether these were being solved.

## 4. PROJECT OUTPUTS

This section looks at what the project has achieved to date, some of the problems, and provides an overall assessment of progress against objectives.

### 4.1 Progress to 2001

In the first CTA's Inception Report (R. Mutande, March 2001) he stated that progress had been very slow over the two years since the project commenced. There was no CTA until January 2001 and there had been a succession of NPMs. During this time the achievements (see table in Inception Report on project progress May 1999-March 2001) had been essentially (a) the establishment of project structure, mechanisms and steering committees, (b) consultations at district and community levels through public meetings, and (c) site selection. There had been no baseline studies, no technical rationale was laid out, no clear work plans drawn up, and there had been no training. It is clear to the Evaluators that it was during this period that the project started to lose its focus and direction.

### 4.2 Achievements

Over the last five years the project has had some significant achievements:

- It is working in three districts (Quthing, Qacha's Nek, Mohale's Hoek) and has a strong presence in each. There are functional District Implementation Teams in each district, comprising the DPO and local government officers from key technical departments.
- The project has made interventions at around 16 sites or sets of communities (8 in Mohale's Hoek, 4 in each of the other districts). At many of the sites there is a greatly increased awareness of biodiversity issues and of the need for conservation. This ICD project has effectively linked Conservation with Development in the minds of many at district and community level. But unfortunately much less so at national level.
- Some target communities, facilitated by the project, have formed conservation groups or grazing associations (e.g. Mapotsane, Qobong, Masita). Some areas have been protected from grazing for a significant period so that the range and plants are recovering (e.g. Mapotsane, Tlhabeli).
- A number of communities are now more empowered (e.g. Qobong, Masita), and more able and willing to take decisions on resource use into their own hands. The project has provided an enabling environment.
- Much training of community members and district-level workers has taken place. Most has been relevant to raising awareness and capacity for conservation, and appropriately targeted. It has been carried out principally through contracting-in persons or local organisations. In addition to short courses there have been a number of study visits or look/learn tours - to other initiatives in Lesotho (e.g. Lesotho Highlands Water Project sites) and to CBNRM areas in Zimbabwe. These have been beneficial and greatly appreciated. Two MSc students from the Department of Range Management were sponsored to study Range Science in South Africa.
- There is raised awareness at community, district and national levels of the possibilities of ecotourism and alternative conservation-friendly land uses. There is also an increased expectation that this will become an alternative source of rural income.
- Three areas have been formally designated for conservation - Letseng la Letsie, Mapotsane and Mosaqane - with three others at an advanced stage. Various village grazing schemes have also been set up by communities with CMBSL assistance. Letseng la Letsie, a

particularly scenic and biologically interesting area in Quthing, has received a high level of attention from the project - it can be regarded as its 'flagship'.

However, there are also a number of concerns over project performance and achievements that need to be addressed. Some of these related to management and implementation, and were discussed in Section 3. Others are discussed under appropriate headings below.

### **4.3 Project Activities & Concerns**

#### Project Direction

Perhaps the most serious problem has been the loss of project direction and focus. Initially, project objectives were the conservation of globally significant plant diversity in the Highlands of southern Lesotho through local communities. This was the justification for GEF involvement. However, in the course of activities this has moved to resource conservation of biological resources by communities (e.g. grazing, thatching grass, medicinal plants). The choice of sites made around 1999-2000 was apparently based on community interest and bore little relevance to biodiversity values or other similar criteria. If sites had been chosen on criteria such as ease of access or community motivation (a demonstration approach), the limitations of this regarding achievement of overall project objectives should have been explicitly stated, and measures taken to link findings to possible activities at more biologically important but problematic sites. This was not done, and there was no strategy developed to address it. Protected areas (PAs and CNRs, forming part of Objective A) have been sited in too many cases in places of insignificant biodiversity conservation value.

It is not clear exactly why this change, which took place before the arrival of the first CTA, happened. However, neither CTA has addressed the issue or given any indication that they considered it a problem (see Section 2.5). Good technical oversight and better incorporation of scientific/technical input into activities would have prevented such a situation arising, or at least allowed the project to regain some of its original conservation vision.

#### Community Expectations

Many communities regard their relationship with the project as a sort of social contract – "we will set aside an area for 'biodiversity', and in exchange you will provide us with some desired development – water supply, poultry, ecotourists". The project has been perceived as making many promises to communities, and there is an increasing feeling among them that these promises are not being, and will not be, fulfilled. It was never envisaged that the project could directly supply such development, nor was it a project objective. Many communities have shown commendable willingness and use of their own resources to initiate construction of accommodation, to set-aside rangeland, and to apply social controls or policing. They are now looking for recognition or a "reward" from the project or government.

This is a difficult situation to handle, and one which was, even if not encouraged by the project, not redirected at an early stage. The project in its closing phase needs to address it and ensure that gains made with communities are not simply left hanging, and not terminate the relationship without explanation or a way forward.

#### Training

The amount, type and appropriateness of training has generally been very good. Most training courses have been run by contracted-in individuals or NGOs, and has been greatly appreciated, as far as we could determine, by both communities and district-level staff/officers. Some study tours have also been held - two to CBNRM projects in Zimbabwe, one to the Wildlife Training College in the Kruger National Park, and to some sites within Lesotho (e.g. Katse botanic garden

of the LHWP). The Evaluators were not able to obtain a full list of training courses run or tours, or of the number of people involved. This is part of the problem of project documentation (see below). There have been five training courses held since the second CTA arrived, with possibly 100 people involved, and one study tour (Kruger, 21 persons).

Two problems have arisen with training. One is that, perhaps quite rightly, project staff do not choose who from each community or group should go, but offer the group one to three places; the community decides. Sometimes continuity is lost (e.g. follow up courses on accounting) when persons change between courses, but sometimes friction and resentment is caused if the same few people go to many courses. In a couple of instances (Mapotsane, Qobong) this may have led to others in the community withdrawing from activities. It is not certain how project staff could have overcome this (perhaps application of stringent, independent criteria?), but a proactive rather than a passive approach to the issue was required.

The second problem is that at least some of the tours have been over-resourced. The DSA offered for the two trips to Zimbabwe, for example, was excessive given the recipients' circumstances. It resulted in both cases in much resentment over who was chosen and on what grounds. The unfortunate loss by the previous DPO, under rather inexplicable circumstances, of a significant part of the DSA monies led to the Letseng la Letsie community actively withdrawing from all project activity for at least four months (for example, project vehicles were even stoned), and probably set back progress for a year. The project/UNDP finally agreed to reimburse participants, which came to almost USD 22,000. The Zimbabwe tour by the Mohale's Hoek communities ended in disagreements such that Range Management staff ceased to be active with the project. More appropriate DSA and more considered selection criteria may well have avoided such problems.

There has been no apparent follow-up on training given - how effective has it been, what improvements could be made, what further training is required for communities to become more capacitated?

### Conservation Areas

As mentioned above, there appear to have been no criteria for the selection of protected areas (PA/CNR), other than community willingness (statement from NSC Chair, August 2004) and perhaps a general unsubstantiated feeling that there were useful plants still to be found there. There was also no system of site prioritisation, although activities at Letseng la Letsie received disproportionate political support. In some instances, areas of normal degraded rangeland (e.g. Mosaqane) or even peri-urban rangeland in the lowlands (Mapotsane village, 1600 m), were selected. One project site, Phatlalla grazing scheme, is in the lowlands at 1500 m and comprises severely-eroded cropping land and greatly degraded rangeland; it cannot be said to fulfil any biodiversity criteria. In few cases does the protected area or project site appear to have significant biodiversity value.

Of the sites the Evaluators visited, or got good information on, and based on features such as relatively undegraded/intact condition, diversity of plants and habitats, and presence of species of conservation significance, only three sites appear to clearly fulfil the original project intentions - Letseng la Letsie (significant extent of upland peat grassland and what was wetland, plus large vulture colonies in the gorges below), Tsatsane (fairly intact habitats with unusual plants and bird colonies), and the Qobong valley and the plateau above (wide range of moderately intact habitats with high-altitude bogs, unusual plants and birds).

The Evaluators were not able to get a clear figure for the number of areas where the project has facilitated or created conservation areas (Protected Areas or Community Nature Reserves in project parlance). Figures given in the 2004 Project Implementation Review (PIR) refer more to plans and negotiations rather than to functional entities on the ground. The table below gives what we were able to determine during visits or from explicit statements during District and community-level interviews. In addition there are three functional grazing schemes with controlled grazing in some parts, to the benefit of biodiversity conservation as well as livestock.

Table 4.1. Protected areas established by CMBSL project, 1999-2004.

	PA		CNR	
	established	advanced	established	advanced
Qacha's Nek	1*	0	0	1
Quthing	1	1	0	0
Mohale's Hoek	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	2	1	1	2

\* Mosaqane, but this appears to be more a CNR or village grazing scheme for catchment protection.

A figure for total extent is not available, except for Letseng la Letsie and Mapotsane, but this is unlikely to be greatly in excess of 8000 ha. This works out at a project expenditure of USD 6200/km<sup>2</sup>/yr compared to figures of around \$ 1000-3000/km<sup>2</sup>/yr, for highly speciose, small threatened forest patches in East Africa.

Part of the problem in determining a figure, and of deciding which is a PA, which a CNR, and which a grazing scheme, is the confusion among project staff, district staff and communities over (a) what is meant by each and their defining attributes, and (b) when an area is real and functional as opposed to just being under discussion. A third point, of course, would then be to determine how effective each is in terms of conservation.

#### Scientific and Technical Input

The project had very limited scientific input into its activities. Neither CTA was a conservation biologist, and that input was not available from other project partners. In retrospect, this should have been provided by a contracted technical agency (as had been originally proposed) or brought in on consultancy terms. This lack of technical input resulted in (a) compounding the loss of biological focus resulting from inappropriate site selection, (b) some inappropriate conservation interventions, (c) the inability of the project to utilise the limited biological/conservation findings and information available, and (d) limitations in effectively advocating for specific conservation actions.

At Letseng la Letsie, for example, the communities (apparently with much external encouragement) requested a 2.8 m game fence to be erected around the 40 km perimeter, this to be funded in full by the project. The fence is meant to (a) control or stop cattle grazing inside the formally protected area, (b) keep introduced wildlife inside for game viewing, and (c) encourage ecotourists. However, (i) wildlife numbers are actually higher in adjacent areas in South Africa, (ii) many animals need to be able to migrate altitudinally during the year, and (iii) they also need a larger area than that being fenced if populations are to remain viable and 'wild'. The difficulties and costs of managing a game fence have not been adequately considered. At present the game fence is being constructed at a total cost of around USD 315,000, over 12% of total project budget and much greater than any other activity. And without any clear assessment of the



conservation value or consequences of this investment, its managerial implications, or any analysis of options. The commissioned Environmental Impact Statement (by NUL Consult) did not address these issues. There has also been a proposal to repair and increase the height of the Letseng la Letsie dam wall, for dubious conservation or recreational objectives (see Annex 4). In both cases the project was not able to adequately evaluate these technical issues or inform decision-making processes.

Limited biological data were available initially for the CMBSL area, but more have since become available through commissioned studies (NUL Consult and others). However, there has been no assessment of these data by the project, or a biological or conservation description made of existing or proposed protected areas. This is a major weakness. The main protected areas should be described in conservation terms (special habitats, species of interest or concern, threats). Only from this it will start to be possible to measure achievements or impact.

The technical input in terms of studies on economic valuation, user rights and ecotourism potentials has been commendable. What is now needed is for these to be synthesised and a clear way forward for activities articulated. The studies, it seems, have not yet informed project activities or direction on the ground.

#### Baseline Studies

Four baseline studies (birds, reptiles/amphibians, mammals, plants/vegetation) were commissioned in early 2003 through the consulting wing of the National University of Lesotho (NUL Consult). For all three vertebrate studies, NUL subcontracted specialists in South Africa as none was available locally. The studies covered a number of project sites, and were partially quantitative, designed to be repeated at intervals to get an indication of any change in status. Differences of contract interpretation between NUL Consult and the project then arose such that, at present, NUL have not delivered anything of significance and are demanding additional payments. In early 2004 the project contacted the three vertebrate sub-contractors and "bought" their reports off them. The project now has data on vertebrate groups but not on plants and vegetation, which were being covered by a NUL staff-member.

What is now required, apart from the completion of the vital plants study, is a scientific evaluation and synthesis of all biodiversity studies, and clear conservation conclusions and points-of-action drawn. Unfortunately, these baselines are only being established towards the end of the project; it will not be possible to determine any impact project activities may have had on conservation status. Or indeed any impact its activities may have had on resource availability, usage or economic well-being - no baselines are available for these either. There is no way to demonstrate impact.

#### Economic, User Rights, Ecotourism and Trust Fund Studies

Studies were carried out by the UN Environmental Economist, in conjunction with the counterpart Economist and DPOs, on economic valuation of biological resources by communities at a number of project sites. A study was also done by outside consultants on user rights. The studies were well done and appropriate. However, they tended to be "ticked off" by project management and were not used to help formulate project direction or activities. There was insufficient effort made to follow up on their findings or conclusions.

The major ecotourism study, by a consultant from South Africa (Rob Hicks) in late 2003, is comprehensive and sound. A numbers of potentials were pointed out, such as a hiking trail along the Lesotho/RSA border from near Qacha's Nek to Letseng la Letsie, and quantified in terms of facilities required, support, visitor numbers, potential income, etc. The consultant presented the

findings to a number of national stakeholders, who accepted them. However, there does not appear to have been any follow-up on this; people and departments seem to be looking at each other to take the next step, hence nothing has happened. CMBSL should have been more proactive in "selling" the ideas and proposed activities to potential investors, government departments and others.

Linked with the ecotourism study was a study on the possibilities of establishing a Trust Fund for monies deriving from conservation with local communities as beneficiaries. The study is regarded as being well done. Discussions have also taken place in NES as to whether such a fund should be new, or linked into the existing Biodiversity Trust Fund set up under the LHWA for protection of the endemic Maloti Minnow. The remit of this Lesotho Biodiversity Trust, with trustees from both Lesotho and South Africa and set up with an initial 8 million Maloti, now also covers other aspects of biodiversity in the country. However, it is quite new and is still in the process of being set up.

Given that no significant income is yet being derived from any ecotourism or conservation activity, it was thought premature to investigate these possibilities further. The idea of a Trust Fund might be sound, but until there is significant income coming in, there is not much point in going any further. It would make far more sense to link in to the established Lesotho Biodiversity Trust.

### Documentation

Aspects of this have been addressed above. The project has not fully used all the available and commissioned studies - biophysical or economic. What appears to be a "ticking-off activity" approach is being followed, rather than fully digesting and synthesising the findings and conclusions, discussing and sharing them with others, and using the results to inform subsequent activities. There is a strong need to compile and synthesise all studies and to draw conclusions, which should be clearly written up and disseminated to others who may be able to make use of them.

Within the project itself documentation is poor, no doubt partly arising from high staff turnover. It was difficult to track down all the commissioned studies, reports or minutes; files are incomplete. The Evaluators, for example, had trouble accessing key documents, and some seemed lost. In the closing stages of the project it is recommended that the major documents and reports are brought together and properly indexed.

The other important aspect of documentation is the drawing and disseminating of conclusions or lessons from the project. CMBSL was recognised as being somewhat experimental in nature, in forging new ground. As such it needs to write up its experiences, what it has achieved, and what it has not achieved, and why. These should be widely disseminated to those involved in conservation in Lesotho and elsewhere, so that they may learn from the large investment that CMBSL represents.

### Institutional Linkages

CMBSL has very weak institutional linkages. It was envisaged that the project would be breaking new ground for conservation in Lesotho, hence it would need links with a number of departments, institutions, projects and NGOs (although it is recognised that the NGO sector in Lesotho is generally weak). Indeed, in the design many of the activities were to be carried out not by project staff but through contracts with institutions such as NUL, NGOs such as QWDT, and through government departments such as Range Management and Conservation. However, these links were not properly functional in most cases.

The Department of Range Management carried out some of the work on RMAs, but later there seemed to be disagreements (the Evaluators could not understand what) and collaboration was significantly reduced. NUL was meant to act as the repository of biological information (surveys, monitoring, etc.) and as the national scientific "hub". Possibly it did not have this capacity, or the will, but it certainly did not fulfil this role. The deep differences over the biophysical consultancies have effectively put a stop to collaboration there. QWDT was explicitly mentioned as a collaborating NGO in the Project Document, but five years later an MoU with it has only just been signed with MTEC (late September 2004). The project had agreed, in early 2004, to make 69,000 Maloti available to QWDT for the establishment of two vulture restaurants (the Cape and Bearded Vultures are globally threatened species with significant populations in southern Lesotho, and vulture restaurants should be a good tourist draw) and for improvements to the existing Quthing Visitor Centre. Both seem to be viable propositions which will help towards project objectives. However, owing to the lack of a signed MoU, disbursement of funds was held up for some months.

Strong links should have been forged with the other GEF-funded conservation initiative, the GEF/World Bank Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project (which commenced in early 2003), and also with the highly-resourced and dynamic Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) that has carried out a number of conservation interventions since the mid-1990s. As with CMBSL, MDTP is situated within NES, and the lack of strong formal linkages is a failure both of the project and of NES. A draft MoU with MDTP has been drawn up, although still has not yet been signed, but it will now need to be redrafted as CMBSL enters its exit strategy with changed activities. In many respects MDTP will be inheriting CMBSL's mantle, and possibly some of its activities in Qacha's Nek and Quthing. It is not clear why links with the LHDA have apparently been only informal and just linked to site visits. Two out of the three formal conservation areas in the country were created under the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

Finally, the project did very little in the area of advocacy as well as dissemination of findings and on biodiversity conservation issues, although a video and three posters were produced for the WSSD and a brochure and fact sheet for national use.

### Transfrontier Issues

Five transfrontier activities were listed in the 2002 project revision (see Table 4.2). Three of them refer to networking with other projects or institutions in South Africa and elsewhere, and two refer to developing and implementing transboundary plans. It appears that only minimal progress has been made. Links exist with the Peace Parks Foundation and with a private initiative in South Africa located close to Tsatsane and Letseng la Letsie, the Southern Drakensberg Trans-Frontier Conservation Area. But these links are comparatively recent, almost casual and with no formalised agreement or plans for joint activities.

### Project Organisation

These activities (Purpose D) are briefly discussed here as they were stated project outputs. They really should not have been outputs, but just essential parts of normal project management.

The project is a functional entity and staff do probably now have increased capacity, particularly those at district level. Implementing agency staff do not appear to have been greatly capacitated by the project, even at NES, with the exception of those from the Department of Range Management who went for MSc studies. Training of project staff has not been a significant project activity. There has been no long-term funding secured for project activities, although MDTP will take on, in effect, some of the national-level activity. Four viable project proposals

have been prepared for specific income-generating activities, including for a botanic garden (Qobong) and water-bottling plant (Mosaqane), although none are yet funded. Monitoring systems may be in place but do not appear to be functioning effectively.

#### 4.4 Overall Assessment

An overall assessment and scoring of progress against project activities (according to GEF scale and definitions) is given in Table 4.2 below. Table 4.3 following indicates achievements against stated project outcomes (which differ from Outputs in their stated goals).

Table 4.2. Project progress against Outputs (2002 revised logframe).

Outputs	Findings	Pro- gress
<b>Purpose A: A planned and rational network of Protected Areas is in place, which adequately covers the extent of Lesotho's biodiversity</b>		<b>MS</b>
A.1 Implementing institutions empowered to support the development of PAs, CNRs & RMAs in Lesotho	2 MSc completed in Range Mgmt. Not being directly applied to project activities. No marked capacity increase in NES. Some project staff trained + awareness visits on community conservation issues. Not enough for sustainability	MS
A.2 Knowledge (including indigenous) on BD generated through research activities	Limited research knowledge available (birds, mammals, herps). Most baseline studies only just completed, some still not. NUL not acting as hub or repository of knowledge. Data on economic valuation available. Knowledge not being applied substantively to project activities	MS
A.3 Local communities empowered with increased knowledge on sustainable use of BD within their areas	Good & appropriate training of many persons in communities & district, including in biodiversity issues & awareness	S
A.4 Alternative livelihood systems based mainly on ecotourism enterprises developed	Some ecotourism & other income generating projects identified. Ecotourism consultancy. Some communities have constructed basic facilities, but not yet substantively functional. No involvement of private sector yet, but some interest	MS
<b>Purpose B: Improved grazing and resources management systems resulting in reduced rate of biodiversity loss outside formal Protected Areas</b>		<b>MS</b>
B.1 BD-relevant policies and regulations developed, revised and/or strengthened	No new significant policies or regulations yet in place. Some assistance to increasing no. plant spp. on regulatory legislation. Poor advocacy	U
B.2 Regulatory agencies empowered with clear mandates and capacity for BD conservation and supported at district & national level	Still some institutional confusion on regulatory and implementing agencies. Moderately good cooperation at district level. Good training	MS
B.3 Local communities and CBOs (including Grazing Associations) empowered to regulate access to grazing resources or RMAs and utilization in project areas	Number of communities have formed CBOs (VGAs, etc) which are effective in controlling grazing & resource use. Sustainable, self-motivated; although still want promised development assistance. Some impediments at regulatory & political levels (chiefs/councils)	HS
B.4 Communities and local government authorities with increased knowledge on BD issues	Greatly increased awareness of biodiversity issues by communities & district authorities. Good participation	S
B.5 Viable projects prepared and approved for funding	4 viable project proposals prepared (incl. Mosaquane water, Qobong Bot. garden). None yet funded or implemented (although Qobong garden started)	MS
<b>Purpose C: An integrated bioregional approach (also trans-border) to biodiversity conservation and watershed management established</b>		<b>U</b>
C.1 Network with other biodiversity projects within Lesotho established and strengthened	No significant networking with others. Links to NUL & MDTP, but not yet formalized	U

C.2 Network with South Africa on cross-border biodiversity conservation established and strengthened	Links made to Peace Parks & SDTFCA, but at very early stage	U
C.3 Network with regional organizations established and strengthened	No progress	U
C.4 Methodologies for bioregional approaches developed and approved by the parties	No progress	U
C.5 Integrated bioregional plans implemented	No progress. Possible links through MDTP	U
<b>Purpose D: A functional project organization, management and coordination system for the implementation of biodiversity conservation programs established at central, district and community levels</b>		<b>MS</b>
D.1 Project facilitation services operational at national and district level	Project operational at national level & in 3 districts	S
D.2 Documents/guidelines prepared on project management and organization	Some documents prepared; implementation weak in places	MS
D.3 Project staff and implementing agencies staff with increased knowledge on project management and organization and BD conservation	Staff have increased knowledge, less on BD conservation. Application good at district level, not good at national	MS
D.4 Long-term project funding ensured	No funding secured	U
D.5 Project annual planning and budgeting system operational at national and district levels	Planning & budget systems operational. Delays within NES/MTEC; problems at UNDP	MS
D.6 Project monitoring and evaluation systems operational at all levels	Reporting & monitoring system developed, but application weak	MS
D.7 Project procurement system operational at national and district levels	Procurement system operational, but keeps changing. Delays experienced, but mostly external to project	MS
D.8 Project financial management system operational at national and district levels	Financial management operational.	MS

NB: HS – Highly satisfactory; S – Satisfactory; MS - Marginally satisfactory; U – Unsatisfactory

There appears to be a disjunction in the evaluation scores given for activities (Outputs) and achievements (Outcomes) as activities and outputs were perhaps not framed sufficiently rigorously. Outcomes are specific and relate to the establishment of protected areas and mechanisms/institutions in place to support conservation, whereas many of the stated Outputs dwell more on mechanisms and processes by which to achieve this, rather than on having actually achieved it. Based solely on project Purposes A, B and C (the substantive Outputs), and giving each activity equal weight, the overall project score is Marginally Satisfactory. But if scoring is based on project Outcomes (actual achievements) then the overall score is Unsatisfactory.

In general, the project has carried out many of its activities, but the results and impacts have not been forthcoming. Although perhaps still early days, apart from awareness raised most project achievements show little likelihood of being long-lasting or sustainable, unless significant further efforts are made.

Table 4.3. Project Achievements against Outcomes.

Project Outcomes	Achievements	
1. Expanding the protected area network in Lesotho	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 PAs (Letseng, Mosaqane), 4 CNRs(?), all relatively small (total ~80 km<sup>2</sup>). RMAs/VGAs not really PAs; unsure of sustainability</li> <li>• Letseng la Letsie being fenced, but no clear justification or cost-effective analysis</li> <li>• Poor biological justification for sites chosen; only cover fraction of Highland biodiversity</li> </ul>	U
2. Putting mechanisms in place to protect biodiversity resources outside protected areas, particularly developing RMAs (grazing and resource management systems)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good training &amp; awareness among communities &amp; district authorities</li> <li>• Good success by some communities in controlling grazing &amp; resource use, but sustainability a challenge</li> <li>• Ecotourism, user rights, economic valuation &amp; other reports</li> <li>• Some project proposals being prepared</li> <li>• No impact on policy yet</li> </ul>	MS
3. A stronger network of biodiversity institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QWDT to be helped in conservation, but assistance just starting</li> <li>• NUL used for biophysical baseline, but has not delivered satisfactorily; BD information hub not functional</li> <li>• NES not empowered by CMBSL</li> </ul>	U
4. Developing an integrated bio-regional approach to biodiversity conservation and watershed management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial links to Peace Parks, private sector initiatives, MDTP. No substantive progress</li> </ul>	U

#### 4.5 Project Impacts & Sustainability

The overall impact of the CMBSL project on conservation in Lesotho so far appears to have been very limited, especially given the USD 2 million expended to date by GEF, and around USD 0.5 million by the Government of Lesotho. Community awareness of conservation issues has been commendably increased through project activities in the localities where the project has worked, but this has had little ripple-effect and the project has not capitalised upon it at national level. A number of communities have become empowered and are willing to take on, and invest in, management of their natural resources, although there must be concerns on its sustainability. In a number of cases, communities have had their expectations raised, and felt they have been promised developments or ecotourists that will uplift them. Such expectations are unlikely to be fulfilled in the expected timeframe, and it is to be hoped that people do not react against this by "de-conserving". It is important to consolidate the gains that have been made, and to wean communities off these expectations. This is a major challenge for the project in its remaining months. Commendably, some individuals are realising that it is now up to themselves - not to the project or government - to take any conservation forward.

Undoubtedly, some natural resources in some areas are in a more healthy shape than they were three or so years ago, but the extent of this area is probably quite small. In at least some instances it is likely the gains can be sustained locally. But it has to be recognised that these resources are not the globally significant biodiversity the project was meant to be targeting. The conservation value of species such as Spiral Aloe is now more widely appreciated, and exploitation of at least some populations is probably better controlled. Medicinal plants, too, are better managed in places (especially in Quthing), although most are fairly widely distributed in occurrence and none are particularly threatened or restricted to the Maloti Centre of Endemism.

One potential success is the area of Letseng la Letsie, which does have significant conservation value - in terms of the species present, the status and diversity of habitats, its relative intactness, and in its potential for ecotourism. The area has been declared protected by the local Paramount Chief. Whether the game fence will enhance or detract from its continued conservation, whether fence construction and enclosure will bring the fractious communities together and lead to reduced livestock grazing pressure, or whether it will act as a source of antagonism against central government and outside conservationists, remains to be seen. If tourism can build up rapidly, and at least some of the benefits go to these communities, then there is hope.

At national level the project is generally regarded as having been, at best, problematic. This statement should be accepted by Government, UNDP and others, and from it they should derive a number of lessons learned of how this came to be. Strong efforts now need to be made to avoid these pitfalls in future, and in that regard CMBSL would have been of benefit to future conservation efforts in Lesotho.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The project was an attempt to (a) conserve some of the unique biodiversity (species, habitats and ecosystems) of the Maloti Highlands, (b) to increase the proportion of Lesotho's area under some form of biodiversity conservation, and (c) to do this through communities so that they could manage their environment to the benefit of both conservation and themselves. Despite some significant achievements, particularly in increasing awareness in a number of communities of the value of conservation, it has not succeeded in its objectives, particularly objectives (a) and (b). There has been a low level of outputs given the resources available and utilized, and very little conservation impact.

There has been no consistent project leadership. In part this has been as a result of high staff turnover, lack of a team spirit, and poor decision making, all of which have led to a very slow rate of project implementation. But more significantly, the project lost sight of its original objectives (conservation of special biodiversity in the Highlands, the reason for GEF involvement) at an early stage by getting increasingly involved in a range of community initiatives focussed on biological resources and income-generation schemes at degraded rangeland sites. Many of these sites are of questionable biological significance and do not contribute significantly to the project goal. There appear to have been no clear criteria for site selection, or any attempt to justify them on conservation grounds. Some project sites do have significant biodiversity conservation value (e.g. Letseng la Letsie, Tsatsane), and any follow-on activities should focus on these.

The levels of awareness of conservation have been significantly raised by the project in the areas where it has worked, and the wide range of appropriate training received is commendable. However, there is a problem in that many communities regard their relationship with the project as a sort of social contract – "we will set aside an area for 'biodiversity', and in exchange you will provide us with some desired development – water supply, poultry, ecotourists". The project is perceived as having made many promises to communities, but there is an increasing feeling among them that these promises are not being, and will not be, fulfilled. Communities have shown commendable willingness and use of their own resources to initiate construction of "tourist" accommodation, to set-aside rangeland, and to apply social controls or policing. They are now looking for recognition or a "reward" from the project or the Lesotho Government. This is a difficult situation to handle, and one which was, even if not encouraged by the project, not redirected by it at an early stage. The project in its closing phase needs to address this and ensure that gains made with communities are not simply left hanging.

A number of useful consultancies and studies have been done under the project, but there has been a lack of integration of their findings into project activities and decision making. In addition, there have been some badly informed decisions (e.g. the Letseng la Letsie fence) and little conservation science input into activities. The linkages between the project and government departments, other projects, transfrontier initiatives, the university and civil society, have been weak. There has been little awareness raised at national level, and little done in the way of advocacy. Project findings need to be synthesized, well-documented and disseminated widely, so that future conservation activities in Lesotho can be well-informed by the GEF investment.

Given the troubled history of CMBSL, and the limited resources (still unclear) and time remaining (now perhaps 6 months), the project needs to adopt rapidly an exit strategy that consolidates the few gains already made and leaves a way forward for other initiatives to take up. Future activities should be focussed at perhaps three sites, those that are of significant



conservation value (Letseng la Letsie, Tsatsane, Qobong). The project should withdraw from all other sites fairly rapidly, but strategically. However, this must be done in full consultation with the communities involved, and with a view to getting current initiatives taken over by other sources of support (government departments, projects, NGOs, investors, etc.) wherever possible. Activities at the three significant sites should also focus on getting activities taken on by others, especially the MDTP and QWDT due course.

The other important remaining activity is to ensure better documentation and synthesis of findings and their dissemination to the wider conservation and development community, both in Lesotho and outside. The synthesis of biophysical findings needs to describe clearly the conservation values of each site, and highlight conservation issues. Strong efforts should be made to get the ecotourism recommendations taken up by developers.

The remaining project resources initially appear adequate for this, as long as they are effectively and efficiently used. Particular attention needs to be paid to field personnel as some may move to other employment as the project nears termination. It is essential to note that present project management practices, modalities and attitudes will have to be greatly changed if the exit strategy is to have any hope of success.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Project should rapidly consolidate the gains it has made so far and articulate the lessons learned. It should henceforth narrow down and focus on a few sites and activities. A rapid Exit Strategy is required, to be completed by March 2005. Project Management should immediately address this issue. It also has to be recognised that by adopting such an Exit Strategy management will have to significantly change its operational style and modalities, and possibly with less motivated staff.

### Site Activities

2. The sites showing most promise and with the most justifiable biodiversity attributes should be the only ones to receive substantive continued project attention. These are Letseng la Letsie, Tsatsane and the Qobong area (including the high plateau to the northwest). In particular, Letseng la Letsie has received a large investment from the project, which should not be allowed to dissipate. Continued substantive assistance (financial and/or time) to any others must be fully justified on biodiversity conservation grounds, and not on community perceptions of usable biological resources. Many sites will have to be phased out over the next four months.
3. Project Management should develop a rapid exit strategy for the sites being immediately phased out, such that communities are left with a way forward and links made to possible sources of continued assistance. This is a major challenge given communities' high expectations of project support, but is essential if faith is to be kept and raised awareness and conservation gains made are to be retained. Any resentment or destruction of gains should be avoided at all costs.
4. Strong efforts should be made by Project Management in the next six months to hand over activities at priority sites to other projects or organisations. For example, some project sites in Qacha's Nek and southern Quthing could be taken on by the MDTP, and Tsatsane could be taken on by the QWDT.
5. Project Management, at both district and national levels, must make strong efforts over the next six months to provide any sensitisation or training required by government officials in order for them to take over responsibilities or activities initiated by the project. This is particularly the case at national level; at District level it is being done fairly effectively through the District Implementation Teams. Clear "one-stop-shop" documentation will be required.
6. The decision to fence Letseng la Letsie should be reviewed, and clear justification and technical rationale for its erection articulated. This large investment of project funds should be justified by commensurate conservation and economic benefits. Fencing may not need to be completed, and monies may be more effectively spent on some other local infrastructure. Much firmer plans need to be developed for maintenance and access.

### National Activities

7. Project Management should forge stronger links with the private sector (including the SDTFCA in South Africa), GoL Department of Tourism and Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation in order to encourage ecotourism investment at project sites and link willing communities on the ground with possible investments. Ecotourism has potential for

community development in southern Lesotho, but identified initiatives need to be followed up by the project.

8. The proposed MoU between the CMBSL project and MDTP should be reviewed in light of the proposed Exit Strategy, finalised and signed as soon as possible. It is imperative that the two GEF-funded projects collaborate both formally and informally, at field and at national level, and as much as possible so that lessons learned are fully transferred. Major CMBSL activities should be incorporated into MDTP workplans where possible. In effect, MDTP should take over the institutional memory and mantle of CMBSL.
9. The MoU and contract with Quthing Wildlife & Development Trust, whereby the project gives support to vulture restaurants and the Quthing Visitor Centre, should be expedited and implemented by the Project and NES as soon as possible. Furthermore, QWDT should be assisted to take over developments at the Tsatsane site. (It is understood the MoU was finally signed in late September 2004.)
10. The issue and completion of the biophysical baseline consultancies with NUL and others should be resolved by the three parties within the next three months. In particular, the plant/vegetation study needs to be finalised. Furthermore, NUL should be encouraged to continue with baseline research and take custody of biodiversity information for the area.

#### Documentation

11. The reports, findings and data from the baseline studies should be synthesised under a further consultancy (perhaps a partnership of South African and local biologists) and the various biodiversity conservation values and issues for each site clearly brought out. The major ecological concerns and threats should be articulated (in effect, post hoc justification). The synthesis should be well documented and findings disseminated by CMBSL to all relevant institutions, stakeholders and projects in the country, particularly MDTP. The resulting document should aim at being the baseline for future conservation interventions in these areas.
12. Any significant gaps noted in the above synthesis in baseline biophysical coverage should be filled by field survey work during the forthcoming field season under consultancies using project funds.
13. Project findings in terms of economic valuation of biodiversity, user rights and ecotourism potentials should be fully documented and synthesised. A comprehensive report should be prepared and made widely available. This could be a task for the incumbent Project Economist, whose contract would need to be extended beyond September 2004 in order to complete it.
14. The project – possibly with input from an external consultancy – should write up its achievements and failings in the form of a series of case studies in community conservation within the next four months. Special attention should be given to (a) the difficulties of balancing conservation of particular biological diversity and the conservation of utilisable biological resources, and (b) the problems of handling raised community expectations of alternative income from biodiversity ("linking Conservation and Development"). These studies should be widely disseminated to GEF, UNDP, SADC and in-country. It would be useful to involve MDTP. There should be acknowledgement that this project has demonstrated a number of actions to be avoided, and these should be clearly stated.

15. Project staff at national level should consolidate existing scattered project documentation. A full and clean set of documents (hardcopy and electronic), consisting primarily of all technical reports, consultancy reports, formal agreements with communities and MoUs, training materials and annual reports, should be deposited with NES and with the NUL library.

#### Other

16. Administrative procedures for approval of payments within MTEC and between the project and UNDP should be reviewed to ensure rapidity while retaining accountability. The present excessive delays will compromise the requirement for rapid Exit Strategy activities. A return to the imprest procedure by UNDP would be beneficial. (This has since been done.)
17. UNDP should ensure that remaining GEF funds are monitored regularly and amounts remaining by major budget line made known to project management timeously.
18. Given that as the project approaches closure, national project staff may be looking for future employment elsewhere, and that loss of district staff would severely compromise the Exit Strategy, thought should be given, by both project management and MTEC, to ways of retaining staff until project termination date.
19. The Exit Strategy should ensure more rigorous adherence by project staff to M & E procedures. Clear targets should be set for activities, with strict timelines. Given the short period of time remaining, this is essential if any meaningful achievements are to be made.
20. The Exit Strategy developed by the project and National Steering Committee, and the level of remaining funds and available staff, should determine the project termination date. In any event this should not go beyond May 2005. The major part of project funds should go towards activities, and not administration or overheads. It is imperative that activities are prioritised and targets adhered to. Commitment by all concerned is essential for success.

## 7. LESSONS LEARNED

The following lessons apply mainly to GEF project formulation and implementation in general. This project, unfortunately, has shown much of what can go wrong.

1. For a project to be successful, among other things it must have a "champion", somebody or some institution that is determined that it achieves its stated objectives. They are the ones who will first note when it goes off-target, becomes inefficient or ineffective, and will attempt to address that, even if it is not their formal responsibility.
2. There is a strong need in projects concerning biodiversity conservation to have regular technical input from conservation or biological scientists, particularly if such skills are not available on the project staff. As seen here, the initial conservation objective can be lost sight of, or poor technical decisions made regarding conservation interventions. This technical input is ideally in the form of a backstopping technical agency, or could be in the form of regular advisory consultancies. It should also be consistent - not a "pick & choose" approach. Regular monitoring and supervision from GEF are also essential.
3. NEX modalities, and the relative strengths of implementing departments and agencies, need to be carefully appraised during project formulation. Changes to them (such as rearrangement of ministries and departments) should be addressed, if need be, by changes in project design, rather than by minor modifications. Many countries lack capacity in key areas - part of the justification for donor support - and these limitations in capacity should not be unduly strained by project demands such that they become the weak links and causes of project failure. Empowerment for sustainability should be the central aim.
4. Steering committees, however well-constituted, can lack the ability to actually have a significant influence or redirect a project. They need to be well-informed, have continuity and commitment of membership, and be able to actively influence progress if required. Field visits and significant time spent with project management are required if their input is to be useful.
5. Collegiate, participatory management is a good idea, but if things go wrong one needs clearly defined responsibilities if the problem is to get solved. Any remedial actions must be timeously taken and not avoided. It must be clear where the buck stops on any issue.
6. The sites at which a project will work need to be clearly articulated during the formulation stage. Likewise, the type of activities that will take place there, targets and expected achievements ought to be specified in the logframe. If not, as was the case here, sites chosen and activities may become inappropriate.
7. Monitoring and evaluation modalities need to be thought through during the formulation stage, and adhered to during implementation. Regular external review missions are important

## **Annex 1. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The overall objective of the Mid-Term Review is to review progress towards the projects objectives and outputs, identify strengths and weaknesses in implementation, assess the likelihood of the project achieving its objectives and delivering its intended outputs, and provide recommendations on modifications to increase the likelihood of success. More specifically, the Evaluation will evaluate the projects progress with regard to the following:

### **1. Outcomes**

- Assess progress towards attaining the projects environmental objectives and outcomes at all levels - global, regional and national. This should include the extent to which the project is contributing to: (a) expanding the protected area network in Lesotho; (b) putting mechanisms in place to protect biodiversity resources outside Protected Areas particularly developing range management areas; (c) a stronger network of biodiversity institutions; (d) developing an integrated bio-regional approach to biodiversity conservation and watershed management.
- Evaluation of project achievements according to GEF Project Review criteria:
  - Implementation approach
  - Country ownership/drivenness
  - Stakeholder participation/ Public Involvement
  - Sustainability
  - Replication approach
  - Financial planning
  - Cost-effectiveness
  - Monitoring and evaluation

### **2. Implementation approach**

- Review the clarity of roles and responsibilities of the various individuals, agencies and institutions and the level of coordination between relevant players. In particular, the capacity and performance of the National District Project Officer, District Steering Committee, Project Manager, Chief Technical Advisor and National Steering Committee will be reviewed.
- Review the management of staff contracts and improvements made in this regard including staff commitment and retention at the district level.
- Assess the level to which the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) and performance indicators have been used as project management tools.
- Evaluate any partnership arrangements established for implementation of the project with relevant stakeholders involved in the country/region.
- Describe and assess efforts of UNDP in support of the implementing agencies and national institutions.
- Make recommendations as to how to improve project performance in terms of effectiveness and efficiency in achieving impact on both capacity building and the targeted conservation concerns

### **3. Country ownership/drivenness**

- Assess the extent to which country representatives (including governmental official, civil society, etc.) are actively involved in project implementation.
- Assess whether Government of Lesotho has maintained financial commitment to the project

### **4. Stakeholder Participation and benefits accrued**

- Assess the level of public involvement in the project and comment as to whether public involvement has been appropriate to the goals of the project.
- Review and evaluate the extent to which project impacts have reached the intended beneficiaries.

### **5. Sustainability**

- Assess the likelihood of continuation of project outcomes/benefits after completion of GEF funding; and describe the key factors that will require attention in order to improve prospects for sustainability

of project outcomes.

- Factors of sustainability that should be considered include; institutional capacity (systems, structures, staff, expertise, etc.), social sustainability, policy and regulatory frameworks that further the project objectives, financial sustainability (including the options of a Trust Fund considered in development of the project).

## **6. Replication Approach**

- Assess the extent to which the projects activities opportunities are being taken to scale up lessons and experiences emerging from the project. Make recommendations of how this could be achieved if necessary.
- Describe the main lessons that have emerged in terms of: strengthening country ownership/drivenness; strengthening stakeholder participation; application of adaptive management strategies; efforts to secure sustainability; knowledge transfer; and the role of M&E in project implementation. In describing all lessons learned, an explicit distinction needs to be made between those lessons applicable only to this project, and lessons that may be of value more broadly.

## **7. Financial Planning**

- Assess the financial control systems, including reporting and planning, that allow the project management to make informed decisions regarding the budget.
- Assess the extent to which the flow of funds has been proper and timely both from UNDP and from the project management unit to the field.
- Evaluate the extent of due diligence in the management of funds and financial audits.

## **8. Cost effectiveness**

- Assess compliance with the incremental cost criteria (GEF funds used to finance a component of the project that would not take place without GEF funding and securing co-funding and associated funding).
- Assess the extent to which the project has completed the planned activities and met or exceeded the expected outcomes according to schedule and as cost-effective as initially planned.

## **9. Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Review the projects reporting systems and their efficiency.
- Review the implementation of the projects monitoring and evaluation plans including any adaptation to changing conditions (adaptive management).

**Annex 2. ITINERARY**

Tue 13 July	PM: JT travel Bulawayo-Pretoria
Wed 14	PM: JT briefing from Nik Sekhran, GEF Pretoria
Thur 15	AM: JT travel to Maseru PM: JT/BM meet project staff. Agree MTR arrangements
Fri 16	AM: JT/BM meet with NES Director and project staff; meet Maloti TF project PM: JT/BM briefing from project staff
Sat 17	AM/PM: JT reading documents
Sun 18	AM/PM: JT reading documents
Mon 19	AM: JT/BM meetings, Dept. Energy, Dept. Water Affairs, Dept. Conservation PM: JT/BM meet Dept. Range Management
Tue 20	AM: JT/BM meet Dept. Livestock, Dept. Forestry, UNDP PM: reading documents, discussions with project Economist
Wed 21	AM/PM: travel to Qacha's Nek via Mohale's Hoek with CTA
Thur 22	AM: JT/BM meetings DPO, District Secretary, District officers PM: Field visit Mosaquane village & Pheellong RMA
Fri 23	AM: travel to Mphaki; meeting with Letseng-la-Letsie committee PM: field visit to Letseng-la-Letsie; travel to Mohale's Hoek
Sat 24	AM/PM: field visit to Qubong village and Tlhabeli grazing scheme
Sun 25	AM: JT/BM field visit to Holy Cross/Phatlalla soil erosion area PM: report writing
Mon 26	AM/PM: JT/BM visit Quthing DPO, district steering committee, QWDT, visitor centre
Tue 27	AM: JT/BM Mohales Hoek District Secretary & staff, DIT members, field visit to Mapotsane CNR PM: JT/BM field visit Masita Grazing Scheme
Wed 28	AM: return to Maseru; meet Dept. Tourism PM: evaluator discussions, JT to UNDP
Thur 29	AM: JT meet Ambrose/Talukdar at University; BM meeting with Dept. Culture PM: reading documents
Fri 30	AM/PM: JT/BM meeting with project staff, including feedback
Sat 31	AM/PM: reading and report writing
Sun 1 August	AM/PM: report writing
Mon 2	AM: report writing PM: JT/BM meet Director NES
Tue 3	AM: preparation of presentation PM: JT/BM meet Director Economic Planning
Wed 4	AM: present findings to UNDP PM: present findings to MTEC/NES
Thurs 5	JT depart for Pretoria, finalise report
Fri 6	AM: JT debriefing with Nik Sekhran, GEF Pretoria
Sat 7	AM/PM: JT return to Bulawayo
10-18 August	JT finalise report



### Annex 3. LIST OF PEOPLE MET

#### Maseru

Prof David **Ambrose**, Research Professor, Institute of Education, National University of Lesotho, Roma.  
Mrs Mamoeti **Damane**, Water Pollution Laboratory, Department of Water Affairs, Maseru  
Mr Stanley **Damane**, Director, National Environment Secretariat, MTEC, Maseru  
Mr Ernest **Fausther**, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP, Maseru  
Mr Emmanuel **Guveya**, Environmental Economist, CMBSL project, MTEC, Maseru  
Mrs Hlasoa, Chair, CMBSL National Steering Committee & Head, Sectoral Programmes, Central Planning Office, Ministry of Finance & Development Planning, Maseru  
Prof Edward **Kairu**, Chief Technical Advisor, CMBSL project, MTEC, Maseru  
Ms Limpho **Motanya**, Co-ordinator, Wetlands Unit, Department of Water Affairs, Maseru  
Mr Teboho **Maliehe**, National Project Manager, CMBSL project, MTEC, Maseru  
Mrs Lineo **Mdee**, Sustainable Development Advisor, UNDP, Maseru  
Mr J.T. **Metsing**, Principal Secretary, MTEC, Maseru  
Mrs Mpho **Moeketsi**, Acting Director of Tourism, MTEC, Maseru  
Mr L. **Mokhutsoane**, acting Deputy Director, Department of Energy, Ministry of Natural Resources, Maseru  
Mr Chaba **Mokuku**, Project Co-ordinator, Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project, MTEC, Maseru  
Mr John **Mosenye**, Director, Department of National Parks, Ministry of Forestry & Land Reclamation, Maseru  
Mr Neo **Mothokho**, Senior Conservation Officer, Department of Soil & Water Conservation, Ministry of Forestry & Land Reclamation, Maseru  
Ms Refiloe **Ntsohi**, Deputy Director, Department of National Parks, Ministry of Forestry & Land Reclamation, Maseru  
Mr Thulo **Qhuosokoane**, National Biodiversity Co-ordinator, NES, MTEC, Maseru  
Ms Motselisi **Ramakoae**, Programme Officer - Environment, UNDP, Maseru  
Mr Joseph **Rantletse**, Department of Livestock Services, Ministry of Agriculture & Food Security, Maseru  
Mr Sello **Rasello**, Range Management Officer, Department of Range Management, Ministry of Forestry & Land Reclamation, Maseru  
Mr Ratsele **Ratsele**, Range Management Officer, Department of Range Management, Ministry of Forestry & Land Reclamation, Maseru  
Mr Jerry **Seitlheko**, Biomass Specialist, Department of Energy, Ministry of Natural Resources, Maseru  
Mr E. **Sekaleli**, Department of Forestry, Ministry of Forestry & Land Reclamation, Maseru  
Dr Sumitra **Talukdar**, Lecturer in Botany (retired), National University of Lesotho, Roma.  
Mrs Leonia **Thulo**, Director, Department of Range Management, Ministry of Forestry & Land Reclamation, Maseru  
Mrs Mpai **Tseole**, Department of Tourism, MTEC, Maseru

#### Qacha's Nek

Ms M. **Makatjane**, Rural Development Officer, Qacha's Nek District  
Mr Kicker **Maluma**, community representative, Mosaqane community, Qacha's Nek District  
Ms M. **Mohapeloa**, Physical Planner, Qacha's Nek District  
Mr M. **Moholi**, community representative, Pheellong grazing scheme, Qacha's Nek District  
Mr M. **Motlohi**, Secretary - Qacha's Nek Tourism Organization (QANETO), Qacha's Nek District  
Mr T. **Mpeke**, Rural Development Officer, Qacha's Nek District  
Mr Rametsi **Mphatsoe**, community representative, Mosaqane community, Qacha's Nek District  
Mrs 'Maletsela **Mpiti**, Chieftainess & Chairlady, Pheellong grazing scheme, Qacha's Nek District  
Mrs Mabokang **Mxakaza**, District Project Officer, CMBSL Project, Qacha's Nek District  
Mr K. **Rantle**, Chief - Makhoreng, Qacha's Nek District  
Mrs 'Mantholi **Sekake**, Chieftainess, Mosaqane community, Qacha's Nek District  
Mr Makotoko **Theko**, Principal Chief, Qacha's Nek District  
Mr F.L. **Tseane**, District Secretary, Qacha's Nek District

Quthing

Mrs Mamakhetha **Letamo**, National Security Service, Quthing District  
 Mr Enea **Lechamochamo**, Chairman, Executive Committee, Letseng-la-Letsie, Quthing District  
 Mr Makhabane **Letsie**, Chief, Letseng-la-Letsie, Quthing District  
 Mr Mpiti **Letsie**, Executive Board Member, Quthing Wildlife Development Trust (also Village Chief and District Steering Committee member), Quthing District  
 Mr P. **Makhetha**, District Project Officer, CMBSL Project, Quthing District  
 Mrs M. **Makhube**, Secretary, Tsatsane Conservation Committee, Quthing District  
 Mrs Naledi **Marake**, Rural Development Officer, Quthing District  
 Mrs L. **Mei**, Chair, Tsatsane Conservation Committee, Quthing District  
 Ms Rekhotosetse **Matela**, Asst. Economic Planner, Quthing District  
 Mrs M. **Mofama**, Treasurer, Tsatsane Conservation Committee, Quthing District  
 Mr Morero **Mohale**, Chief, Letseng-la-Letsie, Quthing District  
 Mr Chitja **Mojaki**, Range Management Officer, Quthing District  
 Mr Khathekile **Nyakama**, Deputy Chairman, Executive Committee, Letseng-la-Letsie, Quthing District  
 Mr Maphosele **Phambaneso**, Secretary, Executive Committee, Letseng-la-Letsie, Quthing District  
 Mrs Mantsepi **Ramoseme**, Land Survey & Physical Planning Department, Quthing District  
 Mr M. **Sekonyela**, Deputy chair, Tsatsane Conservation Committee, Quthing District

Mohale's Hoek

Mrs M. **Damane**, Chair, Masita Village Grazing Scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mrs Matseliso **Khalefi**, Secretary, Qobong Conservation Group, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Khathatso **Lefuma**, Treasurer, Qobong Conservation Group, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Ralitsibana **Letseka**, Land Use Planner, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Motlatsi **Letsie**, Chief, Ketane, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr **Makhetha**, Treasurer, Mapotsane Village Grazing Scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Jaarsfontein **Malebanye**, Chief, Mapotsane, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr E. **Masita**, Coordinator, Masita Village Grazing Scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr L. **Masita**, Chief, Masita Village, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mrs Manthomeng **Matete**, Secretary, Phatlalla Grazing Scheme, Holy Cross, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr S. **Matete**, Phatlalla Grazing scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mrs 'Mabatho **Moeti**, Chairperson, Qobong Conservation Group, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mrs Mampine **Mohale**, Deputy District Secretary, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Sechaba **Mojau**, District Secretary, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mrs Maraohang **Moji**, Chairperson, Working Committee, Tlhabeli Grazing Scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mrs M. **Moleko**, Treasurer, Masita Village Grazing Scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Makheleli **Ntoi**, Assistant Secretary, Executive Committee, Tlhabeli Grazing Scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Mthetho **Nqojane**, District Development Planner, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mrs Makabelo **Poonyane**, Chairperson, Executive Committee, Tlhabeli Grazing Scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Morake **Rakhoba**, District Project Officer, CMBSL Project, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Tlotliso **Rannyali**, District Coordinator, Ministry of Conservation & Forestry, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Molaponyane **Ranyaly**, Village Chief & Committee member, Qubong Conservation Group, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Pakalitha **Sekhonyana**, Department of Lands, Surveys & Physical Planning, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Ramoliehi **Sengange**, Chairman, Phatlalla Grazing Scheme, Holy Cross, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mrs M. **Setefane**, Coordinator, Mapotsane Village Grazing Scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr **Tsibane**, Secretary, Mapotsane Village Grazing Scheme, Mohale's Hoek District  
 Mr Ntitia **Tuoane**, District Agricultural Officer, Mohale's Hoek District

Other

Dr Nik **Sekhran**, UNDP/GEF Regional Co-ordinator Southern Africa, Pretoria, South Africa  
 Dr Alan **Rodgers** (telephone interview), UNDP/GEF Regional Co-ordinator Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya

#### Annex 4. SUMMARY OF FIELD VISITS

Three Districts were visited and ten sites. Meetings were held in District Centres with the District Secretary and with members of the project's District Steering Committee. The following account refers primary to actual field visits.

**Qacha's Nek - Mosaquane** village, some 5 km from Qacha's Nek town, was visited on 22 July. The site is situated in a valley with a large village on one side of a small river and communal grazing land and scattered fields on the other. Underlying geology is Cave Sandstone on the lower slopes with basalt above. The rangeland is degraded from overgrazing with minor localised soil erosion, but no gully formation. Many plants indicating overgrazing (woody Compositae herbs) are found, and grass height is low. There are a series of small springs about  $\frac{1}{4}$  way up the slope opposite the village on the interfluvium of a slope covering perhaps 20-30 ha, and yield c.30 litres/minute. Two have been selected as a source of spring water that could be bottled locally, marketed and sold to bring in community income. There is much higher-level political support for the initiative. It is proposed the small catchment is protected by the community as a Community Nature Reserve by restricting grazing access so that the range can recover and soil erosion contained. The visit took place with the District Secretary, members of the District Implementation Team, DPO and some community leaders, including the Chieftainess.

The community, with project help, have developed a proposal to take some of the spring water in pipes across the valley to a building in the village opposite, where it will be bottled. There is still some debate on which building should be used (two possibilities), and whether a road needs to be constructed. Progress is fairly advanced and many in the community appear motivated. The project CTA has prepared a proposal for funding for the necessary equipment, and funding possibilities through government seem good. The project seems technically feasible, and an economic study by the project suggests it is economic. If other funding is not forthcoming, the project intends to pay the capital costs (35,000 Maloti for building and c. 40,000 for piping).

The rangeland that will be protected for its catchment importance seems to have no particular biodiversity conservation value, although a few medicinal plant species were said to be found in the area.

**Pheellong Range Management Association**, some 10-15 km from Qacha's Nek on the Quting road was visited late on 22 July. Unfortunately it was not possible to see any of the area, just meet with two officials from the scheme. This RMA is very large (unspecified area) and comprises 16 villages. The management group is under the strong leadership of the local Chieftainess. The RMA formally commenced in Jan/Feb 2003, but many of the present members had been cooperating and discussing its formation for some years beforehand. It is still awaiting formal recognition by government.

There are three grazing zones, altitudinally-defined. The high mountains are grazed from January to March, then the foothills until June, after which the lowlands and field are grazed until end of December. Since its commencement the group have noted a significant improvement in range condition, with species of grasses and herbs that had disappeared returning, more small mammals (hares, small buck) seen, and the livestock are looking good. It is not possible to comment further on any biodiversity values of the area.

The RMA has had very little direct help from the project; what they have had is training. Members have attended six courses (three in local Agricultural Centre and three elsewhere in Lesotho), with 2 to 5 persons at each (sometimes the same people). Courses attended include book-keeping, conservation of rangeland, biodiversity issues. The project also helped draft the RMA Constitution. Their next objective is to improve the quality of their livestock, and they are asking the project to assist.

**Sekake** site was visited briefly en route to Mphaki. This is a proposed Community Nature Reserve extending along a narrow gorge-like valley about 20-50 m wide by some kilometres. The gorge is grazed at present but still supports much woody vegetation on its steep slopes. A small botanic garden is also planned at the lower end. At the upper end, adjacent to the main road, a small craft centre is planned, with

a trail and picnic sites in the gorge itself. The biodiversity is normal and not of particular note. There are a number of alien plant species (poplars, *Opuntia* cactus, etc.) present. The steep walls of the gorge have formed a refuge from the otherwise heavy land use around.

**Quthing** – Following a meeting attended by many members of the Letseng-la-Letsie Committee and the South African fencing contractor in Mphaki town, the actual site was visited. In many regards **Letseng-la-Letsie** is the "flagship" site for the project, upon which its legacy may be based, especially given the very large investment in fencing being implemented.

The drive from Mphaki takes 45 minutes on a generally bad road. The site comprises a lake, Letseng-la-Letsie, of about 35 ha at 2400 m altitude surrounded by attractive mountain ridges and peaks. The whole area is very scenic, and is known nationally for this. Formed by a low dam constructed in the 1960s across a narrow outlet, the lake is fed across extensive grasslands by various streams. As the area borders South Africa, the project's initial transboundary concerns are pertinent. It is planned to fence most of this immediate catchment (4350 ha, with 40 km of fenceline) with a 2.8 m game fence, at a total cost of around USD 315,000, to be borne in full by the project. The purpose of the fence is stated to be to keep out livestock and to keep in a number of antelope and other wildlife species that are planned to be introduced from South Africa. The first phase of fencing (20 km) is due to start on 9 August 2004; contracts have been signed and the contractor is right now making arrangements.

The biodiversity and conservation values of the area are much more obvious than for other project sites visited. Apart from the lake, which supports a number of aquatic birds, and the high mountain ridges and upper slopes, there are extensive areas of valley grassland, especially to the south. These do not appear to have been cultivated (possibly owing to their high altitude and short growing season) and comprise a peaty soil with intact turf cover, although the whole area is obviously very heavily grazed. Such valley grassland habitat in moderate condition appears to be unusual in Lesotho. Heavy grazing would appear to have simplified the ecology and habitats in the area; in particular there were a number of small wetlands (indeed the lake itself was probably once a significant wetland) that are now more-or-less grassland, although wet underfoot. Many small woody shrubs indicating overgrazing are found on the lower slopes. No doubt many small mammals (although there was ample evidence of mole rats), birds, herbs and insects have become rare or disappeared. With protection and natural grass recovery, many of the habitats and species should be able to return to their previous state and extent, and wetlands be restored. This can occur naturally, without significant management intervention, as long as grazing pressure is significantly reduced. The present threat is that overgrazing will destroy the turf layer, allowing peat to be exposed, dry out and allow soil erosion to start. Grazing needs to be controlled, but not necessarily stopped altogether. Indeed a future danger might be fire, especially if it gets into the peat and slow-burns.

There appears to be a proposal by the Department of Water Affairs to increase the height of the low dam/weir. The rationale for this is not clear – project staff members variously suggested such things as increasing wetland area (although in fact raising the lake level would decrease the area of potential non-open water wetland); providing a greater extent of aquatic habitat for birds; increasing the areas' recreational value (but there would be less remaining relatively flat area for camping and other activities); and increasing water storage for communities or release downstream. Project staff do not seem to have been involved in any discussions, or have a clear point-of-view from a conservation perspective.

The communities' main concerns seem to revolve around fence construction and its delays. They are eagerly awaiting the income derived from employment on fence construction. One village and Chief, in particular, have not been cooperative and the fenceline has had to be moved downslope in that area. The 18 villages around are hoping to develop ecotourism activities for local income generation, such as horseriding, accommodation, wildlife viewing, fishing. And perhaps later a full lodge in conjunction with an entrepreneur. Present visitor numbers are thought to be around 100 per year.

The construction of the fence has been a contentious issue, not just locally but among the conservation fraternity and GEF/UNDP. The communities (in general) now want it; in that light it could be regarded as an article of faith for them - if it were not constructed, community interest might fall away. However, it should be recognised that getting to this status may have been due to earlier suggestions and promises.

The communities in the area have also had a rocky relationship with the CMBSL Project (e.g. the infamous story of the missing DSA for many participants during a study tour of Zimbabwe), and the area is recognised by others to be "difficult" owing to the differing origins of some of the communities (not all are Sotho). The suggestion of introducing a number of wildlife species to the 4350 ha fenced area has not been sufficiently thought through. Wildlife numbers in adjacent South Africa are actually higher than in Lesotho, and these animals move seasonally into the area in summer, moving to lower altitudes in RSA during the winter months. Will any increase in visitor numbers be commensurate both with the investment in fence building and its maintenance, or with the management input necessary to retain that wildlife there? Will the wildlife be visible to casual visitors (i.e. those not trekking into the mountains), who would mostly be restricted to a few road tracks? And issues around maintenance of the fence seem to be based more on hope than substance at present.

On 26 July **Quthing town** was visited and interviews held with members of the project's District Implementation Team and the Tsatsane community. Also visited was the Quthing Wildlife and Development Trust, a local NGO. With technical assistance from the German Development Service, QWDT is implementing two vulture restaurants in the district, for both Cape Vulture and Bearded Vulture. The CMBSL project has formally agreed to help them with funding for construction materials, for road signs for their accommodation constructed near Mount Moorosi, and for interpretative materials and services at the **Quthing Visitor Centre** by the main road where dinosaur footprints are on view. QWDT, formed in 1988 and of almost solely Basotho membership, appears moderately dynamic although with very limited resources. It is not clear what other resources it has access to. Its main concerns are (a) raising community awareness of the value of biodiversity, and (b) promotion and development of ecotourism. They have received some training from the project, participated in study tours, and sit on the District Steering Committee. Although stated to be a proposed partner in the original Project Document, they only appear to have been supported directly by the project this year. And so far promised funds appear to have been held up by bureaucracy for about 2 months as proposed MoUs have not yet been signed, halting progress of activities.

Mohale's Hoek – The community and proposed CNR at **Qobong** was visited on 24 July. After crossing the Senqu River the road is poor and takes 1.5 hours. The site, about 15 km west of Ketane at an altitude of 2000m, is situated in a valley with gentle slopes on the west side. It is comparatively well-vegetated with extensive stands of the small tree *Leucosidea*. Soils are basalt-derived, rich, and often deep. The incised bottom of the valley supports a dense growth of popular and other exotic trees; the village appears to have good controls on natural resource utilisation.

A meeting was held in one of two rondavels they have constructed for tourist accommodation. The Committee, led by a woman, seem very motivated; they have done most of their activities using only their own subscription funds. The strength of the group comes from commitment, strong leadership, and a willingness to do their activities without external financial support. The CMBSL project has helped with numerous training courses and study visits, and project staff visit the site about 2-3 times per month. A baseline economic study has been carried out, and some bio-physical studies. The conservation group had 114 members some time ago, but is now down to 69, although they recognise that awareness of conservation issues in the area is high owing to their activities. The community was visited by the Minister of Tourism & Environment and entourage, by helicopter for the National Biodiversity Day earlier this year - a great morale booster for them.

The Committee is hoping to improve the communities' livelihoods by ecotourism. The construction of the rondavels (plus dedicated external toilet), horse rides to three waterfalls about a hours' ride away, sale of crafts and dried/bottled fruits (peaches from semi-wild trees), visits to Bushman paintings in caves, and unique rock formations are being developed towards this aim. In the last 1.5 years, since first becoming involved in the CMBSL project, about 6 tourists have visited, some staying for a few days. Project staff use the accommodation at normal commercial rates during their visits, and also have food prepared for them. This has been the main source of income.

A small botanic garden has been constructed (still incomplete) containing medicinal plants (*Trifolium*, *Artemesia*, ?*Haworthia*), and some *Aloe polyphylla* transplanted from a healthy population below the

cliffs on north-facing slopes above the village. The project has provided technical assistance (consultant from LHDA) and tools towards its establishment. The purpose of the garden initially is as a demonstration to visitors, but a nursery is planned for propagation of plants for sale.

**Tlhabeli Grazing Scheme** on the north side of the Senqu River was visited on the way back. The area Range Management Association was taking a long time to get established, so the village set up their own Village Grazing Scheme in July 2001 after being encouraged by the project. Two members participated in study tour to Zimbabwe. The group have built a rondavel for accommodation and as a meeting place, using their own subscription funds. They seem organised, but perhaps not highly directed; it was not clear what their objectives and plans were.

The group have restricted grazing on an adjacent extensive steep hillside area for the last three years. The area was previously overgrazed, but has now recovered. It will be grazed again lightly later this year, meanwhile it has been used as a source of thatching grass. Biodiversity values appeared normal for much of this part of the highlands; nothing special was mentioned apart from a few medicinal plants.

Mekaling or **Phatlalla Grazing Scheme**, near Holy Cross on the road to Quthing, was visited on 25 July. The area, partly under cultivation or habitation with steeper slopes being heavily grazed, is extremely badly eroded with deep gullies in what looks to be fertile soils, and hillsides are often eroded down to bedrock. We were shown a site where attempts at reclamation have been made through the building of gabions and planting of 2000 *Pinus* and *Robinia* trees. This was done in 2002 with assistance from CMBSL, and survival (surprisingly) is about 60-70%. *Robinia* in particular appears to have done well. There is no significant biodiversity in the area, which is at an altitude of 1400 m in the lowlands close to the Senqu River, which here forms the South African border.

The locality seems to have a number of quite serious socio-political problems, with disagreements between three communities, chiefs and various individuals. However, there is one local "champion" (Mr Sengange) who has kept the pressure up, and has rehabilitated his own fields from severe erosion. CMBSL has also helped by inviting various community members to attend a number of training courses.

**Mapotsane village**, close to Mohale's Hoek town (actually part of the designated urban area), was visited on 27 July. A CNR, about 5 ha in extent, was established on a sandstone hillside opposite the village 3 years ago, and grazing has been stopped. It has been marked with white paint and has been surveyed by Dept. Lands (although maps do not appear to be available). The range looks significantly better than adjacent areas, which are showing bare stones, and shrub cover is increasing. The number of medicinal plants is said to be increasing; of particular note are *Aloe ferox*, *Hypoxis* and *Pelargonium sidoides*. There does not appear to be any particular biodiversity conservation value to this area, which is also effectively in the Lesotho lowlands (about 1750 m altitude) and within an urban area. Thatching grass and medicinal plants are the main products.

There was some confusion and disagreement between 2001 and 2003 about the role of the local Committee and persons in it, resulting in a hiatus in activity. In part this appears to have been due to choices on who went on the Zimbabwe study tour, with its lucrative DSAs, and liaison with CMBSL through someone who was on the District Steering Committee but who wasn't a member of the community. The issue of unfulfilled promises was brought up – "CMBSL do not take our requests seriously". They are now realising they must do things themselves. Significant sums of cash are being raised by the local CNR Committee to build rondavels for expected tourists and other microprojects; they state they are showing commitment. What is being requested is a better water supply for the village. Controlled grazing will now be allowed for short periods as grass growth is good. They state that the benefits of set-aside justify their efforts and opportunities foregone.

**Masita Grazing Scheme**, an hours drive northeast of Mohale's Hoek in the Mokhele Range, was visited on 27 July. This basalt area, lying just above the contact with the Cave Sandstone, supports many maize fields and a large extent of grazing land. Deep brownish basalt soils support a good grass cover in places, but other biodiversity values are not apparent. The community mentioned that reeds (*Phragmites*) and wild olive trees used to occur in the steep side valley below the scheme.

The community here have formed a Village Grazing Scheme, but are in conflict with villages below. It appears that although they are making strong efforts to regulate and control their grazing and utilisation of thatching grass, adjacent communities are not doing this and come to "reap the benefits of what they did not sow". This socio-political conflict involves local chiefs and local councillors, and is not readily solvable by technical interventions. The group have constructed their own "offices" and have set aside a plot for tree planting. A number of members have received training or been on study tours through CMBSL, and some consultants have visited during their studies. It was not clear what other tangible support they have received, although they have certainly received much encouragement from the project over a number of years, and apparently also from other government (e.g. Forestry, Range Management) and NGO (e.g. World Vision) sources. The community again spoke of unfulfilled promises – for dual-purpose chickens and other such income-generating activities that would reduce their dependence of an impoverished rangeland. They are certainly appreciative of the training and feel that they are now more aware and able to carry out what they wish to do in a sustainable way.