**The CASPECO Project**

“The Caspian Sea: Restoring Depleted Fisheries and Consolidation of a Permanent Regional Environmental Governance Framework”

Mid-Term Evaluation

Final Version

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December 2010

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# Summary

Project Design and Relevance

This is the third project in a series of support from GEF to the Caspian environment. The CASPECO project aims to address environmental and natural resource degradation in the Caspian Sea, by supporting capacity building and regional coordination across the five littoral countries. Overall the project remains very relevant. It is relevant to local needs, to national priorities and to GEF priorities. CASPECO was by far the most important international effort supporting regional management of Caspian natural resources, and as such was a very valid project.

The project design builds on the analytical work, consultation and successes of the previous phases. It also builds on the implementation structures created with support from previous phases. Notably, the project supports the implementation of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (*or *Tehran Convention,* TC*)*, a convention whose very existence is largely owed to the earlier phases of support.

The project is designed to address two related challenges. Component 2 addresses the need to strengthen overall regional governance, notably the implementation structure linked to the TC. This Component is well designed, focusing on appropriate and key issues, and directly supporting the workprogramme of the TC’s Interim Secretariat.

Component 1 can be considered to focus on TC implementation issues by developing an e*cosystem-based management of aquatic bioresources in the Caspian Sea.* The long-term aim is to restore depleted bio-resources, with much emphasis on fisheries. In general, the Component is designed to respond to the priority threats to fisheries and other biological resources. However, the details of this design face some weaknesses, which should probably have been dealt with during project Inception. These weaknesses include: an unclear strategy and linking across activities; unrealistic expectations, both in terms of individual Outputs and the number of Outputs, and; an incomplete background analysis.

The project implementation and execution arrangements, following on from earlier phases, remain valid and appropriate. This includes the Steering Committee, the National Focal Points (NFP), UNDP, UNOPS, UNEP, TC IS and the Project Management and Coordination Unit (PCMU).

Perhaps the main weakness of the project design is the unrealistic expectations of sustainability. Intrinsic in the design is a presumption that progress under both Components would be sufficient to reach a situation where national/regional stakeholders (including the TC) have become sustainable and independent of external aid by project end. According to the project document, institutional sustainability was to be assured through the “extremely impressive regional governance framework”. Whereas the MTE agrees that the regional framework was relatively impressive at project outset; it was some way from sustainability. In reality, evidence suggests that, from early on in the project, the hope for sustainability relied on further phases of GEF support. This is entirely understandable; it was not at all realistic to expect CASPECO support to be sufficient to carry either the TC process or the process to restore degraded depleted fisheries to sustainability.

Project Efficiency and Impacts

The stated CASPECO project objective is “the five littoral States of the Caspian Sea strengthen regional governance and apply new thinking to the sustainable management and conservation of the Caspian Sea’s biological resources”. Progress can be considered nearly satisfactory through the first half of this CASPECO project. However, and as detailed in the main body of this report, progress under Component 1 faces some serious challenges.

Under Component 1, despite some achievements and a recent acceleration, many activities started late, and many have not started yet. As a result, there is a danger that progress by project end will be unsatisfactory. This report identifies ten contributing factors: the intrinsic challenge in the component’s activities; difficulties in engaging with fishing sector; delays in nominating experts; delays in identifying international experts; over-ambitious nature of project document; change in project management team; unclear strategy; lack of management tools; need for progress on the biodiversity protocol, and; invalid assumptions regarding sequencing.

Clearly, some of the above-factors originated from the project design. Some of the factors have already been addressed. Almost all factors were beyond the influence of the PCMU. However, some of the factors remain and should be addressed as soon as possible. The recommendations outlined below are designed mostly to accelerate progress under this Component.

Under Component 2, progress is considered to be satisfactory, with real progress being registered on the TC process. Examples of the notable achievements include the finalization of two protocols, the securing of financial contributions from parties to the Secretariat and, the finalization of a reporting format. The main factors behind the success are the strong support of governments, the alignment to the TC programme of work, and the continuity in terms of activities and actors from previous phases. Notwithstanding, progress is not comprehensive, and further improvements could be made.

Recommendations

Three types of recommendations are made in this report: those urgent and necessary to ensure project progress; those only to be implemented if time and resources permit, and; those to be considered in the design of future Caspian environmental projects. The first, the urgent and necessary steps to ensure project progress, are:

1. PCMU, with support from UNDP and UNEP, and in consultation with SC. Undertake a strategic reflection process regarding Component 1, preferably with the support of a senior fisheries institutional expert familiar to the region. The Output would be a clear, short, guiding strategy for all of Component 1. The aim would be to develop a tool for use by the Project Manager and the Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert to guide overall activities, to facilitate monitoring and communicating overall progress under Component 1. This high-level road-map would bring all activities together into one framework, showing conceptual linkages, and lead to a clear and accepted end-point. This would also help the team to identify marginal activities, which may be considered for dropping. This may include merging Outputs were possible. If necessary, it may be useful for the same senior expert to continue to advise project activities in the fishery sector until project end. All changes to the workplan should be approved through the standard project decision-making process.
2. PCMU, with support from UNDP and UNOPS. Strengthen activity planning and management, particularly for Component 1. More attention needs to be given to: (i) the preparation of more detailed workplans at the Outcome level; (ii) the preparation of more detailed workplans for each Output; (iii) the preparation of more detailed TOR for all inputs and activities; (iv) an active technical support and monitoring of all activities, to ensure timetables are kept, problems are identified well in advance and help can be provided, and; (v) the active review of all reports from workshops, consultants and contractors. This recommendation focuses support to the Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert. External help will be needed for this. Ideally, recommendations 1 and 2 will be linked, and the *senior fisheries institutional expert* can also provide support to strengthened activity planning.
3. UNDP, UNOPS and Project Manger. Initiate monthly, semi-formal review meetings, to ensure that the MTE recommendations are being heeded, and that they are having the desired effect.
4. PCMU, with support from UNDP. Prepare a short, monthly, informal ‘news-letter’ to provide the internal project network with an update on events, findings, workshops. This will develop the sense of project community and increase strategic understanding. It will help develop the branding and the marketability of the project outputs, and help communicate with existing and potential partners.
5. PCMU, with support of a senior fisheries expert (preferably in connection with recommendation 1). Undertake a comprehensive analysis of the fishery sector, in particular of institutions and policies. This would include a full institutional mapping, covering private, public, state-owned, NGO and academic sectors.
6. UNEP and UNOPS. Within the framework of the IAA, agree on a reporting format. The report should include a clear workplan for next reporting period, and planned expenses. This should serve to trigger the next advance payment.
7. TCIS. If not doing so already, prepare annual reports providing details of all TCIS expenses and all TCIS revenue, from all sources.
8. UNEP/UNOPS. Provide more complete information on expenditures under Component 2, in particular regarding any budget re-allocations.
9. TC stakeholders, supported by TCIS and PCMU. Develop a realistic strategy for sustaining broad support to the TC process and to implementing the SCAP after CASPECO. The strategy should identify barriers to the mobilization of support, and the required changes in practices to remove these barriers. It is likely that important aspects of the strategy would be:

* demonstrating a fuller engagement to the TC process by participating countries, for example through increased contributions, stronger national implementation mechanisms, and by making the Secretariat permanent;
* Improved communication of the achievements under the TC, the CEP and CASPECO;
* A broad based resource mobilization strategy.

1. PCMU, with support from UNDP. In the second quarter of 2011, and no later, if (i) progress has accelerated and (ii) clear targets for sustainable impacts have been re-established and (iii) these targets cannot be reached by end-2011; then request a project extension without budget increase for up to one year.

# 1. Purpose and Methodology of the Evaluation

## 1.1 Purpose

The Project “The Caspian Sea: Restoring Depleted Fisheries and Consolidation of a Permanent Regional Environmental Governance Framework” or “CASPECO” for short is the third phase of Global environment facility (GEF) support towards the preservation and sustainable environment of the Caspian Sea. CASPECO can be considered to have begun operating in April 2009[[1]](#footnote-1) and is planned to run until the end of 2011, with a GEF contribution of $4.7 million towards a total budget of over $47 million.

This mid-term evaluation (MTE), undertaken in the final quarter of 2010 in line with GEF and UNDP monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements, aims to establish:

* If the project design including objectives, execution arrangements and the course of activities are still of relevance to the major stakeholders;
* if the project has been able to efficiently meet its targeted objectives, including the intended impacts, within the established timelines and earmarked resources, and;
* The factors that have impeded/accelerated the project progress towards its objectives.

The evaluation is also to look at gender balance, equity considerations, stakeholders’ engagement, country ownership, donor coordination and sustainability. See Terms of Reference in Annex 1.

## 1.2 Methodology

The Evaluation was undertaken by a single, independent consultant from outside of the project region. The main steps were:

* Documentation review, covering contextual documents, project planning and management documents, project outputs and other documents related to the project objectives (see List of Documents Consulted in Annex 2);
* In depth discussions with project managers and technical experts – based at the Project Coordination and Management Unit (PCMU);
* Interviews with a broad range of project stakeholders in the five participating countries (see Annex 3 for the details of the Stakeholders Consulted). Many interviews were held by telephone or Skype;
* Data analysis, and use of triangulation to determine issues, trends and factors;
* Document drafting; and
* Consultation and document finalization.

## 1.3 Limits

The principal limitation was time. The Evaluation had only 15 days to cover all documents and contact all stakeholders – for all five participating countries - and to complete all report drafting. The evaluator was only able to visit one of the five participating countries (Kazakhstan). Due to time constraints and conflicting schedules, it proved not possible to interview some key stakeholders (notably some government stakeholders).

Through the course of the MTE, the Evaluator received a broad range of insights. In line with the ToR, the focus on the MTE has been managerial issues, rather than technical issues. Given the short time remaining to implement the project, the MTE has focused on those issue/recommendations which are most urgent and can be realistically addressed before project end.

# 2. Situation at the Outset of the Project

## 2.2 Previous GEF Support to the Environment of the Caspian Sea

The first phase of GEF support to the Caspian Sea region environmental issues was launched in 2000 in Baku[[2]](#footnote-2) and was implemented with the support of UNDP, UNEP, UNOPS and the World Bank. The first phase supported the five littoral countries of the Caspian Sea to implement the Caspian Environment Programme (CEP) – a programme of closely coordinated and related activities supported by international partners Specifically, the first phase set out to: (i) build a regional structure and mechanism for regional environmental cooperation and coordination; (ii) to develop a knowledge-based trans-boundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and a Caspian Strategic Action Programme (SAP), complemented by country level National Caspian Action Plans (NCAP), and; (iii) to mobilize national and international resources improving the Caspian Environment.

The second phase of GEF support, initiated in 2004 in Tehran, continued to support the CEP. Through this phase, the SAP was updated to the Strategic Convention Action Programme (SCAP), the NCAPs were updated, and a number of thematic regional plans were developed/initiated. These included a POPs Regional Action Plan, a Public Participation Strategy, a Seals Conservation Plan and a Regional Pollution Monitoring Programme.

The final evaluation of the second phase determined that the Project had excelled in its work to forge inter-governmental cooperation at the regional level. The second phase Project’s main achievement was to have sustained the CEP - notably the TDA, SAP, NCAPs, and the CEP’s regional and national institutional structures and processes. With Project support, these had become the vehicles to support ratification of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea or Tehran Convention (TC)*. The TC is the first and only formal, legal commitment among the five Caspian countries. That second phase Project had also facilitated the relatively rapid and ongoing negotiation of Protocols under the Tehran Convention.

That final evaluation also identified some important weaknesses, notably how the phase 2 Project had struggled to catalyze changed practices or new outcomes at the national level. There was a lack of on-the-ground impact, and a lack of activities that catalysed on-the-ground impact. Moreover, although phase 2 had provided a solid foundation upon which to build new sustainable capacity for the TC, the CEP institutional structures and CEP-inspired programs were not considered sustainable at project end.

By the end of phase 2, the programme of international support to the Caspian environment had declined considerably. There was no longer a ‘caspian environment programme’ as such.

## 2.2 Situation at the Outset and Baseline

Building on the previous support to CEP and on the foundations of the first two phases, this third phase GEF support – the CASPECO project - had two main objectives: to restore depleted fisheries and other bio-resources; and to consolidate the regional environmental governance framework. The following section summarizes the baseline situation with respect to these objectives.

***With respect to restoring depleted fisheries and other bio-resources****:* the baseline trend was disturbingly downwards. For a number of reasons, most ecosystems and bio-resources across the Sea were declining in quality and quantity and functions, and this decline had been ongoing for many years. As stated in the CASPECO project document: “*The Caspian Sea’s ecosystem resilience has been diminished over time due to the cumulative effects of human development. This includes the separation of the Caspian’s fish from their spawning rivers through the dewatering of some rivers and the damming of others; intensive hatchery programs operating with insufficient numbers of brood stock; the introduction of an invasive species of jellyfish that has modified the appearance of the system and most likely its function, including it’s trophic relationships; the input of POPs/PTS from agricultural activities and chronic, low-level pollution from oil exploration over time. The cumulative effects of all of this are manifested most clearly in the dramatic depletion of the Caspian’s priority fisheries of sturgeon, herring, sprat and kilka”.*

In the baseline, a series of issues affected the response to this extremely challenging situation:

* Monitoring was ongoing, but was incomplete, and was not coordinated across the countries;
* Basic understanding of some scientific issues and processes was incomplete;
* There was no regional body or agreement covering bio-resources management. The interagency Commission on Aquatic Bioresources (CAB) had no legal status or government level backing[[3]](#footnote-3);
* There was no regional agreement on how to address invasive species;
* The interactions between actors in the environmental sector and actors in the natural resource management sector (notably fisheries) were weak and not always constructive;
* Although there was good experience on technological fixes to species decline (notably hatcheries for sturgeon and salmon), in the baseline, this was the *only* approach considered, with perhaps unrealistic expectations of it. There was little knowledge of, or commitment to, alternative ecosystem-based approaches such as protecting and restoring natural sites and processes;
* Poverty and uneven economic growth provided incentives to maximize rather than optimize harvests; and,
* Harvesting levels – including any illegal harvesting - particular of fish and seals, were considered to be well above sustainable levels.

***With respect to consolidating the regional environmental governance framework:*** the baseline trend was more positive. Due very much to support from GEF and other partners, the five littoral states had signed and ratified the Tehran Convention, which had entered into force in August 2006 – a startling achievement in itself. This comprehensive environmental Convention includes provisions for land-based pollution control, seabed and sea activities, invasive species, protection of marine living resources, environmental emergencies, coastal zone management, and sea level fluctuations.

Following ratification of the Tehran Convention, and given its umbrella nature, the next step was to formulate ancillary binding instruments. At the outset of the CASPECO project, significant work had already gone into four such protocols, related to: pollution from land-based sources; conservation of biodiversity; response to oil spill emergencies, and; trans-boundary EIA. An Interim Secretariat to the TC (TCIS) had been established under the auspices of UNEP, based in Geneva.

These achievements represented major progress over the decade preceding the CASPECO project, and were a solid basis for cooperation across the region. However, there were many more challenges to be addressed before the cooperation could lead to impacts on environmental quality, including:

* Finalizing the above-mentioned four protocols and operationalizing them;
* Developing additional needed protocols or instruments to cover other issues;
* Determining a permanent location of the TC Secretariat;
* The dependency of the Secretariat on international support, for operations and to implement its workprogramme;
* The need to increase the involvement and engagement of a broad range of stakeholders in the TC, including: many governmental agencies beyond the environment sector; the private sector; the public, and; local communities;
* Finding the tools, resources and commitment to actively implement the TC, in particular the protocols, and in particular at the national and local levels.

Finally, separate to the TC process, for several years the five Caspian littoral states have been engaged in negotiations pertaining to the overall legal status of the Caspian Sea. Until this very high level issue is addressed, many lower level issues cannot be addressed.

# 3. Project Design

## 3.1 Summary of Design

In response to the baseline situation described in the last section, the project: “*The Caspian Sea: Restoring Depleted Fisheries and Consolidation of a Permanent Regional Environmental Governance Framework*” was formulated. The Project Objective is: “*The five littoral States of the Caspian Sea strengthen regional governance and apply new thinking to the sustainable management and conservation of the Caspian Sea’s biological resources*”. The title and objective are generally consistent, although the objective’s focus on biological resources is broader than the title’s clear focus on ‘fisheries’.

In line with the title and Objective, the Project Outcomes/Outputs/Activities are focused into two components. The second component addresses overall regional governance issues, supporting the long-term umbrella process. The first component addresses some key specific implementation issues, identified as priorities under the umbrella.

Component 1 is “*Ecosystem-based management of aquatic bioresources in the Caspian Sea*”. This includes five Outcomes:

1. Ecosystem-based management (EBM) has begun to be adopted and practiced by the Caspian States;
2. Invasive species introduction mitigated;
3. Caspian stakeholders implement policies & measures to increase reproductive success of Caspian’s diadromous fish species;
4. Stakeholders apply regional, circum-Caspian approach to habitat conservation in the Caspian, and;
5. Coastal communities increase participation and contribute measurably to improved bioresources conservation in the Caspian

This Component is clearly designed to primarily respond to the threats to fisheries and other biological resources. It covers the ‘restoring depleted fisheries’ from the project title and project justification/analysis. This component also covers other aspects of the ecosystem – such as seals, invasive species and even pollution[[4]](#footnote-4). Although, clearly, the ecosystem is Caspian one and it is not possible to separate fish from other species, there is some confusion as to the principal focus of this Component: is it predominantly fisheries or the ecosystem as a whole?

Component 2 is: “Strengthened Regional Environmental Governance”. This includes four outcomes[[5]](#footnote-5):

1. Institutional setting of Tehran Convention is fully operational and sustainable;
2. Coordination and synergy with other Caspian projects and activities;
3. Littoral States Implement Strategic Convention Action Programme (SCAP) as adopted by the COP-II at regional level and approve and implement NSCAP at national/sub-national level, and;
4. Enhanced stakeholders’ engagement in the TC process and improved public access to information on the status of the Caspian Sea environment.

This Component clearly responds to the project title, project justification and analysis related to regional environmental governance.

Annex 4 assesses overall project progress under each Output. Where appropriate, comments in Annex 4 relate to the project design.

## 3.2 Pertinence and relevance

To the environmental challenges in the region

The design of the project clearly responds to the environmental challenges facing the Caspian Sea. The project design builds on previous analyses of the environmental situation, notably the TDA and SAP. As such, the project responds to priority and urgent environmental challenges identified, and agreed, through a scientific process. Moreover, the project is designed to respond to challenges that are ‘regional’ in nature; that is challenges that either: (i) cross borders, or; (ii) affect more than one country, or; (iii) require cooperation of at least two countries in order to be addressed.

To the established regional and country priorities

Given the project follows on from the SAP and SCAP, it does address priorities agreed by the countries, as expressed in either the SCAP or in one or more of the National Caspian Action Plans.

The SAP (2003) had a very strong focus on fisheries: the SAP’s First Environmental Quality Indicator addressed managing commercial fisheries. However, this was not considered the highest priority under the TC process or by the CEP Steering Committee. Accordingly, the SCAP (2008), under the TC, allocates a lower significance to fisheries. Notably, under the TC, the parties determined to work on four priority protocols, thereby, it could be said, identifying the four related sub-sectors as priorities. None of the four priority protocols relate directly to fisheries. A likely rationale for this decision is that the parties wished to address sectors where more progress could be made within the timeframe of international projects. Hence, to some extent, Component 1 activities were a priority, but not always the top priority.

To GEF criteria

The project fully responds to GEF criteria for international waters projects. First, it aims to support implementation of a SAP – a key step in GEF strategy to support shared management of international waters. Notably, the coverage, under Component 1, of fisheries and biodiversity, responded directly and fully to GEF first Strategic Program under GEF 4[[6]](#footnote-6), i.e.: “*Restoring and Sustaining Coastal and Marine Fish Stocks and Associated Biological Diversity*”. However, it should be noted that for GEF 4 (2007-2010), GEF was committing less support to “general cooperation on trans-boundary waters and preventive interventions” and more support to “on-the-ground reforms and stress reduction measures”. Given that thinking, it may be considered very fortunate that the project was able to support all the essential environmental governance measures under Component 2.

## 3.3 Assessment of Project Design

Overall

The project design as set out in the project document is generally satisfactory. The analysis provided is pertinent; the design focuses on the key issues, and; the document sets out the major steps to be taken. However, there are some weaknesses in the design document. This mid-term evaluation (MTE) does not say these weaknesses *should have* been addressed in the design stage, however, they may have been. And, for the most part, they *should have* been addressed either at the design stage or in the inception stage. These are discussed below:

Analysis in the project design

Compared to earlier stages of GEF support to the Caspian, the project focuses greatly on bio-resources, in particular fisheries management. However, the analysis of the fishery sector in the project document is incomplete[[7]](#footnote-7). The project document provides a stakeholder analysis, which is adequate for identifying the main players in the project and their potential roles – it is not sufficiently thorough to form the basis for broad capacity building or practice-changing activities in any sector. The project document does give some technical information on fish and fisheries, and on the direct causes of declining fish stocks, however, its institutional and socio-economic analysis is weak. As this was a new focus for the project, a full institutional mapping would have been helpful – of all the stakeholders, public and private sector, at all levels from regional to local, and an assessment of their capabilities, limitations, incentives, obligations, opportunities etc. This would have been a basis for designing and anchoring activities in the fishery sector.

Underestimation of the challenges

The project title suggests the project would make some impact on ‘restoring depleted fisheries’. This is a huge task, probably not achieved for any multi-country water body in the world. The project Objective and Outcomes are more ambiguous and less ambitious. However, given that fisheries was essentially a new sector for GEF support in the Caspian, the project document underestimated just how challenging it is to achieve change in the fishery sector – the project would be acting against a number of large and complex forces. The project document should have clarified that a slow, thorough, step-by-step approach is the only possibility in this sector, and that success would take time.

Strategy and pattern and coherence and duplication

The project design and activity framework contain a lot of activities. In many cases, it is clear that they are linked, but the nature of the linkages is not intuitive. At no stage does the project document provide an explanation as to how the various Outcomes/Outputs/Activities are inter-linked. There is no explanation of the strategic approach of the project: how it will use a range of linked activities to address the overall challenges. Perhaps, this strategic thinking was to be found in earlier documents, such as the SAP or SCAP. However, in the CASPECO project document, there is a lack of pattern and coherence across the activities in the design. This creates a danger of duplication and gaps, and makes communication difficult. For example, the design calls for information/data collection at many points, there is no strong mechanism for coordinating these activities, leading to a danger of inefficiencies and/or gaps.

Specifically, as mentioned previously, the project sought firm engagement with a new stakeholder group (from the fisheries sector), and no clear strategy for achieving this is elaborated. The strategy appears to have been to develop TOR for activities that encourage cooperation within cross-agency teams, and to give the cross-agency teams specific issues on which to work. Although this would surely contribute to some bridge building and confidence building, it may be rather limited.

The strategy also relies heavily on working groups and drafting reports/plans. The MTE assumes these are to feed and facilitate an increase in trust and understanding, and in turn feed into the decision-making and political process. In some cases, the reports were to be revisions or updates of documents that had been prepared earlier under CEP. The added value or validation of these revisions/updates is not clarified in the project document.

Focusing

This is related to the previous issue. The project design responds to many of the demands of the project stakeholders, possibly too many. As a result, there is a danger that the project is too ambitious, or too scattered. It may have been more advisable to focus on a smaller number of high priority issues.

Sequencing

The project design depends on a sequence of events. For example, many activities depend on progress under the first Output under Outcome 1. This sequencing is not clearly stated in the document. The risk that this Output would be delayed was not identified. Consequently, when this Output did advance slowly, many other activities were either delayed or obliged to change.

Indicators

The project document provides a total of 36 indicators, covering the overall Objective and 8 of the 9 technical Outcomes. This is too large a number to be used as a project management or communications tool. Moreover, the indicators are intrinsically far too ambitious, and very little progress could be expected towards many of the indicators, given timescales and resources. They do not provide a useful tool to measure progress. Two key underlying aspects of the project are: (i) securing engagement with the fisheries sector, and; (ii) helping the TC process along towards sustainability. These are two key issues, in which GEF is interested, and in which the MTE feels adequate progress has been made. Realistic indicators of progress on these issues were not developed.

Inception

The Inception phase is a key step in the project design process, where the design can be reviewed and verified, and updated if necessary, and changes can be made to the logical framework in response to latest developments and opportunities. It is the bridge between design and implementation. This phase is recognized to be vital in GEF projects, given the considerable time lapse between first drafting of the logframe and the start of activities. In the case of the CASPECO project, at inception phase, there does not seem to have been a thorough review of the project design and logical framework – a missed opportunity to rectify and complement the project design.

Small Grants Programmes

The Matched Small Grants Programme (MSGP) and Micro Environmental Grants (MEG) Programme were designed based on similar initiatives in the previous phases. Although generally successful, previous evaluations had recommended some ways to further improve the MSGP and MEG. These recommendations do not seem to have been fully considered.

Budget

Costs in the Caspian region have been rising rapidly over the past decade, and the project document did not fully recognize this. This made it difficult to involve the required quality of experts from the region. Similarly, the budget allocation to workshops is considered to be well below actual needs. If future projects are to hire experts and support multi-country workshops, the budget should be based on a realistic costing.

Implementation Framework

The CASPECO project is in support of the TC, which, at the project outset had a decision-making mechanism (the Conference of the Parties – CoP) and an Interim Secretariat (TCIS) under the auspices of UNEP. At the outset, these two mechanisms were not fully fledged and were not able to directly execute GEF support. Moreover, the TCIS is not based in the region. Hence, it was not possible for the CoP/TCIS to directly manage the GEF support. As a result, as in previous phases, the GEF support was managed through UNOPS, with a PCMU established in the project region. The PCMU manages and coordinates all activities.

The PCMU has a team responsible for providing technical and other support to Component 1. Where appropriate, the TCIS lends support to Component 1. For Component 2, TCIS provides technical support and guidance to all activities. TCIS is supported by UNEP, and the project provides direct support to UNEP so that it can support the TCIS[[8]](#footnote-8).

Overall, GEF support is governed by a Project Steering Committee (closely related to the CoP).

These arrangements are considered optimal given the current context. Although, clearly, there is some danger of confusion or duplication. Hence, when the TC has a permanent Secretariat, future international support should be directly through the TC mechanisms, with guidance and financial management from UN agencies as necessary.

Unrealistic expectations and lack of a sustainability strategy

Perhaps the main weakness of the project design is the unrealistic expectations of sustainability. According to the project document, institutional sustainability was to be assured through the “extremely impressive regional governance framework”. Intrinsic in the design is a presumption that progress under both Components would be sufficient to reach a situation where national/regional stakeholders (including the TC) have become sustainable and independent of external aid by project end.

The MTE agrees that the regional framework was relatively impressive at project outset. Yet, it was (and still is) some way from full sustainability. Interviews with stakeholders suggest that, in reality, from early on in the project, the hope for sustainability relied on further phases of GEF support. The MTE feels it was not realistic to expect either the TC process, or the process to restore degraded depleted fisheries, to become sustainable without further international support by the activities of CASPECO. Both Components are dealing with issues that, in the best of circumstances, take many years to reach sustainability.

Recommendations

As mentioned above, the overall design can be considered satisfactory. It is easy to identify design weaknesses *after* the project has been implemented. For the remainder of the project, it is recommended to:

* Clarify the strategic vision and approach to the project, particular to component 1, to the Outcomes under Component 1, and the linkages across these Outcomes and their Outputs;
* Focus, on a realistic set of key targets, to ensure that they are met, rather than trying to advance on too many issues. It is noted that any change in activities has to be approved through the project decision-making processes;
* Undertake a full analysis of the fishery sector, in particular of policies and institutions. This would include a full institutional mapping, covering private, public, state-owned, NGO and academic sectors;
* If resources permit, undertake an impact assessment of all the rounds of small grants programme implemented under the CEP since 2000, assess lessons learnt, assess challenges, and provide recommendations for future grant programmes, possibly in order to increase efficiency, and to strengthen how MSGP/MEG support the overall SCAP implementation.

# 4. Project Efficiency

Project efficiency is defined in terms of progress made towards objectives, with suitable consideration of time taken and resources used. Given that the rate of progress has been different under the two components, the components are considered separately.

Annex 4 provides a summary of progress under each Output (for Components 1 and 2), as well as a brief assessment, a consideration of factors, and comments and recommendations.

## 4.1 Component 1: Ecosystem-based management of aquatic bioresources in the Caspian Sea

Introduction

Some notable achievements have been made under this Component. Successes include:

* The launching of two sub-projects in Iran, one of which is already producing interesting findings of wider relevance;
* The establishment of two working groups (on *Fish Passages* and on *Spawning Grounds*), which are designed to address key yet sensitive issues, and have already generated findings that challenge traditional thinking.

However, overall progress under this Component has been limited and below expectations. As part of the 2010 PIR exercise, the PCMU prepared a brief report on progress towards each indicator (see Annex 5 for the findings related to Component 1). From Annex 5, we can see that, by mid-2010 (i.e. half way through the project), the PCMU reported progress of 20% or less for 14 out of the 17 indicators under Component 1. Whereas the pertinence of some of the indicators may be questioned, clearly, by the PCMU’s own assessment, progress under Component 1 was below expectations at mid-2010.

For example:

* Several activities have been postponed and have not yet started;
* Most activities involving the four planned Working Groups have either just started or are yet to start;
* Many activities are awaiting the results of Output 1 before getting under full implementation.

In the period since the PIR was prepared in mid-2010, the MTE has found that the rate of progress has increased for many of the Outputs/Activities and increased momentum has been acquired. However, this component is still behind schedule. *There remains a risk of progress being unsatisfactory at project end.*

Factors

The factors behind the limited progress under Component 1 are manifold and complex, and the factors vary from Output to Output. The principal factors can be considered:

#1 The intrinsic difficulty of the work in this region. The project aims to change behavior in the fishery sector. The scale of this challenge cannot be underestimated. For example, fishing data is rarely shared by national agencies, where all efforts perceived as presenting a threat to fishing levels meet stiff resistance. Seals are considered a commercial species in some countries – making conservation efforts very difficult. All countries have difficulties establishing protected areas, and so the conservation of aquatic resources faces huge obstacles.

#2 Difficulties in engaging with fishing sector; the success of many activities in Outcome 1 requires a full engagement with fishing sector, either with experts, government agencies or communities. The engagement has to be created before activities can meaningfully take place. Given that this is a complex sector, and this is a new stakeholder group for the project, it has understandably taken time to develop an adequate level of engagement. These difficulties may stem from uncertaincy on the side of some of the project implementers, or hesitancy on the side of the fishery stakeholders, or both. It is noted that the PCMU and others made great efforts to engage, often with limited success, an indicator of just how difficult this is.

#3 Delays in nominating experts; for many activities, this must happen in all five countries before the activity can proceed. This has taken time in many cases. Often the new nature of activities means it is more difficult to identify experts. This is often indirectly linked to factor #2.

#4 Delays in identifying international experts; again, in part due to the new nature of some activities, it has taken time to identify pertinent and competent international experts.

#5 Over-ambitious nature of project document; in some cases, the expectations in the project document are too high (for example, the indicator “new stock assessment methodology … used in five countries”). In such cases, it can be argued that 10% progress should be considered satisfactory. For example, inter-sector collaboration has improved in many countries over the past decade – what rate of progress is considered acceptable in this domain? Moreover, Component 1 addresses a wide range of issues – again this was perhaps too ambitious.

#6 Change in project management team; at the outset of the project, the project office was moved from Tehran to Astana. This caused disruptions. Due to this move, the entire PCMU team was changed in the first six months, and all members (except one, the Project Manager) were *entirely new* to the CEP process. As a result, the management and planning capacity had to be almost completely re-created, and several months were lost. At the time of the MTE, the new team had been in place for only 13 months –a very short time in the context of inter-country collaboration.

#7 Unclear strategy; the strategy behind Component 1 and the linkages across the many outputs and outcomes are not clear. This surely presents difficulties to the management team as they manage the activities, and seek synergies.

#8 Lack of management tools; such as workplans and TOR. This point will be taken up more fully in Chapter 5.

#9 Need for progress on the biodiversity protocol. Many activities would have been facilitated by the finalization of this protocol, as a basis for collaboration and cooperation across the countries. As this protocol has not been finalized, many activities are awaiting.

#10 Invalid assumptions regarding sequencing as mentioned earlier in this report, many activities cannot commence before there are results from Output 1.

Recommendations

Some of the above factors have already addressed over the past 13 months. Others are too entrenched to be addressed by this project management. Others remain and can be addressed, hence, for the remainder of the project, it is recommended to:

* Develop a clear, short, guiding strategy for all of Component 1. This would provide the high-level road-map. This would bring all activities together into one framework, showing conceptual linkages, and provide a clear and detailed workplan, leading to an acceptable end-point. This should clarify the linkages between the various activities and working groups, and probably lead to a merging of some activities and outputs. This would also help identify the more marginal activities;
* Review activities in the workplan, and, for those considered non-crucial, consider canceling them, through the project decision-making process. This would allow a focusing on more critical activities;
* Attempt to merge the workplans under Outputs were possible – this leads to a merging of activities and inputs, and hopefully to synergies;
* Devote more management resources to a constant monitoring and follow-up of the activities of the project experts and consultants. This will be essential to prod activities along and keep the momentum.

## 4.2 Component 2: Strengthened Regional Environmental Governance

Introduction

Component 2 relates to the TC process. This is an inherently political and sensitive process, hence, in the best of circumstances, progress will be slow, as has been seen for similar processes in other regions of the world.

In general, Progress under Component 2 has been much more satisfactory than Component 1, with real progress on the TC process achieved. Some of the notable achievements include:

* Finalization of two protocols – they are now ready for signature;
* Receiving the financial contributions from four of the parties to the functioning of the TC Secretariat;
* Finalization of an agreed reporting format for the TC;
* The continued engagement of a large number of international partners: IMO, UNEP, FAO, EU, ESPOO Convention, etc; and,
* Support to a highly successful and well planned Caspian Day, 2010. This was considered a unique success across the region.

However, some aspects have been less successful and less clear. For example, the countries have decided to cancel the planned regional investment forum and to postpone the formation of a TC subsidiary body. The development of the shared environmental information system (SEIS) is delayed. Hence, CASPECO project support to these activities has been cancelled or very limited.

Moreover, the expected achievements and long-term impacts with regards to public participation and NGOs are unclear. Likewise, there are many data and information related activities, these follow on from related activities in previous phases. In some cases these respond to the specific requirements of the TC, however for many stakeholders, the full value added of the new initiatives beyond what occurred in previous phase is not always clear. Also, the sustainable storage and accessibility of the data/information management is not always established clear.

Factors

The factors behind the progress under Component 2 are manifold and complex, and vary from Output to Output. The principal factors can be considered:

#1 Consistent and constant support of the Secretariat staff, most of the team involved in supporting Component 2 were heavily involved in previous phases of CEP and the TC, and continuity was assured through the TCIS, which has played a strong role in planning and managing Component 2 activities;

#2 Constant workprogramme The workplan under Component 2 is a continuation of previous CEP phases, with familiar activities and familiar stakeholders. The stakeholders: administrative, expert and political, were already engaged in the workplan at the project outset, and continuity was assured.

#3 Full alignment to TC workprogramme The project workplan under Component 2 is almost identical to the workplan of the TC. As this workplan has been negotiated by the participating countries – it is a clearly stated priority and activities are ‘pre-approved’.

Note

Although the progress is clear, it is highly difficult to judge this in terms of the time taken and the resources used. A much more detailed analysis would be necessary, and possibly merited. It is noted that project delivery is above 60%, much of which was invested in Component 2, which is high compared to time passed and achievements. The data made available to the MTE on the details of expenditures under Component 2 was incomplete, including information on budget reallocations due to activities being cancelled or expanded

Recommendations

Under the remainder of the project, it is recommended to provide more complete information on expenditures under Component 2, in particular any re-allocations subsequent to the budget in the project document.

Progress under Component 2 is satisfactory, although could be better. Although better than Component 1, planning, reporting and communications under Component 2 are far from excellent. Hence, improved strategizing, communication, workplanning and reporting would also be useful for this Component.

## 4.3 Issues Pertaining to both Components

The project supports a lot of local activities. It is not clear how these feed into the overall project or TC vision. It is very difficult for regional project to have an impact on the ground, and, this project’s objectives are essentially regional. In some cases, local actions can contribute to regional objectives, possibly through piloting, demonstrating, developing approaches and gathering data. Local support can build support that can feed into a larger picture and contribute to a larger vision, which may ultimately inspire changes in attitudes and practices of important decision-makers.

Danger of duplication, repetition or missing key issues. One example would be the national implementation action plans; these were prepared under both the first phase and the second phase, it is not clear what real value added can be gained by preparing these again under the third phase. National action plans can always be improved, but the emphasis should be on action, not drafting reports and plans. This is partly a design issue.

A second example is all the data collection and information gathering. All three current working groups under Component 1 are preparing country reports, and there is some overlap in the data to be collected for each report. Moreover, many other reports have been prepared in past phases, and in this phase there are many other report writing processes ongoing (SOE, civil society engagement, and the unified reporting format). There is insufficient explanation as to how the present reports/data collection processes are related to each other, nor on how they build on similar work done in previous phases. The project, through all phases and still, is investing significantly in data gathering, yet it all seems ad hoc and fragmented. Finally, several aspects of the project’s work is related to the need for protected areas (spawning ground working group, seal action plan, Kura delta, etc) and it is not clear how these synergize. A gap analysis would have been useful to avoid duplication and gaps.

Recommendation: Future international projects to support the TC process should:

* strategize and clarify how a regional initiative can best contribute to local and national issues such as public participation and NGO networking.
* clarify an approach to data and information management, and the optimal role for an internationally supported regional project. This should address issues such as: avoiding duplication, gap filling, assuring sustainability of databases/access points; handing over to permanent regional institutions. It is noted that a sustainable Caspian Information Centre (CIC) would contribute to this.

# 5. Project Implementation: Leadership, Supervision and Management

## 5.1 Government Leadership and Supervision

Government leadership and supervision is provided through a number of mechanisms: (i) Overall the Conference of Parties (CoP) to the TC is the leading body; (ii) the Project Steering Committee, inherited from the earlier phase GEF projects and; (iii) bilateral contacts between individual governments and the PCMU and the TCIS. Most Government leadership is typically through the National Focal Points (NFP), who are responsible for communications and coordinating activities in their respective countries.

The CoP is scheduled to meet every two years, and it has not yet met during the CASPECO implementation period. The country representatives to the TC are typically, formally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the support of a multi-agency committee. The agency responsible for environment plays a strong role in this committee.

The Project Steering Committee (SC) is an experienced and knowledgeable body to lead and supervise the project. According to the project document, the SC is comprised of representatives from each of the five participating states, international partners and other stakeholders. MTE was informed that the five environment ministries represent the participating states on the SC. Although membership does change, SC members are informed of the project objectives, history and progress, and are well placed to guide the project. Typically, other government representatives are invited to attend SC meetings, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The SC has met twice during CASPECO: in April 2009 at project inception and in October 2010. Two things should be noted: (1) the Steering Committee did not meet during the first 18 months of implementation. It is noted that progress (under Component 1) was not adequate during this period. An earlier meeting of the SC could have addressed this concern; (2) the project is closely linked to the TC, and the SC is closely linked to the CoP. These strong linkages generate ownership and strengthen anchoring, however it can mean that project management is limited by political sensitivities. For example, it may have made sense to modify the project workplan during the inception stage, however getting such changes approved by the SC may be burdensome if it is tied into the more formal TC process.

Bilaterally, all five governments strongly support the project and provide leadership. This support and leadership is provided to the PCMU and the Interim Secretariat, and to project activities. This support takes the place in the form of regular contacts between NFPs, TCIS and PCMU, both by phone and in meetings.

It is noted that this support and leadership originates mostly from the ministry/department responsible for environment. This is natural as this is the focal agency. Support and leadership from other agencies – notably those responsible for fisheries - has been less strong. This is a challenge as the engagement of fishery sector is vital for Component 1. The reasons for the weaker involvement of fishery agencies are manifold and diverse, and include: (i) uncertainty on behalf of the environment agency as to how to engage with fisheries; (ii) hesitance from fishery agencies as to whether to engage with the environment sector, and; (iii) lack of understanding of the project by fishery agencies, and; (iv) the complex nature of the fishery sector, with diverse stakeholders at many levels in public and private sectors.

Full implementation of the TC and the restoration of fisheries will ultimately require engagement by many sectors, including fisheries. This will ultimately have to be achieved by more powerful agencies with the capacity to coordinate – for example a Ministry of Foreign Affairs or a Ministry of Economic Planning. These agencies have been involved in CASPECO, although to a limited extent, and mostly as observers.

Recommendations

* Chapter 3, above, recommends the undertaking of “a full analysis of the fishery sector”. This would also facilitate the mapping of key governmental stakeholders, and assist efforts to contact them and engage them;
* To achieve TC goals will require the active involvement of many agencies. Typically, across the world, environmental agencies find this challenging as they may be young and have limited resources. A programme of advocacy and specific measures to influence sectoral and powerful economic agencies could be beneficial. If time permits, it is recommended to develop a programme of advocacy and specific measures to generate support of economic agencies in the five littoral countries.

## 5.2 UNDP Leadership and Supervision

UNDP Leadership and Supervision on technical issues is provided by the UNDP Regional Unit in Bratislava. Overall, UNDP Bratislava support is considered strong, reliable and appropriate. This was provided through regular emails, skype conferences, meetings and participation in events. However, certain stakeholders noted, given the complexity and challenging nature of this project, additional interventions may have been beneficial. The role of UNDP Country Offices in the five countries is much more limited and relates to administrative and logistical support.

The project has slipped behind schedule, and this MTE recommends many measures to rectify. UNDP will have to ensure that supervision is sufficient to ensure the right measures are taken to put the project back on schedule. Recommendation UNDP, together with UNOPS, to organize monthly[[9]](#footnote-9), formal review meetings, to ensure that the MTE recommendations are being heeded, and that they are having the desired effect.

The issue of indicators and results based management emerges at several points in this report. Globally, UNDP has developed a lot of capacity related to indicators and results based management. Should, in the future, UNDP continue its involvement in the TC process or Caspian environment, UNDP should take the lead in ensuring SMART indicators are prepared and used.

## 5.3 UNOPS Supervision and Management

UNOPS is responsible for financial and administrative supervision and management, and is not responsible for technical support.

Overall UNOPS support has been considered adequate. UNOPS have been considered very helpful in establishing the management systems and in developing the capacity of the PCMU team.

Some stakeholders suggested that UNOPS’ procedures are getting more complicated or less user friendly. Many stakeholders commented that it had been easier to make payments in the earlier project phases. Notably, in earlier phases, it was possible to provide cash to workshop participants before workshops through a project imprest account. Due to the findings of a global assessment and a subsequent global reorganization, UNOPS no longer establishes imprest accounts[[10]](#footnote-10) for project’s of this scale. It is still possible to make such cash payments in advance, this requires appropriate additional advanced planning. The inability to make the advance payments to project participants, who had become used to this service, has created some confusion and friction.

## 5.4 UNEP Leadership and Management

UNEP was requested by the TC to establish an Interim Secretariat for the Tehran Convention (TCIS), based in Geneva. The TCIS was established in 2008 and is operated by 3 part-time staff, all familiar with the region and the TC. TCIS prepares a biannual Programme of Work to be approved by the CoP, and requests funding from several sources, including: (i) CASPECO project (its main source); (ii) the EU, which provides direct support to TCIS, and; (iii) contribution to TCIS from the five member governments. The MTE saw no mechanism to ensure there is no duplication in the use of these three sources of funds.

CASPECO finances:

1. A contribution to the functioning of the TCIS secretariat as it plans, organizes, supervises and monitors activities. This support is covered by an Inter Agency Agreement (IAA) between UNOPS and UNEP. Overall, the modality involving UNEP through the IAA can be considered successful;
2. Component 2 of CASPECO – of which many activities are from the TCIS’ biannual Programme of Work and planned by TCIS, in consultation with PCMU, and each input/activity is approved by PCMU, before UNOPS allocates funding. The funding is direct from UNOPS to the concerned service provider, not through TCIS.

As discussed previously, progress under Component 2 has been satisfactory, and UNEP/TCIS is in part responsible. There are some issues to be addressed:

* UNOPS is not satisfied with reporting by UNEP, and indeed the most recent report appears less than satisfactory;
* The IAA is not fully clear as to whether payments to UNEP should be in advance of activities, or subsequent to activities. It is also not fully clear on reporting requirements; and,
* The danger of duplication, with, apparently, on one occasion, a consultant being hired to perform functions that are included under the IAA.

Finally, as mentioned in Chapter 3, these arrangements can be considered optimal given the current context. Where the roles of PCMU and the TCIS are similar there is some danger of confusion or duplication. Hence, as soon as possible, once the Secretariat is permanently established and functioning sustainably, all future international support should be directly through the TC mechanisms (Secretariat and CoP), with necessary guidance from UNDP and financial management of a UN agency if needed.

Recommendations:

* If it is not already happening, TCIS should prepare annual reports providing details of all TCIS revenue and all TCIS expenses, from all sources. The reports should be distributed to all financial supporters (EU, UNOPS and government);
* Within the framework of the IAA, UNEP and UNOPS should agree on a reporting format. Contents may be taken from similar IAAs on other projects. Each report should include a clear workplan for the next reporting period, and planned expenses. This should release an advance payment, from UNOPS, to cover those expenses.

## 5.5 The Project Coordination and Management Unit

Introduction and Establishment

In line with a previous agreement that the CEP coordination unit should rotate around the Caspian littoral countries, moving every three years, in early 2009 the unit was transferred from Tehran to Astana. The previous Project Manager oversaw this move, and continued his functions for approximately 6 months into CASPECO, covering the process to select/hire the new Project Manager. Given the move from Tehran to in Astana, it was necessary to recruit an entirely new team for the PCMU.

The PCMU management team consists of: a Project Manager; a Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert; a Civil Society Participation Officer; a Finance and Administrative Affairs Officer; an Information Technology Assistant, and; a Logistics and Operations Assistant. The Kazakhstan Coastal Advisor (half time) supports the Civil Society Participation Officer. Finally, the office hosts the Kazakhstan National Project Coordinator Officer (NPCO). The Coastal Advisors in each country report to the PCMU, and can, to some extent, be considered part of the PCMU.

Of all team members, only the new Project Manager had been involved in the previous GEF projects (as a national SAP Implementation Coordinator). Hence, the new team had limited previous experience in TC issues or managing GEF projects. In order to facilitate their initial operations, some support was provided:

* The former Project Manager oversaw the establishment of most of the team and provided guidance over operations for the first months;
* UNOPS provided regular on-the-job training (over telephone/skype) to the financial/operational staff;
* A former CEP office staff member from Azerbaijan provided support and informal on-the-job training over the first months;
* The new Project Manager received a short training by UNOPS on project management; and,
* The new Project Manager provides regular information and guidance to the team on the CEP and the TC process.

Performance

Given the complexity of the challenges in the region, the diversity of the stakeholder network, and the ambitious nature of the project, and given the fact the team was entirely new and quite small, the PCMU has done an admirable job in overseeing the coordination and management of the CASPECO activities and network. Some of the impressive achievements of the PCMU are:

* A smooth transition from Tehran to Astana with a limited impact on performance;
* Maintaining an acceptable level of operations and functions: e.g.: issuing contracts, payments, reports, organizing workshops, coordinating the small grants programmes etc;
* Maintaining a high level of support to the TC, to the TCIS and to other stakeholders;
* Maintaining the high reputation of the TC process across the stakeholder network;
* Maintaining the stakeholder network, and;
* Managing to keep the process moving without impacting on political sensitivities.

Meeting the Future Challenge

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the project is facing certain implementation challenges, particularly with regards to Component 1. The MTE is of the opinion that the following targeted support will assist the project to meet these challenges.

Strategic reflection. Given the constant deadlines and pressures, it has not been possible to undertake significant strategic reflection. The gap between the first and second Steering Committee Meetings was too long, and insufficient strategic thinking occurred around both Meetings. This has contributed to the situation where the Project vision, the long term plan, and the coherence across Outputs and Activities are unclear. This is true for the project as a whole, but particularly for Component 1, and even more for the approach to fisheries. The MTE recommends a reflection process, preferably with the support of a senior fisheries institutional expert familiar to the region, to overcome these weaknesses. The Output would be a clear, short, guiding strategy for all of Component 1. The aim would be to develop a tool for use by the Project Manager and the Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert to guide overall activities, to facilitate monitoring and communicating overall progress under Component 1. Note: this recommendation is the same as the first recommendation in Chapter 3.3 above.

Activity planning and management. The tools used for the planning and management of Outcomes, Outputs and Activities have been weak in the past. The overall Component workplans have changed very little since the project document, suggesting little adaptive management, and there is little documented justification of changes to activities[[11]](#footnote-11) in the workplan. Many of the workplans are not fully suitable for adaptive management[[12]](#footnote-12). There has not been enough success in linking up the activities, and each Outcome/Output is as a separate entity. Reporting is generally good - but with no common format or process, and no clear evidence of the use of reports in management. This is true for the project as a whole, but particularly for Component 1. Notably under Component 1, this has contributed to a situation where the links between activities are not clear, monitoring is difficult and incomplete, timelines have slipped, and it is difficult to take corrective measures, either at the Activity, Output or Outcome level.

The MTE recommends a strengthening of activity planning. Under Component 1, more attention should be given to: (i) the preparation of a more detailed workplan[[13]](#footnote-13) at the Outcome level – a single workplan suitable for adaptive management; (ii) the preparation of more detailed workplans for each Output –single workplans suitable for adaptive management within the Output; (iii) the preparation of more detailed TOR for all inputs and activities, clarifying the link into the overall project and allowing adaptive management; (iv) a pro-active technical support and monitoring of all activities, to ensure timetables are kept, problems are identified in a timely manner allowing help to be provided, and; (v) the active review and follow-up of all reports from workshops, consultants and contractors.

These activities (i) – (v) should be driven by the Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert, under the supervision of the Project Manager. However, given the likely workload of the Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert over the coming months, he would probably require some short-term support. This could be provided in connection with the support to strategic reflection under the previous recommendation. Overall supervision should be assured by regular (monthly) updates to UNDP/GEF which would be the basis for a monthly review by skype.

Internal and external communications. Internally, the group of project participants is broad, and strong internal communications are needed to create a sense of unity and branding. Currently, each activity seems to proceed in an isolated manner, and each participant works only on his/her workprogramme. Some examples of this include: sub-contractors under one Output not being aware of related work under another Output; experts under one Output not interacting with related experts under another Output; very few experts being sufficiently aware of or engaged in the overall process. The previous two recommendations will help rectify this situation. In addition, the MTE recommends a short, monthly, informal ‘newsletter’ to provide the internal project network with an update on events, findings, workshops. To facilitate the process and keep it informal, it may be more appropriate that the newsletter covers only Component 1 and the Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert be entirely responsible.

External communications relate to communications with a broader set of interested parties. This may be necessary for many reasons, notably promoting project outputs, or helping to mobiles resources to the project. Currently, many key external parties are not clear about the aims and achievements of the project. External communications should be improved to contribute to increasing understanding and recognition of the project’s achievement. These can also help bolster further support. The newsletter (see last paragraph), or a complementary newsletter targeting external communications, can help resolve this. Furthermore, the project has not been not strong at capturing/measuring lessons and even achievements. The project has achieved many things, but these have not been adequately captured in a manner that can be shared with partners. This relates to both Components.

Finally, not all stakeholders are satisfied with the project website. Some consider it confusing, and not updated often enough. It was created during the CEP in a different context. As the website provides first impressions to many stakeholders, it is important that it conveys the correct message. If time and resources permit, the MTE recommends a user survey (of actual, potential and desired website users) to ascertain the usefulness of the website, and to recommend modifications.

# 6. Project Ownership, Anchoring, Coordination and Partnerships

## 6.1 National Ownership, Anchoring and Coordination

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 4, the level of government ownership is strong, particularly in the environment agencies. Ownership is notably weaker in sectoral agencies, including the fisheries sector. The approach to ownership, anchoring and coordination includes:

National Focal Points (NFPs), initially nominated by and financed by the countries to implement the CEP. The NFPs assist in carrying out and overseeing the implementation of the national activities, particularly through the NSCAPs. The NFP are encouraged to support inter-agency coordination, to ensure policy streamlining and to facilitate in-country implementation of the project and the Tehran Convention and its protocols. Another important role of the NFP is to ensure coordination of relevant national projects (both government and donor funded);

National Project Coordination Officers (NPCO). NPCO are hired by the project, to enable project implementation at the national level. NPCOs substantively assist the NFP in carrying out his/her duties and responsibilities, monitoring and coordinating the CASPECO project, and also coordinating the implementation at the national level of the SCAP and NSCAP.

National Convention Liaison Officers (NCLO). Following a decision at COPII, NCLOs were to be hired to support contacts between the TCIS and government, and contacts between the project and other in-country activities. The NCLO were to have been compensated from the contributions of his/her country to the Convention budget. It was agreed that this approach would be reviewed at COP III.

Inter-Ministerial Coordination Mechanisms (IMCM) – to strengthen inter-agency coordination at the national level. The long-term aim would be to secure contribution to the TC and the NSCAP from all concerned national agencies, and to increase coordination of activities in line with the NSCAPs. So far, an IMCM has been established in Turkmenistan, and this is not yet functioning optimally.

The five governments, in parallel, but also in response to the GEF projects, are also investing significantly in activities related to the NSCAPs, for example into new hatcheries and sand-dredging to clear spawning sites. Although the long-term appropriateness of these investments can be questioned, they do indicate a real desire to improve the overall Caspian ecosystem.

Assessment

The approach to national ownership and coordination was developed through the first two stages of CEP and has proven to be successful over the years. Some of the successful aspects during CASPECO include:

* The project has maintained good relations with the focal ministry in each country;
* The project and the TCIS have facilitated and helped maintain the good network amongst the five focal ministries in the five countries;
* The ownership and coordination mechanisms have greatly contributed to the achievements on the TC process, towards the development of protocols and to the implementation of TCIS programme of work, and;
* The ownership and coordination mechanisms have facilitated many project activities at the national level, have obtained national support for the activities, and have secured the timely approval and implementation of activities. This ensures that regional activities in five countries can proceed at a reasonable pace.

However, with regards to anchoring/coordination, the MTE has identified some challenges that may need addressing. These may be increasingly apparent as the project aims to work in new areas (e.g. fisheries), and aims to become more operational in the implementation of the Convention.

As discussed in the previous Chapter, the first challenge is with regards to ensuring the project is adequately anchored to address new and emerging issues. For Component 1, this means anchoring into the fisheries sector. Clearly, the fishery sector is diverse and complex, with many competing interests and driving forces. ‘Engagement’ is, at a minimum, a multi-dimensional process, and it may not be possible to engage with the entire sector, only components within it. Notwithstanding, at the national level, it is recognized that progress has been limited and ad hoc.

Generally, inter-agency coordination remains weak at the national level. The only IMCM (in Turkmenistan) was established before CASPECO began and is not adequately effective. This weak coordination is a major barrier to implementing the TC, and in particular to implementing the NSCAPs. Without progress on this, the TC cannot be implemented.

This can also be seen with regards to public participation and NGO participation. This is again challenging. There is a perception from outside that the project continues to involve the ‘same’ NGOs and stakeholders as in previous phases, and that these are not fully representative. A similar perception exists with regards to the participation of national experts in the project’s regional working groups and workshops. Although, overall, many of the experts are considered to be pertinent, as the project has moved into new sectors and moved into an operational mode, in many cases it has been reported that (i) some participants are not fully familiar with the sector and (ii) some participants are too high-level, and do not have the time to follow-up to meetings and working groups.

A third challenge relates to the overall management of the NPCO and NCLO, and the relationship between the two. This was not entirely clear to the MTE. Improved workplans and reporting systems for these positions are needed to clarify the situation.

Finally too many stakeholders see management of the Caspian natural resources as an ‘environmental’ problem, without recognizing the complex socio-economic challenges underlying this, and how this affects solutions.

Recommendation

As mentioned above, the approach to coordination has worked very successfully over the years. Great care should be taken not to jeopardize this. Over the medium term future, as the challenges evolve and the TC moves into full implementation, it will become increasingly necessary to strengthen and broaden the overall anchoring through the NFPs. With regards to fisheries, given that there is also likely to be some resistance from some fishery stakeholders, this will have to be based on a thorough institutional analysis (see previous recommendations). Progress towards effective IMCM has to be monitored. With regards to the participation of NGOs and experts in working groups/workshops, over time, it may become necessary to more delegate the nomination in order to be seen to be independent.

No additional specific action is recommended at this stage. However, over the medium term, more serious efforts to ensure multi-stakeholder, cross-sector anchoring will be necessary. Also, future international projects to support the TC process should have clearer reporting arrangements from the NCLO and NPCO to PCMU.

## 6.2 Partnerships

The CASPECO inherited a large number of partnerships from previous phases of the CEP and has generally maintained these. This remains a priority of the project and the PCMU and TCIS, and this can be considered successful. Some of the more pertinent partnerships include:

Partnerships with international organizations. In most cases this has been through the TC process, as many organizations have been supporting the development of protocols. The IMO, CITES, FAO, the Espoo Convention, the European Environment Agency, and UNEP GPA have been involved in this. It is noted that a fuller cooperation with these, and other agencies, will be possible once the protocols have been signed, and implementation starts. The EU is supporting TCIS, and synergies between the EU and GEF support are achieved by TCIS. The IAEA has been successfully involved as a service provider for training. Compared to previous phases, there has been a less active partnership with the World Bank, reflecting the latter’s reduced level of support to the Caspian environment.

Partnerships with private sector Partnership remains strong with BP, despite the slow process to transfer BP funds to support project activities. A strong relationship has developed with AGIP, who are very appreciative of the project, and are promising to support data and information management activities through CASPECO. Stakeholders are hopeful that these partnerships can be more effective after the Protocols are signed.

However, the MTE finds that the project does not communicate a clear understanding of what is meant by ‘private sector partnerships’, and in many cases this appears to mean seeking funding for CASPECO activities from private sector. It is understood that the PCMU had prepared a draft strategy, but this was not reviewed by the MTE. Recommendation Finalize this strategy, in a consultative manner.

Other CASPECO has rekindled its partnership with CASPCOM, which may prove useful in the development of future projects. The Matched Small Grant Programme has provided a tool for maintaining and developing partnerships with local non-governmental agencies, although for the most part the partnership is in the form of a contractual agreement to pay for specific services provided.

# 7. Cross-Cutting Sustainability Factors

## 7.1 Equity considerations

On the one hand, poverty and inequity are amongst the forces driving resource degradation in the Caspian, and are therefore important. On the other hand, the CASPECO project is rather small and covers five countries, and cannot be expected to address all issues. Only the MSGP and MEG are designed to reach communities, to support sustainable development, and have a positive local impact. As such, many of these grants should have a positive impact on local people and contribute to equity. Based on the available documentation, that is the case.

At a general level, the fact that Component 1 included a major focus on ‘fisheries’, meant the project had a more direct relation to socio-economic and community issues, and so is directly pertinent to equity.

The TC text focuses on resource protection and sustainable harvesting of resources, it does not set out directly to address poverty, equity or even sustainable development. Likewise, the “*Strategy for Civil Society Engagement in the Caspian Sea Marine Environment”* considers sustainability in the protection of resources, but less the development aspects. These documents are predominantly environmental agreements.

The MTE was not made aware of any analysis on the nexus between poverty and resource degradation in the Caspian area[[14]](#footnote-14). Overall, resource degradation is analyzed as a scientific or environmental problem, with little consideration for the socio-economic aspects and causes. This may be appropriate for early stages of the TC, but should evolve with time. Ultimately, within the Convention, it will be necessary to address the root causes of degradation, and consider equity and poverty. For example, this would become an issue in establishing effective protected areas. Recommendation If time and resources permit, raise the awareness of TC stakeholders on the socio-economic foundations of the issues being addressed, and of the equity-environment nexus in the Caspian region.

## 7.2 Gender Mainstreaming

By design, the project strives to involve women in the project implementation in several ways: First, normal UNDP hiring practices emphasize the importance of equality in hiring practices and women are to be equally represented among project staff and expert consultants. Secondly, women are essential contributors to their own governments’ contributions to CASPECO in the form of expert input and guidance as part of their official capacity. Thirdly, women’s groups are to be represented among the grantees as part of the matched small grants and micro grants program under Component.

In practice, women are adequately represented amongst the project stakeholders: the Steering Committee, the PCMU, the national offices, the Working Groups and the project experts contain a reasonable number of women. Furthermore, project reports state that Grants awarded under MSGP/MEG involve women more than men; and that stakeholder participation and environmental awareness activities have been designed and implemented bearing in mind the increased involvement of women. Small-scale fisheries are said to involve more women than men, and more women have been involved in environmental awareness activities.

The above achievements are notable for the region. The project could have gone a step further by exploring the socio-economics of gender issues in the Caspian region and in the use of Caspian resources. For example, there is little information on whether women suffer non-proportionally from the degradation of Caspian natural resources, for example from the depletion of fish stocks or the degradation of tourism sites. There is little information on the role of women in economic activities, for example in fisheries. A finer understanding of these issues may have guided future project activities. Recommendation If time and resources permit, raise the awareness of TC stakeholders on the interactions between gender and natural resource degradation in the Caspian region.

It is noted that ‘gender’ or ‘women’ are not included in the selection criteria or focal areas for the MSGP or MEG. Moreover, there is no specific reference to gender or women in the “*Strategy for Civil Society Engagement in the Caspian Sea Marine Environment”* nor in the text of the Tehran Convention. Consideration should have been given to making specific reference to women in these latter documents, and in formally giving more chance to MSGP/MEG projects that target women through the selection criteria or focal areas.

## 7.3 Stakeholder Engagement

Overall stakeholder engagement has been strong, and donor coordination reasonable. This has continued to be a strong point of GEF support to the Caspian Environment, and a broad range of partners appreciate this. It is noted that in previous phases the CEP provided a formal forum for international agencies to participate in discussions and decision-making, and this is not the case with the TC and its CoP.

# 8. Overall Progress towards Impact and Sustainability

## 8.1 Component 1

Component 1 addresses “Ecosystem-based management of aquatic bioresources in the Caspian Sea”, with a view to apply *new thinking to the sustainable management and conservation of the Caspian Sea’s biological resources* and in the long term aim of *restoring depleted fisheries*. The work with regards to fish, ecosystems, seals, invasive species and protected areas has not yielded solid products, and there is little evidence for ‘new thinking’. Progress, thus, cannot yet be considered very satisfactory.

The long term aim would be an eco-system based approach, incorporating sustainable harvesting levels, and giving due emphasis to natural solutions as well as engineering based solutions. Experience from around the world suggests that over-harvesting of aquatic resources is a global problem, that the forces driving unsustainable harvesting are powerful, multi-dimensional and complex, and that true solutions are very rare. It would be unfair to expect a small, first-stage regional project to make significant inroads on this matter.

Yet, the MTE believes that with a more strategic, vision-based approach, a process can be set in motion that will ultimately lead to a slowing of the degradation and its eventual reversal. Moreover, in line with the long term vision, real indicators of progress should be developed and feasible targets established for the short, medium and long-term. In this connection, the project is right to focus on ‘new thinking’, which would be one of the first steps – however this needs better definition and indicators. At present, there is little evidence of new thinking – and it should be recognized that this will change slowly and that *any* small change can be considered significant.

## 8.2 Component 2

Component 2 addresses Strengthened Regional Environmental Governance. The long-term aim is to reach sustainability in the form of a permanently based Secretariat with predictable finances to oversee implementation of the Convention and its protocols, and an effective implementation structure in each country. Many steps have been taken and these achievements should not be under-estimated. For example, similar protocols have been rejected by the participating countries in other regions of the world previously. Without the CASPECO project, this progress would not have occurred, as there would have been no vehicle for the regional dialogue needed as a foundation to the regional cooperation.

Progress is considered satisfactory. Whereas this may seem straightforward *after* the progress, the reality is that there were many possible pitfalls and obstacles along the way, and the project has done well to keep the process moving. However, progress towards regional governance of natural resources will always be a slow and unpredictable process. Many more steps are needed before sustainability.

If the process is to continue to attract international sponsors, the TC stakeholders need to demonstrate that there has been movement along the path of phasing out support to the Secretariat. The critical next steps are:

* to secure a permanent location for the Secretariat;
* to increase the national contributions to the Secretariat functioning, and;
* to develop an effective cross-sector implementation structure in each country.

## 8.3 Concluding comments

The stated CASPECO project objective is “the five littoral States of the Caspian Sea strengthen regional governance and apply new thinking to the sustainable management and conservation of the Caspian Sea’s biological resources”. Measured against this, the picture with regards to impact and sustainability has to be considered mixed. Progress can be considered nearly satisfactory through the first half of this CASPECO project. However, and as detailed in the report, progress under Component 1 faces some serious challenges, and rectifying measures should be taken urgently.

Looking back over the entire GEF support to the Caspian Sea, overall progress over the three phases is acceptable. The CASPECO project addresses an important cause, worthy of GEF support. It is the only international effort supporting an essential process – essential for local development and regional collaboration. CASPECO – as its predecessors – has done an excellent job in shepherding along a process in a region of high ecological and political sensitivity. In line with the complexity of regional collaboration on water management issues, it is understandable and acceptable that international support to the TC process should continue for some time.

That is not to say that support should be unconditional. Over the medium term, certain changes and commitments should be made, and monitored. If progress on these is made, international support will be more forthcoming. Notably these are:

* Strengthening of commitment to the Secretariat, in terms of greater and more predictable finance, and by deciding its permanent location; and,
* Broadening and deepening stakeholder involvement at the national level, notably beyond the environmental sector, and;
* Concrete progress on implementing protocols, and related reporting on implementation of the Convention.

A main weakness was found in the project design –the absence of a realistic sustainability strategy. The project design seemed to be based on an assumption that there could be sufficient progress under the both Components to reach a situation where national/regional stakeholders would become sustainable and independent of external aid by project end. This was clearly an unrealistic expectation – both Components are dealing with issues that, in the best of circumstances, take many years to reach sustainability.

To address this issue, most project stakeholders are hoping for continued support from GEF after CASPECO. The MTE is sympathetic to this hope: it would be in line with GEF priorities and aims. However, it is understood that any future support from GEF would focus on specific issues, possibly adaptation to climate change. GEF cannot support a fourth phase project, and GEF cannot provide support to the general implementation of the SCAP or to the Secretariat’s Programme of Work.

This leads to one final recommendation: over the coming 12 months, key TC stakeholders should develop a realistic strategy for sustaining broad support to the TC process and to implementing the SCAP. The strategy should identify barriers to the mobilization of support, and the required changes in practices to remove these barriers. It is likely that important aspects of the strategy would be:

* demonstrating a fuller engagement to the TC process by participating countries, for example through increased contributions, stronger national implementation mechanisms, and by making the Secretariat permanent;
* Improved communication of the achievements under the TC, the CEP and CASPECO;
* A broad based resource mobilization strategy.

# 9. Summary of Recommendations

### Urgent Steps to be Taken to Assure Project Progress

1. PCMU, with support from UNDP and UNEP, and in consultation with SC. Undertake a strategic reflection process regarding Component 1, preferably with the support of a senior fisheries institutional expert familiar to the region. The Output would be a clear, short, guiding strategy for all of Component 1. The aim would be to develop a tool for use by the Project Manager and the Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert to guide overall activities, to facilitate monitoring and communicating overall progress under Component 1. This high-level road-map would bring all activities together into one framework, showing conceptual linkages, and lead to a clear and accepted end-point. This would also help the team to identify marginal activities, which may be considered for dropping. This may include merging Outputs were possible. If necessary, it may be useful for the same senior expert to continue to advise the project activities in the fishery sector until project end. All changes to the workplan should be approved through the standard project decision-making process.
2. PCMU, with support from UNDP and UNOPS. Strengthen activity planning and management, particularly for Component 1. More attention needs to be given to: (i) the preparation of more detailed workplans at the Outcome level; (ii) the preparation of more detailed workplans for each Output; (iii) the preparation of more detailed TOR for all inputs and activities; (iv) an active technical support and monitoring of all activities, to ensure timetables are kept, problems are identified well in advance and help can be provided, and; (v) the active review of all reports from workshops, consultants and contractors. This recommendation focuses support to the Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert. External help will be needed for this. Ideally, recommendations 1 and 2 will be linked, and the *senior fisheries institutional expert* can also provide support to strengthened activity planning.
3. UNDP, UNOPS and Project Manger. Initiate monthly, semi-formal review meetings, to ensure that the MTE recommendations are being heeded, and that they are having the desired effect.
4. PCMU, with support from UNDP. Prepare a short, monthly, informal ‘news-letter’ to provide the internal project network with an update on events, findings, workshops. This will develop the sense of project community and increase strategic understanding. It will help develop the branding and the marketability of the project outputs, and help communicate with existing and potential partners.
5. PCMU, with support of a senior fisheries expert (preferably in connection with recommendation 1). Undertake a comprehensive analysis of the fishery sector, in particular of institutions and policies. This would include a full institutional mapping, covering private, public, state-owned, NGO and academic sectors.
6. UNEP and UNOPS. Within the framework of the IAA, agree on a reporting format. The report should include a clear workplan for next reporting period, and planned expenses. This should serve to trigger the next advance payment.
7. TCIS. If not doing so already, prepare annual reports providing details of all TCIS expenses and all TCIS revenue, from all sources.
8. UNEP/UNOPS. Provide more complete information on expenditures under Component 2, in particular regarding any budget re-allocations.
9. TC stakeholders, supported by TCIS and PCMU. Develop a realistic strategy for sustaining broad support to the TC process and to implementing the SCAP after CASPECO. The strategy should identify barriers to the mobilization of support, and the required changes in practices to remove these barriers. It is likely that important aspects of the strategy would be:

* demonstrating a fuller engagement to the TC process by participating countries, for example through increased contributions, stronger national implementation mechanisms, and by making the Secretariat permanent;
* Improved communication of the achievements under the TC, the CEP and CASPECO;
* A broad based resource mobilization strategy.

1. PCMU, with support from UNDP. In the second quarter of 2011, and no later, if (i) progress has accelerated and (ii) clear targets for sustainable impacts have been re-established and (iii) these targets cannot be reached by end-2011; then request a project extension without budget increase for up to one year.

### Steps to be Taken if Time and Resources Permit

1. Undertake a website user survey (of actual, potential and desired users) to ascertain the usefulness of the website, and to recommend modifications to the site or a complete overhaul.
2. Strengthen indicators, as a basis for adaptive management and communicating progress. Indicators should be commensurate with the likely rates of change, and not intrinsically over-ambitious.
3. Develop a programme of advocacy and specific measures to generate support from economic agencies to the TC aims in the five littoral countries.
4. Raise the awareness of TC stakeholders on the socio-economic aspects of the issues being addressed, and of the equity-environment nexus in the Caspian region.
5. Raise the awareness of TC stakeholders on the interactions between gender and natural resource degradation.
6. Although progress under Component 2 is satisfactory, it could be better. Improved strategizing, communication, workplanning and reporting would also be useful for this Component.

### Issues to be Considered in the Design of Future Caspian environment projects

1. Undertake an impact assessment of all the rounds of small grants programme implemented under the CEP since 2000, assess lessons learnt, assess challenges, and provide recommendations for future grant programmes, possibly in order to increase efficiency, and to strengthen how MSGP/MEG support the overall SCAP implementation.
2. Clarify and strategize how a regional initiative can best contribute to local and national issues such as public participation and NGO networking.
3. Clarify an approach to data and information management, and the optimal role for an internationally supported regional project. This should address issues such as: avoiding duplication, gap filling, assuring sustainability of databases/access points; handing over to permanent regional institutions.
4. Finalize the strategy on partnerships with the private sector.
5. Undertake more serious efforts to ensure multi-stakeholder, cross-sector anchoring at the national level.
6. Strengthen and clarify the reporting arrangements from the NCLO and NPCO to the PCMU and UNOPS.

# Annex 1: Terms of Reference for the Mid-Term Evaluation

# Annex 2: List of Documents Consulted

**CASPECO Project Documentation**

Final Evaluation of project: Towards a Convention and Action Programme for the protection of the Caspian Sea Environment (2007)

Project Document: *The Caspian Sea: Restoring Depleted Fisheries and Consolidation of a Permanent Regional Environmental Governance Framewo*rk (CASPECO Project, 2009))

UNOPS/UNEP Letter of Understanding (Inter-Agency Agreement, IAA) (2009)

Detailed Workplans (2009)

Budgetary Information: (2009, 2010)

National Report: I.R.Iran's Progress Report on Implementation of CaspEco Project

Progress Report: Component I, Outcome 5 (MSGP and MEG)

Minutes of MSGP Evaluation Meeting (December 2009, August 2010)

Report of evaluation meeting on MEG programme (October 2009, May 2010)

Progress Report and Recommendations for Discussion (Steering Committee Meeting, September 2010) (2010)

Recommendations to Steering Committee (Steering Committee Meeting, September 2010) (2010)

Steering Committee Minutes, September 2010 (2010)

Various presentations to SC, September 2010 (2010)

Project Implementation Report (2010)

Terms of Reference, Mid-Term Evaluation (2010)

Various WG Workplans, TOR, Project Workplans, Individual workplans.

Quarterly reports, 2009, 2010.

**Tehran Convention Documentation**

Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention, 2003)

Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Caspian Sea (updated 2006)

Strategic Convention Action Programme, Tehran Convention, Draft (2008)

TC IS Programme of Work, 2009-2010

Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention), Progress report by the interim Secretariat (September 2010)

Unified Reporting Format for the Tehran Convention and Protocols by the interim Secretariat (September 2010)

TC IS Programme of Work, 2011-2012 (Draft)

**Technical Reports/Outputs**

Enhancing Connectivity: A Report on the Regional Meeting of the Working Groups on Inventory of Spawning Grounds and Fish Passage, Gianluigi Negroni, October 2010

Enhancing Connective Inception Meeting Report, Ashley Hall, October 2010.

Matched Small Grants Programme, Application Guidelines and Forms (2010)

Matched Small Grants Programme, Implementation Manual (2010)

Micro Environment Grants, Application Guidelines and Forms (2010)

Strategy for Civil Society Engagement in the Caspian Sea Marine Environment (Public participation strategy). (TC/COP3/9). (2010).

Study of the Economics of Bio-Resources Utilization in the Caspian, Elena Strukova, Oleg Guchgeldiyev (Draft) (2010)

# Annex 3: Stakeholders Consulted

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Date** | **Time** | **Means of communication** |
| Vladimir Mamaev, UNDP/GEF RTA | 3rd November | 15:30 – 16:00 | Skype |
| MONDAY |  |  |  |
| Parvin Farschi, Project Manager | 8th November | 13.00-17:00 | Meeting |
| Ms. Amy Evans  Consultant World Bank | 8th November | 17:30-18.30 | Meeting |
| TUESDAY |  |  |  |
| Mr. Stanislav Kim/Ms. Emilia Wahlstrom -UNDP Kazakhstan | 9th November | 09:00 - 10.00 | Meeting |
| Mr. Alexander Bragin- Ministry of Environment Protection, Kazakhstan | 9th November | 12.15-13:00 | Meeting |
| Mr. Serik Akhmetov  NPCO –Kazakhstan | 9th November | 13:45-14:45 | Meeting |
| Ms. Eldana Sadvakasova, Vice-Minister and CASPECO NFP Kazakhstan | 9th November | 15:00-15:30 | Meeting |
| Elchin Mamedov, Fisheries, Bioresources & Data Management Expert, PCMU | 9th November | 16:00-17:00 | Meeting |
| Mr. Hamid Ghaffarzadeh  Senior Advisor, PCMU | 9th November | 21:30- 22:00 | Phone call |
| Jeffrey Griffin, Project formulator and short-term consultant | 9th November | 22:00- 22:30 | Phone call |
| WEDNESDAY |  |  |  |
| Zhanar Mautanova, Civil Society Participation Officer, PCMU  Dinara Abdrakhmanova, Civil Society Participation Coastal Advisor, PCMU | 10th November | 09:00 – 10:00 | Meeting |
| Zhanar Mautanova, Civil Society Participation Officer, PCMU  Dinara Abdrakhmanova, Civil Society Participation Coastal Advisor, PCMU | 10th November | 09:00 – 10:00 | Meeting |
| Ms. Gozel Orazdurdyyeva  NPCO Turkmenistan | 10th November | 10.00-10.30 | Skype |
| Mr. Hossein Gholizadeh NPCO  I.R. Iran | 10th November | 11:45-12.30 | Phone |
| Ms. Farnaz Shoaie NCLO, I. R. Iran | 10th November | 12.30-13.00 | Phone |
| Mr. Rasim Sattarzadeh,NPCO/ NCLO-Azerbaijan |  | 14:00 – 14:30 | Skype |
| Mr. Hashemi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R.Iran | 10th November | 14.30-15.00 | Phone |
| Mr. Batyr Balyyev, Ministry of Environment, Turkmenistan | 10th November | 15:15-15:30 | Phone |
| Mr. Reza Shahifar, Iranian Fisheries Organization, and CAB Iranian Representative | 10th November | 17:30-18:15 | Phone |
| THURSDAY |  |  |  |
| Mr.Gianluigi Negroni  Lead Consultant on Fish Spawning Ground | 11th November | 9.00-9.40 | skype |
| Parvin Farschi, Project Manager | 11th November | 11.00-12:30 | Meeting |
| Mr. Georgi Daskalov  Lead Consultant on EBBM | 11th November | 12.30-13:00 | Phone |
| Mr. Ashley Halls  Lead Consultant on Fish Passages | 11th November | 15.30-16.30 | Phone |
| Katrin LICHTENBERG, Senior Portfolio Officer, UNOPS | 11th November | 19:00-19:30 | Skype |
| Elena Strukova, Project Consultant | 11th November | 20:00-20:30 | Skype |
| FRIDAY |  |  |  |
| Ms. Tatyana Butylina NPCO Russian Federation | 12th November | - | email |
| Umit Kazhgaliyeva, Finance and Administrative Affairs Officer, PCMU  Vassiliy Sokolov, IT Assistant, PCMU | 12th November | 10:30-11:30 | Meeting |
| Dr. Jalil Zorrieh, Caspian Sea Trout Pilot Project Manager | 12th November | 12:30-13:00 | Phone |
| Mr. Mohammad Pourkazemi  Pilot Project Manager | 12th November | 13:30-14:00 | Phone |
| Galym Zhanseitov, Head, Fish Economy Department, Committee of Fishery Industry.  Almas Assylkenov, Irina….?  Narimov ? | 12th November | 15:00-16:00 | Meeting |
| Anara Ayaganova, Operations and Logistics Assistant, PCMU | 12th November | 16.30-17:00 | Meeting |
| Parvin Farschi, Project Manager | 12th November | 17:00-17:40 | Meeting |
| Mr. Walter Rizzi , AGIP-KCO (private sector partner) | 12th November | 17:40-17:50 | Phone |
| Mr. Frits Schlingemann  Interim Secretariat (UNEP) | 12th November | 18:00 – 19:00 | Phone |
|  |  |  |  |
| Ms. Sue Wilson  Lead Consultant on Seals | 18th November 10 | 10:30-11:15 | Skype |
| Mr. Hamid Amirebrahimi  Coastal Advisor, Iran | 19th November | 10:30-11:15 | Phone |
| Lena Nielsen, Programme Manager, European Commission - EuropeAid Co-operation Office (Europe, Southern Mediterranean, Middle-East and Neighbourhood Policy) | 24th November | 11:00-11:30 | Phone |

# Annex 4: Assessment of Progress, by Output

| **Outputs** | **Main Achievements/Progress** | **Challenges** | **Comments/Recommendations** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Component I. Ecosystem-based management of aquatic bioresources in the Caspian Sea.** | | | |
| **Outcome 1. Ecosystem-based management (EBM) has begun to be adopted and practiced by the Caspian States.** | | | |
| **Output 1.** New analytical models and decision support tools for EBM. | Little has been achieved. The working group has been assembled and met once, and just started its work. | Very small input for an ambitious agenda. So focus reduced to a limited model rather than EBM.  It is too early to say if this is heading towards a success. However, if the endpoint is only several recommended sites for future action, this is unlikely to take off.  Previous delays and future tight deadline. | Approach/rationale not clearly articulated.  Strategize (integrally within PCMU), closely monitor progress, regular follow-up on actors.  Perhaps develop a broad strategy on how to support ‘fisheries management’ in the region, even if progress is to be managed and slow but with indicators, and possibly based on thorough *institutional mapping*. This could bring together in several Outcomes/Outputs/Activities. |
| **Output 2**. Unified Environmental Monitoring Program operational and data utilized. | Little has been achieved. The working group has been assembled but has not yet met.  Training on risk assessment is half complete. | Due to previous delays and the future tight deadline – it is too early to say if this is heading towards a success. | Clarify aims and how they fit into the larger picture, and combine with output 1.  Note links to TC reporting format (although this latter does not cover ecology) and to SOE. |
| **Output 3.** Capacity building for bioresource governance and management | Little has been firmly achieved.  Contacts with CAB are slowly improving. An initial dialogue seems to have been established.  The TCIS is preparing the text for an intergovernmental agreement on fisheries, and joint CAB-CASPECO meeting is tentatively planned for March 2010. | Time taken to develop contacts and overcome reticence of CAB/fishery stakeholders. | Strategize, focus. Set meaningful targets. |
| **Outcome 2. Invasive species introduction mitigated.** | | | |
| **Output 4.** Recommendations for regional management of ballast water to control invasive species traffic among the Caspian and the Black and Baltic seas. | Little has been achieved.  The Output seems to be unofficially under review. There have been discussions with IMO. Activity is currently on hold. |  | Strategize and clarify pertinence of this, given time challenges. May be dropped. |
| **Output 5.** Regional collaborative process focusing on *Mnemiopsis* control. | Little happened as of yet. Discussions on the approach are ongoing. Monitoring of *Mnemiopsis* will take place in the coming monitoring season.. |  | Strategize and clarify pertinence of this, given time challenges. May be dropped. |
| **Outcome 3. Caspian stakeholders implement policies & measures to increase reproductive success of Caspian’s diadromous fish species.** | | | |
| **Output 6.** Pilots to improve existing hatcheries efficiency including location consideration, culture techniques. | Pilot projects are underway and progressing smoothly.  These appear to be good sub-projects.  However, they still have to achieve their major objectives, and, notably the trout/salmon sub-project will not be able to finish before end-2011. | The challenge is to ensure the benefits are regional, not just local/national. | Develop regional aspects to this.  Ensure full technical support/supervision of sub-contract – from where?  Integrate into all the project fisheries and EBBM work. |
| **Output 7.** Pilot demonstrations to identify, rehabilitate and/or expand access to natural spawning grounds. | Both working groups have been established and are coordinating/ collaborating. Feasible workplans have been developed. However, the timelines are very tight, and there are risks that the end points will not be reached. | Due to previous delays and the future tight deadline – it is too early to say if this is heading towards a success. Will it have an impact? Will it be technically strong? Will it catalyze ‘new thinking’?  If the end-point is only recommendations for follow-up, this is unlikely to take-off and sustainability may be very limited. | Strategize, closely monitor, regular follow-up.  Clarify link into Outcome 1 (this Output seems like a true core of the project component 1 – fisheries management).  Should there be more ‘economists’ involved in this kind of work? Financial implications raises awareness. |
| **Outcome 4. Stakeholders apply regional, circum-Caspian approach to habitat conservation in the Caspian** | | | |
| **Output 8.** Circum-Caspian network of “special protected areas, wildlife habitats and essential fish habitats for Caspian ecosystem” (SPACE). | There has been little progress. There has been some networking and exchanges and dialogue.  There has been some progress on the support to the Seal Action Plan and developing a network of seal protected areas, but even this seems limited so far.  The planned Kura delta management plan project is ready to start, and should be mostly implemented on time. | The network is behind schedule because: it (i) waits for outputs under Output 1 (ii) cannot nominate national (marine) sites, partly due to Caspian Sea ‘legal status’.  Countries are hesitant to recommend expanding or creating new protected areas, given previous failures in expanding the network.  Urgent, concrete steps may be needed for the seal, and there is pessimism as to whether this will happen. | Clarify aims and the fit into the larger picture, notably with EBBM and fisheries management/protection.  Strategize, focus. What can be achieved?, what is aim?, and how does it fit?  Ensure no overlap and optimize gap filling. |
| **Outcome 5. Coastal communities increase participation and contribute measurably to improved bioresources conservation in the Caspian** | | | |
| **Output 9.** Matched Small Grants Programme (MSGP) | The two grant programmes are under full implementation.  These are very popular and very visible.  These are also good for capacity building of national stakeholders (due to the thorough governance/process). In addition, these contribute to awareness raising. They link national stakeholders to locals and local realities.  The related ‘Caspian Day’ was a great success in 2010. | How to make sustainable, sizeable impacts with small grants issued by a central agency?;  How to reduce the considerable overheads?;  How to further simplify the complex rules/formats/reporting/etc?  How to ensure that each small project is technically ‘good’ – as in general the grants are technical. Moreover, each small grant has to satisfy any relevant safeguards, and ensuring this can be costly with a large number of small and dispersed interventions.?  How to ensure the MSGP and MEG appropriate link into and support the overall programme? | On the one hand a small project makes a big splash. On the other hand, it can be difficult to see the links into a bigger picture and sustainability is a challenge. Better indicators would be part of a solution.  Review past and capture lessons.  Strategize, clarify aims, show the pattern behind grantees , confirm links into bigger picture.  Previous indicators have focused on approval/disbursement of grants, rather than the impact of the programme or of individual grants. Better indicators are needed.. |
| **Component 2. Strengthened Regional Environmental Governance.** | | | |
| **Outcome 1. Institutional setting of Tehran Convention is fully operational and sustainable.** | | | |
| **Output 1.** National and regional level coordination and institutional support to the Tehran Convention and its Protocols. | Overall moving to schedule, making good progress, and providing good support to TC and parties.  GEF major supporter of this critical process, and ensuring international partners can continue to play an essential and constructive role in the Caspian.  The national financial contributions have been mostly received.  Two protocols ‘ready’ for signature (hard to say, but this may be exceptional progress). | Avoiding GEF support to baseline and business as usual; avoiding creating dependency (financial sustainability). Party financial contributions remain small.  Protocol process is lengthy (gone from ‘drafted’ to ‘ready to sign’), hard to say if progress is adequate.  Been little progress, if any, on the national coordination structures.  TC and CASPECO remain predominantly an ‘environment’ sector issue. | Develop excellent indicators, and *long-term* exit strategy. |
| **Outcome 2: Coordination and synergy with other Caspian projects and activities.** | | | |
| **Output 2.** Convention Executive structure, donor coordination and thematic partnerships established and in operation. | Overall moving to schedule, making progress.  Lots of international partners involved in protocols.  CASPROM.  GEF major supporter of this critical process. | Avoiding GEF support to baseline and business as usual; avoiding creating dependency (financial sustainability).  No clear formal forum for donors to participate after CEP stopped.  Plans for a Convention subsidiary body have been placed on hold by the countries. | Develop excellent indicators, and *long-term* exit strategy. |
| **Output 3.** Partnerships with private sector, including an effectiveprocess /mechanism to promote identification and financing of investment projects in the region. | Overall moving to schedule, making some progress. AGIP a good partnership. | Private sector involvement limited until protocols are signed, it seems. This may expand after signature.  Countries determined that, at the regional level, the ‘Investment Forum’ was not appropriate.  Bureaucratic delays in channeling funds received from private sector. | Clarify roles/responsibility of potential partners, and *strategic thinking.* What is meant by private sector partnerships. |
| **Outcome 3. Littoral States Implement Strategic Convention Action Programme (SCAP) as adopted by the COP-II at regional level and approve and implement NSCAP at national/sub-national level.** | | | |
| **Output 4.** Updated knowledge-based and enforceable SCAP and NSCAPs developed, initiated, and monitored for enforcement. | Overall moving to schedule, making progress.  The standard TC reporting format approved is a major achievement.  NSCAP’s drafted and under appraisal. | Some delays on certain aspects, in some cases pending approval of protocols.  Danger of duplication or at least inefficiency (e.g. 3rd NCAP, 3rd S(C)AP). | This may need some strategizing/clarification, especially if GEF support is to be requested in future. |
| **Output 5.** Effective regional M&E framework. | Progress on SOE report. | Danger of duplication or at least inefficiency with regards to data collection/management activities. | More clarity needed on M&E of what, and links to Component 1 and other data collection activities. |
| **Outcome 4. Enhanced stakeholders’ engagement in the TC process and improved public access to information on the status of the Caspian Sea environment.** | | | |
| **Output 6.** Creation of solid regional NGO partnerships engaged in the implementation of the Tehran Convention and its protocols. | Some progress, overall satisfactory.  Caspian Day 2010 a major success.  Regional strategy approved, providing a framework.  Support is to be provided to ‘virtual partnerships’. | Culture in region limits NGO involvement, and a ‘framework’ may not be enough.  Not clear what difference a small regional project can make on issues such as this – national action is needed.  SEIS was dropped. | Clarify aim, and get proper indicators of partnerships (if only to convince GEF), of participation and of awareness raising.  Perhaps include these issues into the TC common reporting format.  Do user survey of website in order to determine how to make it more service oriented.  Clarify what is meant by ‘virtual partnerships’ and how this will be sustainable. |
| **Output 7.** Data/information sharing web-based Caspian Information Centre (CIC) incorporating Caspian environment status data. | This is now moving, but progress has been limited. | Attitudes and culture limit information sharing.  Danger of duplication or at least inefficiency with regards to data collection/management activities.  Proposals for a ‘virtual’ information centre are not clear – what is links to other information sources and how is this to be sustainable? | Develop proper indicators.  Strategize on links to other initiatives.  Consider focusing.  Clarify what is meant by a ‘virtual information centre’ and how this will be sustainable. |

# Annex 5: Progress on Indicators under Component 1, According to PIR (July 2010)

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| **Indicator (Component 1)** | **PIR Rated Progress** |
| 1) New stock assessment methodology recommended for consideration by CAB (or endorsed by CAB) and used in five countries | 10% |
| 2) # of TCS & country partners using ecosystem modeling tools and supporting data for bioresources conservation and management. | 30% |
| 3) % 30 improvement in knowledge of key technical aspects of ecosystem based resources management through trained people in bio-economic modelling, ecosystem managemenet and ecological and risk assessment | 10% |
| 4) Level of cooperation between TCS and CAB. Number of joint activities or actions. | 10% |
| 5) Number of national institutions using the unified environmental monitoring system | 20% |
| 6) # of ecological risk assessments done by Caspian states based upon environmental monitoring data. | 15% |
| 1) Regional Action Plan (RAP) on Invasive Species Control and Prevention Endorsed by COP III and MoT of the Russian Federation; | n/a (postponed) |
| 2) # of ships passing the Volga-Don Canal with all necessary BW paperwork. | n/a (postponed) |
| 1) # of hatcheries adopting improved efficiency and more biodiversity-friendly practices by end of project | 40% |
| 2) Strategy for maintaining genetic robustness in support of fisheries resilience endorsed by CABC. | The strategy is expected to be delayed until year 2. |
| 3) # of hectares of land/# km or rivers under improved natural spawning habitat management practices by end of project. | 15% |
| 4) # hectares of wetlands with improved flooding regimes on the Volga. | 20% |
| 5) # of fish passages improved around dams in Caspian rivers to enable sturgeon to pass upstream of the dam to other spawning grounds. | 20% |
| 1) # hectares of coastal area under increased protection by end of project. | 10% |
| 2) # of circum-Caspian collaborative coastal surveys conducted among those priority areas in the SPACE network by end of project. | 5% |
| 3) Frequency of communication among SPACE staff around Caspian improved over existing baseline levels via email list serves and web blogs. | 5% |
| 1) # of projects funded that result in measurable support for bolstering the resilience of the Caspian Sea social and ecological system in the form of: improved transboundary public participation, increased employment & reduced stress in terms of number of former fishers employed by aquaculture, increased awareness among target groups. | 80% |

1. The date of the Project Inception meeting. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Source: Terms of Reference [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The CAB consists of the officials of national fisheries agencies, it does not have formal government backing. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Through the two small grant programmes. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Excluding the two Outcomes related to project management. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See, for example, “Focal Area Strategies And Strategic Programming For Gef-4” (GEF Secretariat, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It is possible that this analysis is found in the earlier TDA/SAP documents, however no reference is made. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Through an inter-agency-agreement (IAA). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It is noted that this was agreed the 2010 PIR, yet this does not seem to have happened. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Note: these are now called ‘Atlas accounts’. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. It is noted that several activities have been dropped or deferred, probably with very good reason, but there is no process and documents related to these decisions. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. By contrast, the workplan prepared for the fish passages Working Group is a good example of a workplan at the Activity level. All workplans should be prepared synergistically, under the PCMU umbrella. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. At all levels, workplans should include both textual descriptions and a matrix. The textual description should cover, at a minimum: overall objective, link to overall project objective, justification of changes to project document, strategic approach, links to other activities and outputs, timelines, reports and monitoring framework. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This could include the following: What are the poverty levels in littoral areas? How does poverty drive people to degrade resources, if at all? How would economic growth affect the pressures on the natural resources, an increase or a decrease? This is particularly notable with regards to fisheries – does poverty contribute to over-fishing, or not? If allowed catches can be increased, will poor people benefit? [↑](#footnote-ref-14)