LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Careful formulation of realistic tenders is crucial to project implementation success and demands a good understanding of the local labor market prior to launching time-consuming tendering and hiring processes.**

During the first two years of implementation, the project lost many months of time to unsuccessful tender offers. The project learned that it is important to think out of the box and be more flexible in looking for expertise that is readily available locally in order to fill highly specified job descriptions. The following are three examples:

*Example 1:* A good manager may not be a biodiversity expert. A protected area project needs a good manager more than it needs a biodiversity expert.

**Lesson:** Many of the crucial tasks in a “protected area” project are not related to protected areas at all, but rather to good people management and activity execution abilities. Good management abilities are key to a project’s success and should take precedence in, for example, the search for a PA project manager. Biodiversity or PA expertise can be obtained via focused technical ToR.

*Example 2:* The two first tenders for the projects’ NBIS work failed because they were looking for hybrid company that had IT experience and biodiversity expertise. A very rare and unrealistic combination for Macedonia and even globally. It was particularly difficult in Macedonia, where no one company had all the necessary expertise: database design, software and biodiversity. The project wasted months of effort in trying to find the ideal entity for this important sub-contract.

**Lesson:** Split the tasks into more readily available areas of expertise (database design and biodiversity data and ecological analysis) and contract parties separately to work together on the same overall task.

*Example 3:* The project wanted to hire a training/capacity development expert. At least two recruitment efforts failed because they were looking for one coming from biodiversity sector. Finally, under new management, the project changed the ToR to one that called for a capacity building training program specialist (w/out biodiversity expertise) and then combined that expertise with PA expertise from other experts. The project was able to find a very capable Macedonian specialist with no expertise in biodiversity or PA who executed a training program widely praised by stakeholders.

**Lesson:** Do not develop ToR that ask for hybrids of expertise because you wont find proper candidates and they will not achieve minimal technical points. Break down these into parts that have well recognized and established parts.
2. **UNDP could improve its project assurance support in facilitating the RBM of future project teams.**

This project holds a lesson in this respect. Most of its more important core indicators were totally unrealistic or not understood by the project team. UNDP needs to be sure that project results indicator targets are clear to all within the management team to facilitate monitoring and reporting and results-based work planning. Of particular importance is that the indicators and their targets be reconfirmed at project inception to be SMART so that all project resources can be focused on its activities and outputs producing outcomes and impact that meet the pre-determined indicator targets. Otherwise, the indicators serve no purpose and ambiguity bedevils evaluations like this one.

3. **Online, participatory reporting and monitoring mechanisms may help keep future projects like this stay on track or modify their course sooner.**

There are models to draw upon within UNDP’s own portfolio that demonstrate how to transform routine reports into useful and efficient monitoring tools. An simple yet sophisticated monitoring approach, tied into the power of the worldwide web may very well help to improve monitoring and reporting for future projects, particularly projects like this, with three year time frames that leave little leeway for delays in implementation. One model can be found at the following website: [www.protectedareas.org](http://www.protectedareas.org).

This particular model uses familiar software like MS Word, Excel and basic web programming. The mechanism links numeric progress ratings (from the quarterly reports) to an at-a-glance bar graph view showing progress by country. A similar approach is done to show expenditures to date. In just these simple strokes, a project team can create a snapshot view, with background material available for those wanting to dig deeper.

This would enable all project stakeholders to see at a glance, where the project is in its work without having to find the email or document with this information. Another strength of this approach is that such a reporting process can involve project partners themselves as active rather than passive recipients of reports. Synthesizing the essential information and summarizing it on a publicly available web site sheds more sunlight on the whole process and transforms the reporting process into a much more dynamic, transparent, and accountable monitoring mechanism.