

EVALUATION OF THE RHODOPE MTS  
CONSERVATION PROJECT, BULGARIA

INITIAL PROJECT EVALUATION:  
CONSERVATION OF GLOBALLY  
SIGNIFICANT BIODIVERSITY IN THE  
LANDSCAPE OF BULGARIA'S RHODOPE  
MOUNTAINS

UNDP PROJECT NO. 33627

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# Abbreviations & acronyms

APR	Annual Project Review
DANCEE	Danish environmental assistance to Eastern Europe
EEA	Executive Environmental Agency
EU	European Union
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographic Information System
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
IPA	International Project Advisor
IPM	International Project Manager
ISPA	Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (of EU)
JOBS	Job Opportunities through Business Development
LLG	Local Leader Group
LLR	Lessons Learned Report
LT	Long-term
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forests
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFG	Municipal Focus Group
MoEW	Ministry of Environment and Water
MP	Management Plan
MRDPW	Ministry of Regional Development & Public Works
NBMP	National Biodiversity Monitoring Project
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NP	Nature Park
NPD	Nature Park Directorate
NTFP	Non-timber Forest Product(s)
PA	Protected Area
PD	Project Document
PDF-B	Project Development Fund – Block B (of GEF)
PHARE	Poland and Hungary Assistance for Economic Restructuring Programme (of EU)
PIR	Project Implementation Report
PM	Project Manager
PMC	Project Management Committee
PMU	Project Management Unit
PR	Public Relations
PSC	Project Steering Committee
QPR	Quarterly Progress Report
RIEW	Regional Inspectorate for Environment and Water (of MoEW)
RP	Rhodope Project
RS	Remote Sensing
RSC	Regional Support Centre
SAC	Special Area of Conservation (under the EU Habitats Directive)
SAPARD	Special Accession Programme for Agriculture & Rural Development (of EU)
SHP	Small Hydropower Plant
SPA	Special Protection Area (under the EU Birds Directive)
ST	Short-term
STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (of GEF)
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WWF	World-wide Fund for conservation of nature (formerly World Wildlife Fund)

# Foreword

This evaluation was carried out for UNDP Bulgaria and the Rhodope Project PMU on an intermittent basis, between 7 February and 10 April 2006, by Wim Giesen, freelance biodiversity & wetland consultant from the Netherlands, and Rossen Vassilev, Executive Director of the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation. Fieldwork was carried out in Bulgaria from 19<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> February, and included a visit to the Rhodope region from 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> February. The first draft Initial Evaluation Report was submitted on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2006, and a revised draft Initial Evaluation Report was produced in response to the joint comments received from UNDP, RP and MAF on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2006. This final version of the Initial Evaluation Report was produced on the basis of final comments received from UNDP on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2006.

The evaluation team would like to express their sincere thanks to the persons interviewed and met during the evaluation mission, for making the time available and for providing very useful comments and suggestions. Without these inputs, the evaluation would lose its meaning. The team would also like to sincerely thank the PMU and project's two RSCs in Smolyan and in Kurdjali for organising the evaluation mission, by making arrangements for meetings, preparing very useful background notes, and organising the logistics of the field trip. This was all very well done and ran like clockwork – all was very much appreciated. Lastly, the evaluation team would like to thank UNDP for its support, and for the useful comments and suggestions provided.

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## CHAPTER

## 1

## Introduction

## 1.1

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

The objective of the Rhodope Project<sup>1</sup> (RP) is the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in the Rhodope Mountains of southern Bulgaria. The Rhodope is an ancient, European cultural landscape extending over approximately 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> (10% of Bulgaria's total area), where productive uses of forestry and agriculture predominate and protected areas are small and scattered. The successful completion of the Project will result in stakeholders undertaking innovative and adaptive practices to mitigate and prevent threats to biological diversity by applying new partnerships, conservation tools, information, and sustainable livelihoods to conserve biological diversity. The application of landscape-scale conservation practices and perspectives to the productive landscape as a whole and the protected areas within it, constitutes the Project's strategic approach to securing the sustainable long-term conservation of biodiversity in these mountains.

Bulgarian and international partner co-financing provides the crucial foundation for GEF's incremental investment by enhancing the sustainability of the existing economic development baseline. GEF funding has been provided to support the establishment of protected areas in the Rhodope, to construct a diversity information baseline by conducting field surveys, to forge new partnerships among local and international stakeholders and to strengthen the capacity of civil society institutions, to catalyze the development of public-private partnerships for habitat management and conservation, and to pilot diversity-friendly tourism and agricultural development practices.

The Project began in June 2004 and will run for five years, until the end of 2009. A Project Management Unit (PMU) has been established and it works in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MAF) in Sofia, which is the executing agency for the Project. Physically, however, the PMU is housed in an office shared with the UNDP/GEF Small Grants Programme in central Sofia, about 10 minutes walking distance from MAF headquarters. Other major stakeholders are the Ministry of Environment and Water and about 40 municipalities, of which 27<sup>2</sup> have been identified as key municipalities for the Project. Two Regional Support Centres (RSCs) have been established, one in Kurdjali, the second in Smolyan, from where field activities are undertaken.

<sup>1</sup> Full title is "Conservation of globally significant biodiversity in the landscape of Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountains", UNDP Project No. 33627

<sup>2</sup> The 27 municipalities represent 10% of the total number of municipalities in Bulgaria (265).

## 1.2

## INTRODUCTION TO THE EVALUATION

The present evaluation is the first of three external evaluations planned for the Rhodope Project: initial, mid-term, and final evaluations. For this Initial Evaluation, both the Rhodope Project team and UNDP found it necessary to focus specifically on a number of issues that have cropped up since the Project's initiation in 2004. These main issues are, in a nutshell:

- The lack of designation of the Eastern and Western Rhodope Nature Parks. Designation of these two Nature Parks (which would extend over a combined 6,500 km<sup>2</sup>, just over half of the total area of the Rhodope region) formed a central part of the original Project design, and is embedded in outputs 1-4 (of the 8). However, to date designation has not occurred, and it would seem unlikely to occur soon. The process of nature park gazettal was initially held up by the government wanting two key pieces of legislation finalized: i) one related to underground resources, and ii) related to conservation and PAs. However, the chances for establishment of the two nature parks are getting slimmer as EU integration processes in Bulgaria has resulted in a shift in priority within MoEW towards the establishment of the Natura 2000 network. Moreover, government does not seem to consider the parks as an important tool that can a) facilitate local sustainable development; and b) provide for achieving a better conservation status of Rhodope ecosystems compared to what Natura 2000 provides. The main issue of concern for UNDP and the project is whether the RP can achieve its objectives in a non-park scenario. In recognition of the problem at hand, the Project team has drafted an assessment of "How will a change from nature parks to a non park scenario affect the Rhodope Project" (September 2005).
- The response from the regional UNDP office in Bratislava to the first PIR<sup>3</sup> of July 2005 was: "According to the Regional UNDP/GEF Coordination Unit in Bratislava, the original project logical framework should be revised and simplified, as it envisages two instead of one immediate project objectives, which is against the established GEF practice, and 65 log-frame indicators, which are too many and too cumbersome for reporting." The general view is that the Projects 65 indicators of achievement and 110 activities make implementation and monitoring overly difficult. In recognition of the problem, the Project team has drafted a "Proposal for revised version of the Rhodope Project indicators and Project log-frame" (November 2005). The main issue here is dealing with the implementation of a Project Document that is far from perfect, and requires extensive revision.

It should be pointed out that the RP is not changing its focus, but is striving to adapt itself to changes in circumstances. While the current evaluation primarily aims to address the above two key issues, it also focuses on a host of secondary issues. One of the secondary issues is that of the achievement of concrete, on-the-ground outputs of the RP. The project has been designed primarily as a planning project, with few concrete outputs. However, the Evaluation Team (and also MAF, UNDP and the RP Team) consider that it would significantly boost the success of the project if more tangible results could be planned and achieved, so that stakeholders are more likely to follow examples provided.

The Terms of Reference provided by UNDP Bulgaria for the evaluation assignment is attached in Annex 1.

<sup>3</sup> PIRs (Project Implementation Reports) are submitted on an annual basis by UNDP to the GEF.

## CHAPTER

# 2

## Review of Project documents

### 2.1 REVIEW OF PROJECT ADMINISTRATION DOCUMENTS

#### 2.1.1 PROJECT DOCUMENT (PROJECT BRIEF)

The Project Document (PD) – dated 23 April 2004 – is generally sound and detailed. Given that the present evaluation will address some of the main shortcomings of this document, it is not very productive to provide detailed comments at this point as these will be dealt with in chapters 3, 4 and 5. However, it can be briefly stated that certain aspects of the PD should have been addressed prior to Project implementation (i.e. by UNDP Regional office, GEF or the STAP review), as these represent significant omissions or design errors. These are:

- Lack of overview of the region's biodiversity. Biodiversity values are partially summarised in the Project Document's main text, but a Project Document (or brief, in GEF terminology) of a biodiversity project should also include details on biodiversity, for example, included in an annex.
- Lack of a detailed threats analysis; threats are mentioned throughout the introductory sections and are summarised in 2.b.ii, but should be appended in full.
- Lack of a socio-economic assessment.
- Lack of a stakeholder analysis and involvement plan; stakeholders are mentioned throughout the project brief, but a comprehensive analysis should have been included as an annex.
- The institutional arrangements for the Project are not very clearly presented in the brief, which gives rise to many of the current questions concerning the concrete roles and mandates of MoEW and MAF.
- The total number of outputs (eight) seems too many, as most GEF projects are designed with 3-4 (very rarely 5) outputs. Some of these could easily have been combined. Related to this, the 8 outputs, 110 activities and 65 key performance indicators make the Project unwieldy, and to some extent difficult to manage.
- It is surprising that reviewers of the draft Project Document (e.g. STAP, UNDP) did not identify these omissions (particularly the STAP review seems very weak in this respect), as these gaps would normally provide sufficient reason to prevent the approval of a Project Document by the GEF Secretariat.

Although various aspects are lacking in the Project Brief, it must be mentioned that baseline data collected during the PDF-B Phase is available at the three RP offices, i.e. at the Project Management Unit PMU office in Sofia, and the two Regional Support Centres (RSCs) in Smolyan and Kurdjali.



## 2.1.2

### ANNUAL PROJECT REPORT (APR/PIR)

The cut-off date of the first APR/PIR for the Rhodope Project is 31 May 2005, covering the first 12 months of the Project. On the whole, Project progress is rated as satisfactory in the APR/PIR except for the establishment of the Nature Parks, which is deemed marginally satisfactory by the UNDP Country Office and the UNDP/GEF Regional Coordinator. These agencies are also pleased with most results, some of which have been achieved ahead of schedule.

Much of the APR/PIR document consists of tables outlining the 8 outputs and 65 indicators, and outlining progress that has been achieved in the latter. This is more or less in line with what was concluded above. Of more interest is the lessons learned section of the APR/PIR that concludes that:

- The Project underestimated the time required by the Project team to fully absorb what is required, assuming that the Project document would provide sufficient information about activities and so on. While correct in the immediate implementation phase this seems to have had a fairly limited effect in the long term.
- The MFG programme started early on and has been highly successful. However, some influential stakeholders may not be interested (and thus not included in the MFGs), while less influential stakeholders may be keener to join. <MFGs are specifically addressed in 3.3 and 4.1.2>

## 2.1.3

### MONTHLY, QUARTERLY AND ANNUAL REPORTS

Detailed monthly work plans, fully in line with the agreed general and annual Project work plan, are prepared by the Project Manager and approved by UNDP and the National Project Director.

#### Monthly Reports

Initially, the evaluators wondered if the production of monthly reports was not overly bureaucratic, and heaped an unnecessary administrative burden on the Project team. However, the Monthly Reports produced by the RP consist of a 7-9 page table listing Project outputs and activities, along with progress on these. The reporting burden is therefore very limited, and the table serves as a very useful reminder to flag any outstanding activities and highlighting where extra efforts or attention may be required. Together, they also provide a useful outline for the Quarterly and Annual reports, as all basic activities are summarised in this way.

The format seems generally fine, but could be improved by adding a column on who is responsible for the activity (to bring it in line with the Work Plans), and highlighting areas of concern (e.g. in bold or colour, so that attention is drawn to where this is necessary). The monthly work plans indicate in columns who is responsible for each activity, with an extra indication of who is the main person responsible, and those who share this responsibility. These are in line with the individual TORs and appear to work well. Individual team members may use this to develop an individual monthly work plan for themselves. This approach appears both useful and sound.

### Quarterly Progress Reports

Quarterly Progress Reports reflecting all aspects of Project implementation are prepared by the PM and submitted to the Project Management Committee for review and recommendations. In addition, the UNDP office shares short (100 words) quarterly reports with GEF Regional Coordination Unit in Bratislava. Five Quarterly Progress Reports (QPR) have been prepared for the RP to date, starting with the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2004, until the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2005. All follow the same format and are about 25-30 pages in length. The first section deals with each output in narrative form, highlighting the main achievements under each output, and dealing with challenges, opportunities and lessons learned. It goes on to describe the recommendations and actions required in response to the challenges. The second part of the quarterly reports consists of various tables:

- outputs and activities, targets, progress in the quarter, and cumulative progress since Project inception;
- work plan of the quarter being reported on, listing output, activities, time frame, responsible partner(s) and planned budget;
- requested payments; and
- work plan for the coming quarter, listing output, activities, time frame, responsible partner(s) and planned budget.

These QPRs appear to be fine in terms of length, level of detail, and format. The narrative section on “main activities for the next quarter” could be expanded, as this is generally very brief and forces the reader to refer to the table in the annexes. The recommendations and actions in response to challenges should include a prioritisation of actions, as some are very significant, while others are of minor urgency. The QPRs (and Annual Progress Reports) should have a table of abbreviations and acronyms attached, to simplify things for the reader.

### Annual Project Reports

The Annual Project Report (APR) for 2005 consists of two parts: the first is a narrative that includes a short description of the Project, an overview of the Project contribution to the relevant Country Programme Outcome, and the Project contribution to the relevant UNDP Bulgaria MYFF 2005 target. The second part of the APR is similar to the QPR, and consists of tables with:

- outputs and activities, targets, progress in the quarter, and cumulative progress since Project inception;
- work plan of the quarter being reported on, listing output, activities, time frame, responsible partner(s) and planned budget; and
- work plan for the coming quarter, listing output, activities, time frame, responsible partner(s) and planned budget.

The format and length of the document (28 pp.) seem both appropriate and adequate.

Scanning the APR for 2005, the Project’s progress seems to be limited to forest certification, data collection, establishing Municipal Focus Groups, providing input to Municipal Strategies and training in environmental issues, with little progress in other areas. Concrete conservation-related activities, aside from activities related to biodiversity surveys, appear to be under-represented, which is not surprising given that the two Nature Parks have not been established. Annexes B & C (p. 18 onwards) of the APR lists MAF as the responsible partner for all Project activities. While this may be logical for many (if not most) activities,

this cannot be the case for activities such as conducting biodiversity surveys, establishing biodiversity databases and GIS, selection of priority areas for conservation, conservation plans for endangered species, and so on. In all of the latter cases, MoEW should be the responsible agency, and not MAF.

## 2.1.4

### ASSESSMENT OF MINI-PROJECT APPROACH

The evaluation team was provided with two examples of the mini-project approach:

- Environmental Services and Incentive Measures - Identification and Initial Assessment – 2005/2006. This consists of a combination of activities 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.3, 8.2.1 and 8.2.2, i.e. quantifying values and benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem health, and determining options for financial incentives and mechanisms for integrating conservation principles into the productive sector.
- Production of “Lessons Learned from a Project Perspective – 2005” – i.e. one of the RP’s strategic documents (activity 5.3.1).

While the “environmental services and incentives” assignment could be considered a real mini-project, as it consists of a combination of five activities listed in the Project Brief, the “lessons learned” mini-project consists simply of a sub-contracting TOR and agreement. Organising various activities into combined activities and subcontracting these for implementation certainly simplifies matters. It would hardly be workable in any other way, given the 110 activities recognised in the PD.

The evaluation team recommends that the RP team continues with the ‘mini-project’ approach, combining as many activities into coherent packages, and identifying an appropriate service provider to implement these (in a subcontracting arrangement, or via another agreement). In order to simplify documentation, for small scale tasks TORs can be developed instead of detailed mini-projects. The decision on what type of document to be developed should be taken by the Project Manager on a base of clear criteria, such as amount of funds involved, number of activities foreseen, and so on.

## 2.2

### REVIEW OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

The RP has produced a number of Strategic Documents, all of which are highly useful for discussion and for focusing the project. They are also generally well-written. A general – albeit minor – comment that holds for most of the strategic documents: these should be checked for spelling and grammatical mistakes if the documents are to be sent to an audience outside UNDP, MAF, MoEW and the PMU. However, if these documents are mainly for ‘internal consumption’ not so much effort should be devoted to polishing the use of English.

## 2.2.1

### LESSONS LEARNT REPORT

The lessons learned report (LLR)<sup>4</sup> has been produced early in the Project, when the number of lessons to be learned is usually quite modest. This is reflected in the LLR, as many of the lessons learned are quite mundane and, for example, related to Project management and administration. However, as such it is a useful document that should be updated regularly (e.g. annually), as many of the lessons learned early on in a project are often forgotten by the time a project is completed. The latter is often compounded by turnover of project staff, and a lack of 'institutional memory' within PMUs. The LLR lessons section is divided into four parts: i) Office management and project administration; ii) Project management in a changing reality; iii) Project coordination; and iv), Project activities, with the bulk of the lessons falling in the last category.

Some minor comments:

According to the Lessons Learned Report (p.3), "the Rhodope Project does not have the permission or the financial means to provide financial support to sustainable development activities, <hence> the Project work at local level has been based on a purely voluntary basis on behalf of the local people." This does not appear to be entirely true, however, as the RP does have the financial means to support sustainable development activities, although it cannot (and indeed, it would be inappropriate to) support members of the MFG for their involvement. Co-funding of sustainable development projects is possible and desirable (see 3.4.6).

LLR, p4. "One of the most interesting Project undertakings, from a Project perspective, is the establishment of the Project's Geographic Information System (GIS)." The LLR described how the GIS was established, but how does this GIS relate to other GIS' in the country, for example, that being used by Natura 2000? This is important from the point of Project coordination (see 3.4.4).

## 2.2.2

### PAPER ON HOW TO PROCEED IN THE WITHOUT PARKS SCENARIO

Both Project goal and the immediate objectives (which in fact are the two planned project outcomes – in the new GEF terminology) are not immediately affected by the non gazettal of the two Nature Parks. A number of points addressed in the paper<sup>5</sup> on the 'without parks scenario', however, do not seem entirely correct:

- The paper states that while certain park structures such as the Nature Park Directorates will not be established in the non park scenario, other agencies such as the Regional Environmental Inspectorates, Regional Forestry Board and forestry staff could take on the management activities originally designated for the NPDs. However, this remains to be seen. The NPDs were to receive support from MAF, but if these tasks are to be (partially) taken over by RIEWs, funds should be (partly) forthcoming from MoEW.

<sup>4</sup> A Project Perspective on Lessons Learned. Review of the first 18 months of the Rhodope Project (June 2004 – December 2005). Undated, 28 pages.

<sup>5</sup> How will a change from nature parks to a non park scenario affect the Rhodope Project. September 2005, 30 pages.

- Nature Parks have a NPD support structure, while the Natura 2000 sites do not have such a structure, nor does this seem likely within the next 10 years. While MAF is responsible for the NPs, MoEW is responsible for the Natura 2000 sites. The Project seems institutionally unhinged, as MoEW would be the appropriate executing agency if the RP's focus is shifted to Natura 2000. However, this is being addressed by the RP, by taking steps to include MoEW and the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW) into the Project Management Committee.
- The paper proposes to use the Natura 2000 network (or National Ecological Network as it is known in Bulgaria) as a vehicle for the Project, instead of the NP designation as originally proposed in the Project document. As an idea this seems fair enough, but the consequences of this change need to be fully highlighted as well. What needs to be done is:
  - Identification of another landscape-level framework for embedding conservation-oriented programmes (such as ecotourism, sustainable farming, existing protected areas). This could be a regional spatial plan or development plan.
  - Identification of the institutional consequences of the change. In the 'with park' situation, MAF has the main role, with MoEW playing second fiddle. In the non park situation, MoEW's role may be more important, as it is responsible for Natura 2000 site designation. Also, the roles of various ministries in spatial planning may determine the level of their involvement.
  - Determining the consequences for co-funding. Under the original proposal, MAF had pledged funds towards NPD establishment and operational costs. In the new situation, MoEW may be responsible for Natura 2000, but has no co-funding obligations to the Project in terms of meeting costs by 2009. Its obligations for Natura 2000 are towards the EU, and runs according to a different time table. Since MAF will most probably not be spending 1 million US \$ on establishment and running of NP Directorates, it has to be discussed (e.g. at the PSC meetings) whether this co-funding will be transferred to nature conservation management in forest and agricultural areas.<sup>6</sup>
- According to the paper, the main issue delaying the designation of Nature Parks in the Rhodope area is the Protected Areas Act and its requirement that representation of Private Owners be part of the committee. MoEW is reluctant to proceed further with NP designation, as they may face court cases filed by private owners who find that they should also be on the committee. However, this is the opinion of MoEW. Other agencies have other opinions as to why MoEW has delayed the designation process, the main ones being: i) the limited amount of resources, now have been redirected and devoted to Natura 2000; and ii), the mining and forestry lobby preventing designation.
- An alternative <to the Nature Parks> proposed was utilizing consolidated state land, instead of a mosaic of different ownership. However, according to the paper this would reduce the NP to 25% of the original size, which was originally perceived by the RP Team as unacceptable to GEF. The question is, has this been checked with GEF or is this an assumption? In the light of the challenges faced, GEF might be happy with 25%, and this should still be on the table as a desirable option. Also, the original area (more than 6,000km<sup>2</sup>) proposed for the two Nature Parks may have been overly ambitious, and on

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<sup>6</sup> MAF would be legally obliged to manage the NATURA 2000 sites within territories it is responsible for, which will most probably imply hiring or redirecting staff / resources towards this purpose. Another option for the RP could be to agree with the Government on transferring MAF's RP co-funding commitment to the MOEW, thus increasing MOEW's co-funding commitment.

the ground such a large PA seems unacceptable to many of the stakeholders. The discussion about NP size may be pointless at present, however, as the RP Team fears that MoEW might be unwilling to designate more nature parks in the Rhodope, irrespective of size.

### 2.2.3

#### STRATEGY FOR INVOLVING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Initially, UNDP and GEF aimed at mobilising significant co-financing for the Project from the private sector, but during the PDF-B phase this proved to be impossible. During Project implementation, a Strategy<sup>7</sup> was developed by a Task Force created under the RP, to address involvement of the private sector. The first part of the document provides an assessment of each sector – agriculture, forestry, tourism, construction, non-timber forest product harvesting (NTFP), financial sector, small hydropower plants (SHPs) and mining. The second part deals with how they can be involved, and prioritizes the various sectors according to potential benefits to the environment. The actual strategy and action plan is formulated in a third section from page 12 onwards. The Strategy provides a plan that covers the period 2006-2007, and states that a plan for 2008-2009 will be drafted once practical experience has been obtained. In connection with this initiative, it should be noted that the original project budget does not allocate funds for work with the private sector, and this needs to be addressed via a budget reallocation. On the whole it is an interesting document, but it has its shortcomings:

- The section that describes the situation in the forestry sector does not mention the activities that were already well underway and have recently been finalised regarding FSC certification of two forestry enterprises in the Rhodope region. This was carried out by the RP in conjunction with WWF and GTZ, and was carried out in two forestry enterprises, one state-owned, the other a privately owned company.
- The sections on mobilising the agriculture sector (p.9) and forestry (p.10) states that the focus should be on large-scale farmers or forest owners, as the small-scale ones have little or no financial means to support nature related activities. However, the focus should not be on what they can possibly offer (in direct terms of co-funding), but on what the potential impact on the environment may be. It may well be that the cumulative impact of many small-scale farmers or forest owners is much greater than large scale ones. The RP should therefore aim to find sources of funding for the small-scale farmers and forest owners. For example, if (soft) loans can be identified and provided (e.g. certain EU funds or government funding), these could serve as co-financing for pilot projects aimed at establishing sustainable forms of agriculture.
- This focus on large-scale enterprises and entrepreneurs is echoed again in the strategy section from page 12 onwards, which targets medium and large scale enterprises only.
- Regarding the tourism strategy (p.10), the Strategy should include a reference to tourism councils and associations (NGOs) that aim to promote (eco-) tourism in the region, and the investments that are already being made in this field. The latter includes trails, brochures, leaflets, and homestays for small-scale tourism and so on.
- The assessment of the financial sector does not include an assessment of the players – the main investors in the Rhodope region should be identified and targeted, if appropriate. Certain large foreign banks (e.g. ABN-AMRO, HBSC, ING) are certainly keen to nurture an environmentally sound image, while others actively tout a label of

<sup>7</sup> The Rhodope Project Strategy for Engaging the Private Sector in Environmental and Nature Conservation Activities 2006-2009 & Action Plan for 2006-2007. Draft, December 2005, 21 pages.

green investment (Triodos, SNS). These could be actively encouraged to fund ‘green’ (i.e. environmentally sound) investments in the Rhodope region.

- The focus of the strategy should be on developing pilots as examples, and in creating an impetus for replication of environmentally sustainable enterprises. This can only work if the companies being targeted are representative, i.e. many companies in the Rhodope region resemble these. If only a score of large-scale companies are targeted, the likelihood of replication is diminished, as there are few that can follow suite.
- Some business sectors have been neglected altogether by the strategy, such as health spas and mineral water producers. The Devin Mineral Water Company, for example, is one of the largest in the country and is directly dependent on a good environment for the quality of its product. To date, it has not provided any direct support for conservation in the region, according to members of the MFG in Devin, but with careful lobbying support by the Devin Mineral Water Company could be encouraged.

## 2.2.4

### COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

In November 2005, the PMU produced a document titled “Strategic considerations for the selection of promotion activities supporting main Project directions”, which outlines the RP’s communications and public relations (PR) strategy. This is a useful document, in that it outlines what has been done to date, what the shortcomings are, and presents a clear strategy. However, it may be considered over-ambitious as, for example, it lists seven (7) strategic goals alone! In most instances, a Strategy would have a single strategic goal, or perhaps two linked goals, and seven would seem unrealistic.

The strategy provides details on the implementation of ten (10) promotion activities, which are packaged as separate stand-alone activities, but should in fact directly relate to existing Project activities, such as promotion of organic farming, and development and use of the GIS system. What is missing in the strategy is information on the costs of information dissemination, communication and PR. The costs should be taken into account, as certain types of media might be more cost-effective than others.

Although more related to implementation than actual strategy, the evaluation teams questions the need for Rhodope Project promotional materials such as pens, agendas, calendars, cups, clocks and umbrellas, and finds that PR funds are better spent on brochures, training material, and perhaps low budget films for regional television or screening at schools. Spending lots of funds on what is seen as “advertisement materials” is often not a good signal for the local people.

## 2.2.5

### WORK PLAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL FOCUS GROUPS

The RP’s “Strategic concept paper for the development of Municipality Focus Groups and proposed MFG work plan for 2006” outlines the history of the MFGs, and provides a good, solid basis for MFG activities during 2006. The level of detail is significant, as even the detailed agendas for the three MFG meetings scheduled for 2006 have been prepared, and one wonders if the MFGs might not regard this as too great a degree of micro-management. On the other hand, MFG members may well approve of the high level of guidance provided by the RP – in any case, it would be a point to confirm with the MFG members (if this has not been done already).

While a general, broad-brush strategy for MFGs has been outlined in the Strategy document and many details are provided for what is to be achieved in 2006, what appears to be missing are the milestones that the RP hopes to achieve with the MFGs over the coming four years. The RP should set several main strategic targets (e.g. for 2007, 2008 and the end of the Project), that are then to be detailed in the successive annual work plans. What is also missing is a plan for continuity – what is to become of the MFGs after the Project? While it is implied in some sections of the document (e.g. at the second meeting in 2006, the RP hopes to clear the legal status of the MFGs to enable them to act more actively and independently), some mechanism or at least thought must be given to what the position of the MFGs will be after the RP has been finalised. This should address if the MFGs are to continue in another form, or if they can be disbanded because they have outlived their usefulness. This may, of course, vary from municipality to municipality. In municipalities without NGOs active in the field of environment or conservation, for example, it may be useful to establish MFGs as an NGO.



## CHAPTER

# 3

## Evaluation of the status of Project implementation

## 3.1

## STATUS RELATED TO WORK PLAN

The APR for 2005 provides a basis for evaluating how successful the RP has been in adhering to its Annual Work Plan, by comparing part IV Summary of Progress, with Annex B, Annual Work Plan 2005. When comparing the two, the following discrepancies are evident:

- Output target 1.3 Strengthening of the Nature Park Directorates (NPDs). As the Nature Parks have not been established, the RP focused its attention to strengthening of collaborative management, in essence, establishing the MFGs and undertaking activities with this stakeholder representative group.
- Output target 2.2 Monitoring Protocols established and implemented. During 2005 it became evident that the Executive Environmental Agency (EEA) was implementing similar activities in the field of monitoring via the National Biodiversity Monitoring Project (NBMP). The RP therefore responded to this change by shifted the emphasis from the establishing of protocols, to that of establishing a Voluntary Monitoring Network.
- Output target 4.2 Developing management plans (MPs) for priority areas. Initial actions are underway, but collaboration mechanisms have yet to be established, and the MPs have yet to be produced.
- Output target 5.1 Informal M&E. There appears to be a mismatch between the activities undertaken in M&E under 5.1 in 2005 (i.e. Project monitoring and evaluation), as opposed to what is understood in the Project Document and in the Work Plan (i.e. training of local stakeholders in M&E, and regional meetings with stakeholders).
- Output target 5.2 Formal M&E. According to the progress summary, this has not been achieved in 2005, while it should have been implemented according to the Work Plan. However, upon reading the Project Document it would seem that formal M&E refers to the APR, which has been implemented.
- Output target 6.1 Quantifying values and benefits. Studies are underway, but a workshop (planned for mid 2005) has not been carried out, so there has been partial progress.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Because of the almost total lack of knowledge about ecosystem services and ecosystem valuation in Bulgaria, the RP made a decision to not hold a workshop to identify specific ecosystem service studies. Instead, the RP prepared a desk review of ecosystem services and their value, in order to facilitate the transfer of international findings into the Bulgarian context. A workshop to discuss the desk review will be held in May 2006, based on which RP will launch studies on specific ecosystem services.

- Output target 7.1 Aligning municipal and private sector priorities. Training has been provided to municipalities and private sector, and application for SAPARD funding stimulated. However, biodiversity friendly development projects have not yet been identified, modified and prepared, as outlined in the Work Plan<sup>9</sup>.
- Output target 7.2 Sustainable forestry demonstrations. The RP has identified forestry projects and successfully supported the certification process. However, it has not identified the market for certified timber (-products), nor has it assisted in overcoming market barriers, as outlined in the Work Plan. Neither of the latter is to be finalised by 2005, however, and some limited progress has been made.
- Output target 7.3 Sustainable agriculture demonstrations. In accordance with the Project Brief, the RP has focused on the EU's SAPARD programme and Teams on Wheels<sup>10</sup>, but unfortunately neither of these has lead to positive results in 2005. One of the reasons is that, unexpectedly, SAPARD measure 1.3 Organic Farming did not start in 2005. Apart from provision of training in business development, none of the other six sub-activities listed in the Work Plan for 2005 under 7.3 have been implemented. It should be borne in mind, though, that these sub-activities are not scheduled to be finalised in 2005, but progress has been quite limited.
- Output target 7.4 Sustainable tourism. The RP has carried out a very successful business training workshop for ecotourism and has (as yet informal) partnerships with various municipalities in this field. However, it has not embarked on programmes to overcome market barriers, nor has it developed demonstration projects as was planned for 2005. Neither of the latter was scheduled for completion in 2005, so there is still one year to make up for lost ground. The RP has started identifying suitable projects and has completed three surveys (Ecotourism Gap Analysis for the Rhodope, Nature Attractions Surveys and Wildlife Observation Survey) on ecotourism aimed at identifying ways to further develop ecotourism in the Rhodope region.
- Output target 8.1 Funding for sustainability. Initially, 8.1 focused on EU support for funding of the Nature Parks, but as this is no longer an option (due to a lack of designation of NPs), the RP has focused on identifying funding mechanisms for sustainable landscape conservation.
- Output target 8.2 National options for financial incentives. The RP has only recently (October 2005) finalized an in-depth review in this area, which has yet to bear fruit. According to the Work Plan, this should have started in January 2005 but did not start before May 2005. However the RP started disseminating information on viable funding options for environmentally friendly projects in June 2005, i.e. before the funding database was formally completed.

<sup>9</sup> Identified projects turned out to be ineligible for the current SAPARD funding options, hence the delay.

<sup>10</sup> Project "Teams on Wheels in Rural Regions" of UNDP and the MAF was supposed to provide mobile advisory services to agricultural and other entrepreneurs in rural regions in 2005 and 2006, but has not been launched so far due to delay in the payment of the planned MAF cost-sharing to the project budget.

The differences between what has been achieved, and what was planned according to the Annual Work Plan for 2005 fall into three broad categories that are described below.

#### Responding to a changed environment

Some of the differences between achieved and planned results are due to changes in the environment, in which the RP is operating. These are, for instance, Output target 1.3 Strengthening of the Nature Park Directorates, Output target 2.2 Monitoring Protocols established and implemented, and Output target 8.1 Funding for sustainability. In all cases, the RP has adapted to the changes in a positive way, and responded in an appropriate way.

#### Miscommunication

In at least two cases, the difference between achieved and planned results is due to some form of miscommunication or misunderstanding. This is the cases for Output target 5.1 Informal M&E and Output target 5.2 Formal M&E. The principle of M&E is dealt with in 3.4.5 of this evaluation report, which describes the different forms of M&E that appear to be confused by the RP.

#### Behind schedule

At least seven of the output targets can be regarded as being behind schedule, when one compares achieved progress with the Work Plan for 2005. In most cases, however, there are legitimate reasons, and these are explained above. These seven output targets are: 4.2 Developing management plans (MPs) for priority areas; 6.1 Quantifying values and benefits; 7.1 Aligning municipal and private sector priorities; 7.2 Sustainable forestry demonstrations; 7.3 Sustainable agriculture demonstrations; 7.4 Sustainable tourism; and 8.2 National options for financial incentives. Especially Output 7 appears to be lagging behind in implementation, as all four targets are behind schedule. This is also perceived by the MFGs, who have voiced their concerns about a lack of tangible outputs, especially for eco-tourism, organic agriculture and alternative farming. This is dealt with in more detail in 3.4.6 on tangible results of the Project.

## 3.2

### MUNICIPAL FOCUS GROUPS

#### History of the MFGs

Municipal Focus Groups (MFGs) were formed by the Rhodope Project in 27 municipalities in February 2005. These stakeholder groups were in many cases formed out of existing groups such as the Local Leader Groups (LLGs) created in the Rhodope region under the UNDP/MAF Sustainable Development in Rural Areas Project<sup>11</sup> (in Ivajlovgrad, Madjarovo, Ardino, Kirkovo and Gurmen), or the Bulgarian Swiss Forestry Programme (in Rakitovo, Batak and Gurmen). The composition of the MFGs varies from municipality to municipality, but on the whole these include a reasonable combination of municipal and regional governmental agencies, NGOs and private sector. The average size of the MFGs is 12 persons, although these may vary from 10-15. Most MFGs also have a pool of associated members that can be drawn upon as resource persons when addressing issues that require input of a more technical nature.

<sup>11</sup> This UNDP/MAF Project (2003-2006) pilots the EU LEADER method for rural development in 11 rural municipalities of Bulgaria, 8 of which are in the Rhodope. LEADER consists of bottom-up planning of rural area development strategies and their decentralized implementation, co-funded from EU budget resources. LEADER is an obligatory mechanism in the EU Member States programmes for rural development in the period 2007-2013.

The main aim of the MFGs is to ensure a local bottom up approach to local planning, focused on integrating nature conservation concerns into implementation of local activities. In practice, however, the MFGs also address other local initiatives such as the LEADER approach, and this is certainly not discouraged by the RP. In 2006, the RP will recruit local MFG facilitators to guide the MFG discussions so that a focus is maintained, and to generally assist the MFG members. In 2006, the RP will also provide training to MFG members, especially related to the LEADER programme and project formulation.

#### Assessment of MFG composition & establishment process

The RP's approach of building upon existing stakeholder groups such as the LLGs is well-founded and is to be commended. Establishing new groups would have been an extra burden, both to the local administration and to the Project, and the approach used is both the easiest, and is likely to be most effective.

Government agencies appear to be well represented in the MFGs, as are certain private sector sections such as (eco-)tourism operators. Other private sector groups (such as non-tourism businesses and farmers) appear under-represented, as is the NGO sector, apart from associations of ecotourism operators. The latter can be explained by the fact that at municipal level there are few active NGOs that would be of relevance to the RP. Few local NGOs are active in the field of conservation, for example, or deal with sustainable agriculture. This is not something that the Project directly needs to address, although local initiatives such as the establishing of conservation-oriented NGOs should be supported. The lack of representation of non-tourism private sector groups can be explained by a lack of direct interest of these sectors in the RP (e.g. trade or manufacturing sector), or a lack of time for something that may be perceived as not being directly productive (e.g. farmers). The lack of farmer representatives is more of an issue, and the RP should assess opportunities for attracting more farmer (-groups) or associations into the MFGs.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the MFG Strategy for 2006 allows for the identification of whether the MFGs need to be expanded, and accommodating this during 2006.

#### Assessment of effectiveness & continuity

The 27 MFGs, with Project support, have all met 3-4 times to discuss various topics and issues. They have developed 'local visions' for each municipality, and have developed two Regional Declarations (one for Eastern Rhodope, one for Western Rhodope) on the importance of nature as a resource for achieving sustainable development (June 2005). In addition, the municipal meetings held under the Project helped to bring local issues onto the municipality and regional agenda. In turn the RP has taken the concerns of the MFGs into consideration and incorporated local concerns into its activities where possible. The MFGs can therefore be regarded as a generally effective way of addressing stakeholder concerns, and involving stakeholders in the RP. The meetings of the MFGs are organised around themes, issues or topics, and sub-groups of the MFGs are invited to attend those meetings that re of direct interest. This approach tends to make meetings more effective, and of interest for those attending, and seems a good approach. The number of meetings held so far (3-4 in most cases) seems small as this means one meeting per 3-4 months.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that at national/PMU level, farmer associations have also not been much involved or consulted (see Annex 6).

Although the RP activities through the MFGs have not yet enhanced the sustainable management of natural resources, they have helped in identifying and formulating local concerns and ideas in this area. Two district governments have approached and received technical support from the RP in developing their district strategies (September 2005), and eight local administrations (municipalities) have adopted more conservation-oriented versions of their draft Municipality Strategy's based on proposals made by the RP. The development of the Municipality Strategies was one of the main activities of the UNDP/MAF Sustainable Rural Development Project<sup>13</sup>, and the RP contributed by reviewing and commenting on the draft strategies.

In short, the MFGs show promise as a mechanism for local ownership, and a good way for ensuring a bottom-up approach to Project implementation.

The MFGs are likely to remain an effective platform throughout the life of the Project, but whether they will continue to meet in the same form after the Project is debateable. To some extent, this is not really an issue, as many MFGs were formed out of existing stakeholder groups (e.g. the LLGs), and if another project is launched in the Rhodope region, the MFGs may be reformatted into a revised structure to meet the new project's requirements. On the other hand, many MFG members state that one of the most important contributions has been the contacts that have been established between various stakeholders. Through the MFGs, the RP has succeeded in lowering barriers between various stakeholder groups and created dialogue. Even without formal MFGs (e.g. if they stop functioning after the Project), this dialogue is likely to continue. The MFGs have 'institutionalised' their ideas and recommendations into the Municipal Strategies, the two Regional Declarations, vision statements and in development plans. As such, this will contribute to continuity and sustainability, even if the MFGs were to be disbanded after completion of the Rhodope Project.

In municipalities where there are no (or few) active NGOs, the RP should support the institutionalisation of the MFGs, perhaps by having it registered as an NGO, that may continue its work at the local level beyond the life of the Project.

### 3.3 STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

#### 3.3.1 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

##### Present situation

##### Executing Agency

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MAF) is the Project's Executing Agency and has appointed an official from MAF's National Forestry Board to act as National Project Director (NPD). The NPD is assisted by/alternates with a second official from the NFB. The NPD reports to the Deputy Minister and oversees the Project on behalf of the Executing Agency. The NPD supervises the execution of the Project and represents the Executing Agency for the purposes of operational level decision-making.

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 12 above.

### Project Management Unit

The Rhodope Project Management Unit (PMU) coordinates the implementation of the Rhodope Project, assuming responsibility for Project operations at the central level and for guidance and supervision of Project operations at the regional/district/local levels. The PMU consists of 8 full-time members: Project Manager, International Project Advisor, Administrator, Biodiversity Specialist, Landscape Specialist, Business and Public Relations Specialist, Assistant and Driver.

The Project Management Unit (PMU) is in charge of Project activities (delivery of Project outputs) including, but not limited to: development and updates of the Project's general, yearly and monthly work plans; record-keeping and reporting; drafting of terms of reference for consultants and sub-contractors; drafting of specifications for equipment and goods; identification and selection of consultants; collection of offers/proposals for goods and services; procurement of goods and services, preparation of contracts; coordination of consultants and sub-contractors schedules and assignments, handling of duty travel; organization of workshops, public information activities and other Project events; liaison with Project stakeholders at the central and local level.

During the first year of Project operations, the PMU was headed by the International Project Advisor (IPA), responsible for setting up the Project's infrastructure, the effective introduction of national Project staff and counterparts to Project implementation, as well as the effective, efficient and timely implementation of the Project activities and the achievement of the planned Project outputs. A Project Manager (PM) was appointed and reported to the IPA during the Project's first year. During the second through fifth years of the Project, the PMU is to be headed by the PM, who will be responsible for the effective, efficient and timely implementation of the Project activities and the achievement of the planned Project outputs. Contrary to the Project Document, the IPA has been retained on the Rhodope Project for a second year to act as resource person, trainer and mentor to the Rhodope Project Manager. As the IPA is answerable to UNDP and not to the PM, there is a risk that the position of the IPA is unclear, and that he is perceived as a 'second captain at the helm'. As the contract for the IPA expires in June 2006, it is proposed that this be continued in a different form after that date.. The PM's TOR states that (s)he is to collaborate with the IPA in all aspects of the IPA's work – this seems inappropriate as the IPA is to support the PM.

### Regional Support Centres

Two Regional Support Centres (RSC) have been established: one in Eastern and one in Western Rhodope, in Kurdjali and Smolyan, respectively. The RSCs are responsible for Project operations at the regional/district/local levels. The RSCs liaise on a daily basis with the PMU in Sofia, as well as with Rhodope Project stakeholders at the regional/district/local levels, and are supervised by the PMU.

### Project Steering Committee

A Project Steering Committee (PSC) has been established as the inter-institutional strategic decision-making body for the Project. The PSC coordinates and monitors implementation of the Project. It meets once per year to review the Project's Annual Progress Reports

(reflecting the status of achievement of the planned Project outputs) and to take strategic decisions pertinent to the achievement of the Project's objectives.

The PSC consists of the following officials or their authorized representatives: the Minister of Agriculture and Forests, the Minister of Environment and Water, Regional Forestry Board, Regional Forestry Board, Rhodope Tourism Association, Bulgarian Forest Certification Association, Bioselena Foundation for Organic Farming, East Aegean Sea River Basin Directorate, Rhodope Water Users Association and the UNDP Resident Coordinator. In addition, the following are be invited and encouraged to be observers at SC meetings: the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, Minister of Economy, Executive Directors of the Eastern and Western Rhodope Municipal Associations, National GEF Focal Point and the World Bank Forestry Project.

#### Project Management Committee

A Project Management Committee (PMC) has been established to oversee the Project at the operational level. The PMC reports to the PSC and hold quarterly, or if necessary, more frequent, meetings. The PMC is composed of a UNDP representative, the MAF Deputy Minister in charge of "Forests, Forestry and Hunting" and the National Project Director. The Project Manager act as Secretary to the PSC and the PMC. UNDP and the RP Team intend to suggest to the PSC that MoEW and MRDPW representatives be included in the PMC.

#### Weaknesses of Project management

The structure used for Project management: Executing Agency, PMU, PSC and PMC is the same as what is commonly used on most similar projects. Interaction with the NPD (and his alternate) is regular and systematic, as is further interaction between PMU and MAF technical staff (certainly weekly, but often several times per week). The PSC has not been convened formally so far, although the project has been running since 2004; however, the RP Team has been maintaining regular contacts with relevant PSC members.

The Project Document (PD) does not include an organigramme of the management and coordination levels and structures of the RP, but one based on the descriptions in the PD is attached in Annex 7. In general, the structure is clear, but there are some ambiguities. On the one hand, the PD states that "The Project will be implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, through the Project Management Unit", while on the other hand it states that "The MAF authorizes the UNDP Resident Representative to enter into contractual arrangements ...on behalf of the MAF throughout the Project life". The PMU staff report to the PM, who acts in cooperation and consultation with the NPD and reports to UNDP. In the first year the PM also had to report to the International Project Advisor.

As a result, it has taken time for the Project team to understand who is who in the Project structure. It is time consuming to organise the decision making processes, to report to the different levels and to coordinate with the different actors. The institutional landscape has also been changing, and during Project implementation, the involvement of MAF and the role of the NPD have been reduced due to political changes. An outward sign of lowered MAF involvement is the fact that MAF has not provided office facilities for the PMU and the



RSCs, as originally foreseen as a government contribution in the Project Document to the Project.

In 2005, important steps were taken towards “Bulgarianizing” the operational management of the Project – the ToRs of the IPA and of the PM have been significantly changed. This made it possible for the PM to assume responsibility for the effective, efficient and timely implementation of the Project activities and the achievement of the planned Project outputs. Under such circumstances, however, it is not easy for the International Advisor to withdraw from the operational and day-to-day management of the Project, and to keep instead to the role of advisor, resource person and mentor. There is still some duplication in the functions of the IPA and the PM, as both are supposed to give “strategic guidance” to the Project (who is ‘at the helm’?). All-in-all, the position of the PM is a difficult one: organising the implementation of Project activities, managing the team, reporting to UNDP, the PMC and to the PSC, and coordinating all this with the IPA and the NPD. This is not unusual, but the task can be simplified by shifting the responsibility for project management fully to the PM, and formulating an output-oriented TOR for the IPA.

The reason given by MoEW for non-designation of the two Nature Parks (the requirement that representation of Private Owners be part of the NP committee) has widely been perceived (outside MoEW) as an excuse for appeasing the mining and forestry lobbies, and for devoting all resources to Natura 2000 requirements for the EU, and many wonder if the PSC and UNDP could not have done more. This would seem unlikely, though. UNDP and the RP Team have had a series of long and exhausting meetings at all levels with the MAF and the MoEW to discuss the nature parks designation issue, and according to both, all possible avenues have been pursued to discuss the parks designation. At the last two PMC meetings (involving highest-level UNDP and MAF representatives) the MAF/NFB has produced a subtle yet unequivocal message that the RP should not count on nature park designation in the foreseeable future. Also, according to the Protected Areas Act, a commission must be established by the MoEW to take a decision on any park designation proposal within one year of the submission of the proposal. In the case of the Rhodope Nature Parks, however, this deadline has past over a year ago.

The PMU appears to perform well, but could do with some changes. Firstly, the tasks of the IPA (whose contract expires in June 2006) should become more Project output oriented (concrete conservation activities) rather than the current open-ended orientation as ‘resource person, trainer and mentor to the RP’. The broader task of also being a resource person for UNDP should be removed, as this only serves to dissipate energy and distract. Secondly – provided that such a person could be recruited in Bulgaria – the PMU should be expanded with sustainable development expertise, i.e. someone with a background in alternative livelihoods, organic farming and perhaps ecotourism, who can help direct, guide and manage these activities, and provide expertise to the RSCs. At the same time, the current PR/Private Sector position could be teased apart into two different jobs. Both of these are dealt with in more detail below.

Experience on similar large-scale biodiversity conservation projects shows that regional teams with high level of expertise and motivation (like the RSCs) tend to develop into (semi-independent) NGOs. These are often more willing to assume conservation and education tasks than to manage, organise and monitor the implementation of the Project, and this tendency can also be observed to some extent in the RSCs. This is not necessarily a



negative development, it has just to be foreseen and managed. In the scope of the Project's sustainability an assessment has to be made of whether the Eastern and Western Rhodope regions need new local NGOs that can be registered on the basis of the teams and the functions of the RSC. And is such a development acceptable for GEF/UNDP? If yes, this development has to be targeted, planned (possibly using the 'mini-project' approach) and monitored.

The PMU seems to be regularly overloaded with translation tasks, which are undertaken by staff members or carried out by external translators. If it is not justified on the Project to have a permanent translator on the team, the need for having each and every document in two languages should be re-assessed. The only justification appears to be the needs of the International Project Advisor, but does he really need to have each document translated into English in order to function? Even in the tender procedures for mandates the candidates are required to present the applications in Bulgarian and English – why is this so if the PMU, which is responsible for project management, is exclusively Bulgarian. Perhaps UNDP has certain requirements that justify all these translations.

#### Sustainable development & planning specialist

On the whole, the teams appear to be adequately composed, except for the area where there has been a notable delay in implementation – i.e. someone with expertise in promotion of sustainable development. This person should form part of the PMU team and have expertise in the fields of alternative livelihood development and organic farming (and marketing). Some knowledge of ecotourism development would also be advantageous, although the Rhodope Project has apparently been able to tap into this expertise in the past (e.g. in the provision of ecotourism training) and may continue to do so in the future. The PMU will have to assess what level of support an alternative livelihood specialist is to receive at RSC level, and whether this can be provided by consultants hired under ST-contracts, or if the RSCs need to be expanded with similar expertise. The person's experience should be on concrete implementation, and his/her outputs should focus on concrete outputs, and not on developing 'paper' projects and strategies. If such expertise is unavailable in Bulgaria, perhaps such a person could be recruited in the region.

At the same time, support to the RP in the field of regional planning may also be considered. Such expertise would be welcome in order to help integrate the Project's concepts and ideas into the municipal, district and regional policies, strategies and plans. This is already ongoing, but expert advice by someone with a proved track record in the planning sector would be very useful to help guide this process. This need not be a full-time position, but consist on one or more short-term inputs.

#### International Project Advisor (IPA)

During the first year of the Project, the International Project Advisor's (IPA's) role was primarily to set up the Project and Project structures, while in the second year, the role was shifted to that of resource person, trainer and mentor to the Rhodope Project Manager, and resource person for UNDP Bulgaria in general. The current contract for the IPA expires in June 2006, and it is proposed that this be continued in a different form. Now that all Project structures have been established and many aspects are up-and-running, the mentor role is less necessary. What is necessary is achieving concrete outputs in the following fields:

- Conservation: protected area establishment in one form or another (Nature Park, smaller NPs, other forms of PAs in the Rhodope region); and

- Embedding environmental concerns into lasting institutional frameworks (facilitating the establishing of institutional structures, both at local and regional level).

The IPA's new TOR should therefore include working towards these results, which cannot be achieved during one year (i.e. the duration of IPA contracts to date), but prolongation of a contract should be based on progress.

#### Public relations/private sector

The reasons for combining the public relations and the private sector work into one position are not clear, as the two activities require quite different competences. The communication with the local or national business groups is very important and a specific task that requires business acumen and experience. This appears to fit well with the background of the person currently in this position. The different aspects and needs of public relations, however, should be distributed under the specific Project activities – promotion of the biodiversity of the Rhodope, promotion of sustainable development principles, and promotion of the ideas of the Project.

### 3.3.2

#### INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

##### Assessment of the existing institutional framework

In the Project Document, the institutional framework for the Project was clear and appeared sound, although it lacked detail at the local and regional level. MAF would be the executing agency/main responsible agency for the Project, both at central level, but also in the Rhodope region by means of two Nature Park Directorates. MoEW would be responsible for Nature Park designation, and the municipalities would cooperate with the two directorates in aspects regarding sustainable regional planning and development.

For various reasons, the two Nature Parks have not been designated by MoEW, and as a result MAF has not established the two NP Directorates.<sup>14</sup> MAF has also distanced itself further from the Project by not providing office facilities for the PMU and the RSCs. MoEW is currently focused on establishing a network of Natura 2000 sites throughout the country, including in the Rhodope region, but this will not involve establishing an on-the-ground management structure for these sites, as this is not an EU requirement. However, the integration of nature conservation into local sustainable development activities (forestry, agriculture, tourism) points towards MAF, whereas the integration of conservation concerns into local, district and regional planning points towards the MRDPW, which is the ministry spearheading the decentralization process. In any case, the original institutional framework with the project firmly embedded within MAF seems less obvious, and remains a point of discussion. To reflect this change in the institutional setting, the RP Team currently seeks to involve MoEW and MRDPW on the PMC, and perhaps also involve them as Project Partners signing the Project Revision Document.

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<sup>14</sup> The relationship between MoEW and MAF regarding Nature Parks is an uncomfortable one. Ideally, designation and management of sites should be within one directorate, and certainly within one ministry, but the present situation is an awkward compromise that allows MAF to continue to manage large tracts of forest even if they are designated as Nature Parks by MoEW. MoEW manages National Parks, reserves, nature monuments and protected sites. Reportedly, MAF is not entirely happy with the burden of managing the NP Directorates, which means that this situation may change in the future.

As mentioned above, the process of decentralization is currently ongoing in Bulgaria, guided by EU Directives on Decentralization. The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works plays a key role in the decentralization process by means of its Territorial Governance and Decentralization Directorate (this will soon be renamed the Administrative and Territorial Governance and Local Self-governance Directorate). The director of the Directorate stated (see Annex 6) that at present there is actually no state structure that is able to replace the foreseen Nature Park Directorate functions – this would have to be developed. Regional development plans are to be developed – the Rhodope region lies in the South-central Planning Region, of which Plovdiv is the capital. A disadvantage may be that the Rhodope region comprises only 40% of the South-central Planning Region. However, other structures will also form part of the decentralization process, and it may be possible for the Project to influence this to some degree. By meeting with MRDPW following the evaluation team's fieldwork, the PMU has undertaken steps in this direction.

**Assessment of Project's approach in dealing with changes in institutional setting**  
The Rhodope Project has responded to the non-designation of the Nature Parks and absence of the NP Directorates by working closely with the municipalities, the Regional Forestry Boards and the Regional Inspectorates of Environment and Waters in almost all its field activities. The RP has established 'Municipal Focus Groups' comprising a broad cross-section of municipal stakeholders, and the two RSCs have worked closely with the MFGs, among others contributing to the development of municipal plans, and jointly with the MFGs they have formulated declarations for Western and Eastern Rhodope. The municipalities of the Rhodope region are united in five Municipalities Associations, covering the 45 municipalities in the greater Rhodope region: Rhodope (21 municipalities), Hebar (11), Maritza (9), Trakia (5) and the Association of Southwest Municipalities (ASM, 5). Two municipalities (Ardino and Chernoochene) are not a member of any association, while eight municipalities are members of two associations. Of the 27 priority municipalities in the Rhodope region, 19 are in the Rhodope Association, 4 in Hebar, 5 in Maritza, 3 in Trakia and 1 in the ASM. Ardino is one of the 27 RP priority municipalities, and 6 of the 27 are members of two associations. The legal status of these associations is not strong, however, and the municipalities often have to accept decisions made in central ministries in Sofia, even if they go counter to what has been decided at the local level.

This approach has created a lot of goodwill with the municipalities, RIEWs, RFBs and the various other stakeholders, and forms a good basis for further nurturing of environmentally sound approaches to development. In the first stage, this has been limited to capacity development by means of joint planning exercises and provision of training. In a second stage, this should also include more tangible activities such as pilot examples of sustainable development. The MFGs show promise as a mechanism for local ownership, and a good approach for ensuring a bottom-up approach to Project implementation.

#### Assessment of sustainability of the Project's approach

As stated in 3.2, it is uncertain if the MFGs will continue to meet in the same form after the Project has been finalised. Important in this respect is that MFGs have 'institutionalised' their ideas and recommendations into the Municipal Strategies, the two Rhodope Declarations, vision statements and in development plans. As such, this will contribute to continuity and sustainability of environmental concepts, even if the MFGs were to be disbanded after completion of the Rhodope Project.

From the point of conservation, however, working with the MFGs does not provide a good alternative to the Nature Park Directorates (nor were they intended as such); the MFGs do not have a conservation mandate, and are unlikely to develop one given the broad membership. Also, the Natura 2000 network is unlikely to provide an alternative structure, as no management network is to be established in parallel. MFGs could be developed into consultative councils to the existing (or future) protected areas – category IV (protected sites and natural monuments). The Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation is currently developing this model for the Shabla and Dourankoulak lakes protected sites, where clear economic interests for use of the lakes are to be taken into account. However, for most of the small protected sites in the Rhodopes (mainly in state-owned forests), the need of such consultative councils is not evident. Alternatively, the RIEWs also have a mandate that is much broader than conservation, which forms only a small part of their overall activities. The RIEWs also do not have the capacity – in term's of staffing, training and budget – with which to manage larger conservation areas.

#### Overall assessment of institutional setting regarding PA management

The RP has not been able to identify a suitable institutional structure for management of PAs in the Rhodope, in the present non park scenario (absence of Nature Park Directorates), a situation that is likely to continue in the foreseeable future. The Evaluation Team also cannot envisage a clear alternative: currently there is no option for overall management body for the small protected areas – in the Rhodope or elsewhere in Bulgaria – as this is not foreseen by law. However, even if the nature parks had been designated there would still be ambiguity regarding responsibility over the small protected sites or natural monuments in the Rhodope region. These responsibilities are not clearly defined, as the management of these sites is to be provided by the respective state forestry or municipality that is the owner of the land. Also, in the case of strict nature reserves it is obvious that these sites are definitely not under the management of the nature park directorates. It is clear that legislation regarding PA management needs to be reviewed and revised to remove such ambiguities and provide a clear institutional setting.

### 3.3.3

#### INFORMATION BASELINES

##### Assessment of the information baseline

A significant amount of information has been collected to date, as a baseline on biodiversity (species, habitats), land use, settlements, and infrastructure and so on. This data has been collected by the RP, but also provided by other agencies, such as the municipalities, RIEWs and the NFB. Also, together with the Natura 2000 programme, many biodiversity surveys have been implemented throughout the Rhodope. Various agencies with which the RP cooperates have been enthusiastic so far. Information about biodiversity is good for the RIEWs, but also for promotion of ecotourism and nature trails, conservation efforts and nature education (e.g. nature exhibits in Kurdjali Museum).

In spite of all these efforts, however, the level of data availability on the current status of the biodiversity in the Rhodope region is still regarded as insufficient. Some involved on the Natura 2000 programme estimate that up to now, “only 20%” of the territory of Western Rhodope has been inventoried, which means that vast swathes have yet to be studied (pers. comm. Prof. Tenyo Meshinev, 21 February 2006; see Annex 6). However this seems to be an underestimate because the RP alone surveyed 285,100 ha, which is 22.7 % of the total Rhodope Mountains area in 2004-2005. In this connection, not all areas are relevant targets

for biodiversity surveys, for examples, urban areas and agricultural areas are of relatively little importance and do not need to be surveyed. If such areas (which account for 32 % of the total area) are disregarded, the RP has surveyed 33.99% of all relevant areas in the Rhodope. This figure would increase even further if plantation forests were also excluded from the relevant areas. These figures do not include surveys undertaken in the Rhodope by other organizations, such as the National Museum of Natural History and the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation, or the baseline created by the Bulgarian Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Project in the Rhodope. Further surveys are planned by the RP for 2006.

#### Assessment of the GIS, survey and database approach

The database and GIS elaborated by the Project team are of very high quality. They are of a professional design that takes into account the specificity of the information and the practical needs of the main potential users.

The data collected in the Project preparation phase is very abundant; the results of the surveys (both on the biodiversity and on the social-economic aspects) have to be made available to the public and decision making bodies. It has been also useful in the identification of gaps and further needs for studies.

The selection of priority areas for the surveys has been made after extensive consultation with specialists, scientific institutions and NGOs. This approach should be maintained in future.

The needs of the Bulgarian institutions – governmental or municipal – on biodiversity related information are generally not well understood; the capacities for using such databases are under-developed. The Project is helping this development in the Rhodope region, thereby providing an excellent model for other regions and institutions.

The database and GIS approach used by the RP appears sound – the products are good, and will ultimately prove very useful, provided that sufficient data is entered. All parties that had been given a demonstration of the GIS and database (e.g. various MFGs) were very enthusiastic, and are keen to make use of these products. The RP is currently seeking ways in which to provide the programmes free-of-charge (notably by using ArcExplorer<sup>15</sup> instead of ARCVIEW as a software platform), and provide training in use of the GIS/database.

Some potential users want to have very specific data entered, such as cadastral data; if the latter is already available it can easily be added as an extra GIS layer (after correcting and aligning). However, if such detailed data is not available, the RP should not put any effort into this unless it directly concerns conservation/biodiversity, as it needs to focus on its main aim, and that is ensuring that it serves as a biodiversity database.

#### Assessment of sustainability

At present, the RP has not identified an institutional setting for the database and GIS, which means that while a good product is being developed at present, it may not last long beyond the life of the Project. Therefore, parallel to development, special effort should be made in identifying the institution able to maintain the database and GIS after the end of the Project. This should be addressed before long, and not at the end of the Project.

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<sup>15</sup> ArcExplorer is a lightweight GIS data viewer developed by ESRI, the company that has developed and markets ARCVIEW and ARCGIS. This freely available software offers an easy way to perform a variety of basic GIS functions, including display, query, and data retrieval applications. It can be used on its own with local data sets or as a client to Internet data and map servers.

## 3.3.4

## MONITORING &amp; EVALUATION PROGRAMME

## Project Document descriptions of M&amp;E

In the original Project Document of April 2004, Output 5 is described as “Monitoring and evaluation applied as tool for capacity building of stakeholders”, as it is mentioned that this is closely related to Output 2, “Information baseline established and strengthened as basis for adaptive management”.

The description of the activities under Output 5, however, is unclear. 5.1 on Establish basis for effective ongoing informal M&E and to support the three formal project evaluations in particular, remains a mystery. On the one hand 5.1 refers to monitoring and evaluating changes in the baseline, which under Output 2, will refer to biodiversity baselines. On the other hand, 5.1 also refers to monitoring and evaluating changes in perception. Both are very different types of monitoring, as one is related to Project performance in terms of communication, the other refers to Project performance in terms of safeguarding biodiversity.

5.2 is also somewhat confused in the way it is formulated. On the one hand it states that each year a Project consultant will, together with the Project Manager and Steering Committee, monitor the Project's performance and make any adjustments necessary. On the other hand it states that this will happen three times during the five year period, which is not the same thing as ‘on an annual basis’. 5.2 also includes an element of ‘learning-while-doing’, which refers to stakeholders learning by adapting to lessons learned from the M&E input of the external consultant.

5.3 is on sharing the lessons learned, which seems to be a continuation of the second part of 5.2 as described above. This activity is designed to develop and share best and worst practices, and the lessons learned. It is unclear why this is part of monitoring and evaluation, as it would seem to be a part of overall Project Management.

## As interpreted by the Rhodope Project

Judging from the Annual Project Report, the Rhodope Project has interpreted the output targets under Output 5 quite differently. Under output 5.1, the APR lists Project administration documents such as the APR/PIR, monthly reports, quarterly reports and annual report. It also lists the proposal for the revision of the logframe under this output target. More in line with the Project Document, however, the APR also mentions the public attitude report that has been produced. The APR reports that no activities were undertaken under output target 5.2 in 2005, while under 5.3, a lessons learned document is listed as having been produced and distributed, which is in line with the Project Document.

Apparently, there is a lot of confusion about M&E, both in the Project Document of April 2004, and between Project Document and the way in which the RP team interprets Output 5 on M&E. Recommendations on how to untangle this problem are provided in 4.5 below.

## 3.3.5

## PRODUCING TANGIBLE RESULTS

During Project preparation, the involved NGOs and partially – the regional government structures, expected that the Rhodope Project would continue the efforts and follow the lines of conservation projects and activities previously operating in the region, such as the Eastern Rhodope project (of the BSBCP), Western Rhodope Biodiversity conservation projects (funded by NTEF, BSPB), Green Balkans nature parks promotion efforts, the RIEWs (Haskovo, Plovdiv, Pazardjik), RFB Kurdjali biodiversity, and PA control and management. For many, the GEF Rhodope Project was expected to take over all these various activities, to be the umbrella, the coordination structure, but also – the agency actively lobbying on regional and national level in favour of the conservation agenda, and in this way playing a political role, presenting the co-financing incentives (to the governmental institutions and the municipalities). In such an environment of ‘great expectation’ it is difficult to perform well, as one cannot please all those involved, and when tangible conservation activities remain elusive (due to the non-designation of the Nature Parks), many in the national and regional conservation circles are disappointed.

To date, the Rhodope Project has produced tangible results in the form of information and education materials (panels, brochures) and the GIS and biodiversity database. All of these have been welcome and very useful, but many people (including members of the MFGs) find the biodiversity surveys and inventories, the elaboration of plans and strategies, the training programmes, and even the business project preparation too ‘soft’ and would welcome more concrete activities. Stakeholders of the Project would appreciate concrete forms of sustainable development that help generate local incomes, and ideas suggested in the meetings with MFGs include eco-trails, berries-processing factories, dairies, planting of forest areas, and production and export of organic farm products. It must be borne in mind, however, that the RP is primarily aimed at biodiversity conservation, but at the same time investment in pilot examples could be highly beneficial, even if these are small-scale and aim at a local level only. Also, the RP has been designed and approved as a GEF planning and capacity building project, and not primarily as an ‘on the ground support’ project. Perceptions and expectations may differ between various stakeholders, and some stakeholders will always have a different view of what should be the main aim of the project. Recommendations for what could be achieved in terms of more tangible outputs, are mentioned in 4.6.



## CHAPTER

# 4 Strengthening Project implementation

## 4.1

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT

## Improving management structures &amp; communication

The PSC should be used more effectively as a forum at which to lobby vigorously for the designation of these two Nature Parks<sup>16</sup>. A strategy for this should be developed and discussed by PMU and UNDP prior to the next PSC meeting(s). These partners should determine beforehand whether the aim is to be the original, large scale NPs, scaled down NPs (the 25% option; see 4.3), significantly scaled down protected areas, or a combination of these options.

The PMU is to determine (with UNDP) what the future role of the RSCs is to be, that of an NGO or are they to disappear after the life of the Project? In the former case, a strategy for continuation as an NGO will need to be developed.

## Recommendations regarding team composition and individual TORs

- The tasks of the IPA (whose contract expires in June 2006) should become more Project output oriented (concrete conservation activities) rather than the current open-ended orientation as 'resource person, trainer and mentor to the RP'. The broader task of also being a resource person for UNDP should be removed, as this only serves to dissipate energy and distract. The IPA should not be directly involved in day-to-day Project management other than for assigned tasks, otherwise there will be impingement on the role of the PM.
- At the same time, the TOR of the PM should be modified so that he can assume full responsibility for the Project. For example, the sentence "Collaborate with the IPA in all aspects of the IPA's work, with the objective of being able to perform the IPA's duties in the future" should be removed as it creates confusion. In fact it is not the PM who is to collaborate with the IPA, but the IPA who is to support and to give advice to the PM. The ToR of the PM should be expanded with the task of "Lobbying for the Project objectives among state institutions".
- All the ToRs describing the duties and responsibilities are quite explicit, but can be better structured, for example, by grouping the different tasks into more general ones.

<sup>16</sup> UNDP Bulgaria has consistently indicated that it cannot get involved in the government's decision regarding the nature park designations, in respect of its status of a non-political development entity – underlying principles of the provision of UNDP support at the country level.



- The PMU should be expanded with sustainable development expertise, i.e. someone with a background in alternative livelihoods, organic farming and perhaps ecotourism, who can help direct, guide and manage these activities, and provide expertise to the RSCs. <this is provided, of course, that such expertise can be recruited in Bulgaria in support of the RP>
- The combination of public relations and private sector work in one position should be re-assessed, as the two tasks require very different competences. The person currently employed for this position is very well suited for the public relations work, and should continue in this respect. Creating a separate private sector function would mean that both staff could focus on one clear task, instead of trying to combine very different tasks, with the risk of not progressing much on either. Alternatively, a PR task could be incorporated into the tasks of the various other staff, provided that there is an overall strategy guiding this.

#### Project implementation M&E

This is a formal type of M&E that focuses on whether certain activities that are included in a proposal and/or work plan have indeed been carried out, and is formalised in Quarterly Reports, APR/PIR reports, and to some extent also in external evaluations. The evaluation team finds that this has been adequately produced to date, and should be continued as is.

The need for having all Project documents produced both in Bulgarian and English should be re-assessed, as this is putting an unnecessary burden on the Project team, and is costing significant amounts of time and Project funds, better spent elsewhere.

## 4.2

### MUNICIPAL FOCUS GROUPS

It has been suggested (e.g. in the APR/PIR of 2005) that the MFGs include people with available time but without much influence, and does not include many busy entrepreneurs, farmers or stakeholders of influence. This may be true to some extent. What the RP can do to address this is to ensure that meetings focus on topics of interest (which is what has been done up to now), and actively approach potential candidate members from poorly represented sectors. Meetings on stakeholder-specific topics such as 'organic farming and funding opportunities' could attract farmers, while holding certain MFG meetings when stakeholders have time on their hands (e.g. evenings or on Saturday morning) may also be another possibility.

The number of meetings held so far (3-4 in one year) seems small, and the same amount is planned for 2006. This could be expanded (e.g. to 5-6 per year), especially if special interest meetings on certain topics are held with sub-groups. However, this would have to be sounded with the MFGs first.

As outlined – albeit in different terms – in the MFG Document, the RP will assess possibilities for institutionalising the MFGs, for example as a 'municipal sounding-board group' - not only for dialogue or discussion, but for assessing community ideas and maintaining a non-political link with local stakeholders. Such a sounding-board group should meet only once or twice a year, and intermediately to address certain issues that may arise. This would add continuity, and enhance the sustainability of some of the RP's achievements. Alternatively, the MFGs may be established as NGOs, especially in municipalities without NGOs active in the field of environment/conservation.

## 4.3

## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

## Conservation status and areas

As designation of the two large Nature Parks seems highly unlikely in the near future, the RP should actively pursue viable alternatives as a way of providing an institutional framework for conservation efforts in the Rhodope. At present, the RP is focusing on the already gazetted smaller PAs (reserves, nature monuments, protected sites), and to some extent also the proposed Natura 2000 sites and forested areas managed by the RFBs. However, as the latter two are not managed as conservation areas, other options need to be considered. One option is that additional smaller sites are gazetted, either by MoEW as new reserves, nature monuments, protected sites, or established by the municipalities themselves. The advantage is that the status is clear, sites are likely to be well protected, and local stakeholders are likely to agree to designation; the disadvantage is that the total area will remain small. A second option is the designation of a smaller Nature Park area: by avoiding the inclusion of 'difficult' areas (e.g. privately owned, or earmarked for mining) a single Nature Park in Western Rhodope covering an area of about 25% (150,000ha) of the originally proposed NPs may be designated. The advantage is the clear status and greater size of the area; the disadvantage is that this route may take longer than the first option, it extends over only Western Rhodope, and local stakeholders may not agree to designation of such a large area.

## Nature Park Directorates versus Natura 2000

The structures and procedures for management of the future Natura 2000 sites (as protected zones according to the Biodiversity Act) are to be developed and clarified after the accession of Bulgaria to the EU and the formal approval of the Natura 2000 network. This process is likely to take some time. Currently there are no ongoing attempts, either at a governmental or other level, for clarification of these management issues, except the planning of budgets for compensation to owners in Natura 2000 sites under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

On other hand there is an extensive experience in management of Nature Parks in Bulgaria. According to Art. 52(2) of the Protected Areas Act, "The National Forestry Board with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry shall establish specialised Nature Park Directorates for execution of the management plans of the nature parks". Currently the 10 Nature Parks in the country all have their own directorates, along with staff, funds, and activity plans. Their experience (successes and failures) can be studied and used. Some of them are already implementing approved Management Plans (e.g. Vitosha, Sinite Kamani, Russenski Lom, Rilski Manastir), while others are working only with annual projects and budgets, awaiting the approval of the respective draft management plan (e.g. Strandja, Persina).

The Nature Park Directorates are implementing conservation and monitoring actions, they are working for improving the public image of the protected territory, developing opportunities for sustainable tourism (information centres, eco-trails, rural tourism), publishing information and advertisement materials (brochures, books, maps, films). Some of the directorates are institutional members of the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism, and all of them are members of the Bulgarian Parks Association. They maintain good collaboration with scientific institutions, municipalities, NGOs and local businesses. At

the same time, ongoing pilot projects are being used to establish consultative councils involving the stakeholders in support of the directorates (Persina, Strandja).

The Nature Park category (according to the Bulgarian Protected Areas Act) is considered to correspond to the Category V of the IUCN categories, and combines in an optimal way conservation and development objectives. For this reason, Nature Park regimes are generally well-accepted by the local population and by many municipalities (in Eastern Rhodopes, in Belassitza, in Western Stara Planina). Also, debates are ongoing about legislative improvements in the Protected Areas Act in relation with the management of the Nature Parks, with the tendency to give more rights and responsibilities to the local communities.

#### Agency responsible for conservation in the Rhodope

Under the present circumstances, the RP is cooperating with two agencies that have a conservation mandate in the Rhodope region: the RIEWs, which are responsible for the small, already gazetted protected areas, and the RFBs, which are responsible for the many of the forests likely to be recognised as Natura 2000 sites. The advantage of the current approach is that the present mandates are clear; the disadvantages are that the area managed by the RIEWs is very small (there is no management responsibility for the Natura 2000 sites), and the RIEWs have many other responsibilities other than conservation. Similarly, the RFBs conservation mandate is very limited, as they are primarily forest production oriented. Under the first option mentioned above, the institutional setting will remain the same, but under the second option, MAF will have to establish two Nature Park Directorates for managing the new (smaller) Nature Parks. The advantage is that much larger tracts are actively managed as conservation areas, and that a single agency (the NPD) has management responsibility that extends over a large area.

Another option would be cooperating with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW), who are at present designing and implementing (part of) the government's decentralisation programme. At present there is no state structure able to replace the foreseen nature park administration functions, but these could be developed. The National Decentralisation Plan that is currently being developed could be used as a vehicle of change, and one of the changes that could be suggested to the Decentralisation Working Group of the Council of Ministers is that structures for regional planning and coordination (in our case, in support of the RP) be put in place. The advantage is that this would ultimately have a legal status (unlike the Association of Rhodope Municipalities), and could provide the institutional framework needed for sustainability and continuity of environmental plans developed under the RP.

In practice, however, there are a number of complications. The decentralisation process is to be discussed until 2008, and only after that date will implementation of the developed decentralisation plan actually begin. Also, it is not completely clear whether the process will finish by the start of 2008 (January) or by the end of 2008 (December). In either case, though, working through the MRDPW would leave the RP in an institutional limbo until then. The best approach for now – and for the RP – will be to work with its current partners (MAF, MoEW and their structures), but liaising with the MRDPW, and attempt to establish an adequate management of conservation areas or at least a sustainable process leading up to this.

Under all circumstances, the RP needs to cooperate with the municipalities (e.g. via the MFGs), but also with agencies such as the RIEWs (who manage PAs other than NPs) and RFBs (who manage state forests). In addition, the RP may also cooperate with NGOs, who may be recruited by MoEW or the municipalities to manage state or municipally recognised conservation areas. There is already a precedent for an NGO managing a state PA – BirdLife is currently managing a reserve in Eastern Rhodope for MoEW, under a formal agreement.

#### Approaches to conservation management in the Rhodope region

Several different institutional approaches for conservation management in the Rhodope region are elaborated in Table 1. The original concept is the Nature Park approach as outlined in the Project Document, which is no longer an option. The current approach being used by the Rhodope Project is also elaborated - the disadvantages of the current approach is that conservation areas remain small, and as a result the agencies have mandate over only a small area. As a result, the impact of the Project will remain small.

The RP Team has indicated to MAF and MoEW that if the two large NPs are not established, the RP is ready to support 4-5 five smaller Nature Parks, primarily on state lands or based on areas containing large tracks of proposed SPAs and SACs. Alternatively, areas with combined SPAs and SACs could be “upgraded” from Protected Zones under the Biodiversity Protection Act to a category under the Protected Areas Act. Also, designation of NATURA 2000 sites should start immediately in the Rhodope, taking precedence over other areas in Bulgaria.

A number of alternative options have been investigated by the Evaluation Team, but more of these are mainly theoretical, as in the current situation they have a low viability. The main issues facing these alternatives is that MoEW is unwilling to designate new areas, and approaches via MRDPW will require a long time to develop – longer than is available to the RP. The best approach for the RP seems to be continuing with the current approach, but also adding some new elements:

1. Emphasizing a wide range of conservation areas, including the existing network of small MoEW PAs (Reserve, Nature Monument, Protected Site), forested areas that comprise most of the Natura 2000 sites, and possibly expanding these with sites recognised at a local or municipal level.
2. Cooperating closely with a wide range of agencies on conservation matters, including MoEW, RIEWs, RFBs, municipalities and MFGs (as is already occurring), but adding to this cooperation with conservation NGOs and local interest groups (e.g. ecotourism groups eager to conserve areas of local importance).
3. Recognising that coordination of these conservation activities will be required, the RP should fill this gap for the time being, but strive to assist MRDPW in developing such capacity. This may not be achievable during the life of the project, but the RP should at least work towards this goal.
4. The overarching goal is conservation of globally significant biodiversity, and as information from the baseline surveys becomes available, this should form the basis for a clear strategy of which areas are to be targeted. Areas are to be listed according to their priority, and RP activities focused accordingly.

TABLE 1.

## Approaches to conservation management in the Rhodope region

	Original concept Nature Park approach	Current RP approach	Alternatives	Viability of alternative
Conservation areas	The extent of the Nature Parks will cover approx. 2,500 km <sup>2</sup> in Eastern Rhodope and approx. 4,000 km <sup>2</sup> in the Western Rhodope.	Existing smaller protected areas managed by the RIEWs (0.5-600 ha each). Perhaps additional ones added, guided by municipal priorities.	Smaller Nature Park(s) (about 25% of the original area has been proposed, which would be about 150,000 ha)	Low, as MoEW has expressed unwillingness to designate new PAs.
Conservation status	Nature Parks (designated by MoEW)	Other than Nature Parks (i.e. Reserve, Nature Monument, Protected Site) managed by MoEW. Natura 2000 sites (no official conservation status).	In addition, also Nature Parks (designated by MoEW, managed by MAF).	Low, as MoEW has expressed unwillingness to designate new PAs.
Main agency in Rhodope managing conservation areas and issues	Two Nature Park Directorates, one for Western Rhodope in Smolyan, one for Eastern Rhodope in Kurdjali (under MAF)	RIEWs for small conservation areas.  RFBs for forested areas that comprise most of the Natura 2000 sites	Nature Park Directorate(s) for new Nature Parks (under MAF).  Regional agency installed by Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, with mandate for conservation issues.  Cooperation with conservation NGOs.	Low, as MoEW has expressed unwillingness to designate new PAs.  Low, for even if MRDPW is willing, it is unlikely to be actively involved in conservation activities before the end of the RP.  Medium; few examples exist, but these are positive.
Cooperating agencies	Regional Forestry Boards, and to a lesser extent the RIEWs,	Mainly municipalities and MFGs, but also RFBs and RIEWs.	More emphasis on RIEWs for small conservation areas, and RFBs for forested areas that comprise most of the Natura 2000 sites; NGOs for small Protected Areas.	Medium to high; but without a central coordination.

## 4.4

## INFORMATION BASELINES

## Recommendations regarding the surveys program

The data available on the current status of the biodiversity in the Rhodope is regarded as insufficient. Currently, there are few alternative opportunities for studies and inventories with expert participation other than on the RP and Natura 2000. The biodiversity (species and habitats) surveys should therefore continue, especially in areas that have never or not recently been studied (e.g. the border areas, some parts of Central Rhodope). After the past two field seasons it is advisable to now present the results to the scientific and conservation community, and to solicit recommendations for continuation of the activity.

The general species and habitats surveys have to be further extended to detailed inventories of territories, especially of protected areas. The information collected should be integrated in the biodiversity database and published in order to serve management, education and scientific purposes.

The scientific surveys should continue also in the framework of elaboration of management plans for selected protected areas or action plans for important species. Existing or ongoing surveys implemented by other projects have to be carefully scrutinised and analysed for their relevance. For example, the studies for identification of Natura 2000 sites being implemented by some NGOs are made with this specific task (i.e. identifying Natura 2000 sites), and do not necessarily cover all aspects of biodiversity. The studies are occasionally carried out by non-professionals, under time constraints, and may therefore be superficial at times.

## Recommendations regarding biodiversity database and GIS

As it is foreseen, the biodiversity database and GIS developed by the RP will be distributed free of charge to interested institutions and organisations, and posted on the internet. During the Project, the database will be further complemented with collected data. The Project has to take the responsibility of updating the versions of the database provided to local partners at least once per year. Parallel to this, a special effort should be made in identifying the appropriate institutional setting, where the database and GIS may be housed, accessed and maintained after the life of the Project. The discussion on this issue should include Government agencies, academia and NGOs. In the absence of the Nature Park Directorates, this institution could be:

- the Executive Environmental Agency of MoEW (in the frame of the biodiversity monitoring system) and the respective RIEWs; and/or
- an environmental NGO (local or national).

Such an institution assuming the sustainability of the database and GIS should be selected soon (during the coming year) in order to develop its capacity during the Project implementation. Practically, the maintenance of the database in the second half of the RP life could be outsourced to this institution (in the case that this is an environmental NGO), under the supervision of the Landscape Planning Specialist of the RP team. If such an institution is not identified, the database and GIS will be only partially used, and only eventually updated by the RIEWs, RFBs, municipal and district administrations.

### Recommendations for biodiversity M&E

On national scale, biodiversity monitoring will be based on the Framework for Development of a National Biodiversity and Protected Areas Monitoring System in Bulgaria (developed by the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation; <http://monitoring.biodiversity.bg/english/>). Currently, a large-scale project financed by Senter Internationaal – EVD and executed by Ameco Environmental Services with the Bulgarian NGO Borrowed Nature ([http://chm.moew.government.bg/spec/PrjFinal\\_En.cfm?S\\_Prj\\_ID=72](http://chm.moew.government.bg/spec/PrjFinal_En.cfm?S_Prj_ID=72)) is developing this national biodiversity monitoring system. The RP should continue its collaboration with the Executive Environmental Agency of MoEW, in order to integrate its efforts into the national system. These efforts should include:

- further development of the sustainability of the Voluntary Monitoring Groups established by the RP. One possible option is to develop capacity of some locally based NGOs to maintain these groups. Another option is to have these groups organised (and supported) by the RIEWs – in the frame of their biodiversity monitoring and education activities.
- support to the biodiversity monitoring capacity building of the RIEWs, RFBs and municipalities – by providing training, specific consultations and coaching, documentation and equipment.

## 4.5

### MONITORING & EVALUATION PROGRAMME

#### Interpreting M&E

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can be interpreted in various ways, as can be seen by the inconsistencies within the Project Document, and between Project Document and the way in which the RP is operating (see 3.3.4.). Three basic approaches to M&E are outlined below:

- Environmental M&E. In its narrowest sense, monitoring and evaluation on environmental projects can be interpreted as monitoring of the changes – either positive or negative – in the environment. For conservation projects, this is not an uncommon approach, and sound arguments can be made promoting this. Environmental M&E can be carried out in many ways, for example, by using interpretation of remote sensing (RS) imagery to detect changes, or by carrying out surveys along fixed routes or in permanent plots to detect changes, or by monitoring population changes in certain key species. The Project Document refers to being linked to Output 2, which is about establishing information baselines, and the APR refers to having established a Voluntary Monitoring Network in output target 2.2. This network collected data in the field on certain key species, and this activity can be seen as part of this type of M&E.
- Project Results M&E. As with Environmental M&E, this also focuses on measuring the effects of the Project, but then in a broader sense. On the Rhodope Project, Project Results M&E would measure effects on the environment (as above), but also include assessing and monitoring changes in public attitude, for example, the degree in which organic farming methods are adopted, or the number of forestry enterprises that are certified by the FSC. The results of the evaluation would then result in a change in approach by the RP if a certain line of approach appears ineffective, or amplifying a certain approach if this seems to be particularly effective.



- Project implementation M&E. This is a formal type of M&E that focuses on whether certain activities that are included in a proposal and/or work plan have indeed been carried out. It is more of an administrative exercise, whereby activities are 'ticked off' as having occurred, but without directly linking this to effectiveness. This type of M&E is formalised in Quarterly Reports, APR/PIR reports, and to some extent also in external evaluations. These reports do touch upon effectiveness to some degree, but this is usually limited in its assessment.

Recommendations for the RP

Output 5 should be reworded as 'Monitoring & Evaluation of Project Results' rather than 'Monitoring/evaluation applied as a tool for capacity building of stakeholders', which is too convoluted. The following output targets can then be formulated:

- Monitoring and evaluation of changes in habitat and the environment at large. This would largely consist of RS/GIS work, as already is being implemented by the RP, and would also include work by the Volunteer Monitoring Groups.
- Monitoring and evaluation of changes in attitude and perception. As mentioned above, this can include the attitude of the general public towards conservation, degree in which organic farming methods are adopted by local farmers, and the number of forestry enterprises that are certified by the FSC. The RP can possibly identify one or two more, but these would seem to be some of the key ones.

These should then be included in the proposed new Output 2 Biodiversity conservation management established, both at landscape and at local level, and as a general project objective indicator #3. (please see Table 2 page 51)

Formal monitoring and evaluation of Project progress, in the form of evaluating if activities have been carried out or not, should be included as part of overall Project management (new Output 4), and not included under (old) Output 5.

Similarly, the assessing and communicating of lessons learned on the Project should not be included in the M&E output, but be part of the overall communications and PR strategy. This should form part of the RP's activities aimed at increasing capacity. Output 6 on Institutional Capacity Building would therefore seem the correct 'address' for this activity.

## 4.6

### PRODUCING TANGIBLE RESULTS

The need for having pilot demonstration projects implemented in the framework of the RP is well motivated in the Project documents. It is proven by practice that nature conservation and sustainable development ideas have to be demonstrated in order to be well understood and accepted by local communities. Bearing in mind the limited resources of the RP (relative to the region covered), the main question to be resolved is how to develop these pilot projects. Options that may be considered are:

- Announcing a competition for small grants for projects in the field of sustainable forestry, (eco-)tourism or (organic-)farming, with requirement for an important share of co-financing (50%?), and with a preference for projects demonstrating partnerships (e.g. groups of municipalities). Guidelines on which type of project will be considered for funding need to be distributed and widely understood. This approach is similar to



previous or existing funding schemes (e.g. PHARE Eco-tourism, PHARE CBC, SAPARD, GEF SGP, etc.). In order to be able to cover the entire Rhodope region with small projects, the amount of money distributed to each pilot project would have to be relatively small (maximum of US\$20,000 each, not including co-funding). The approach will have to rely on local initiatives, and in practice it means just adding a small grants distribution component to the RP. It would probably not have enough reach to have a real 'landscape dimension' (e.g. at regional level).

- Giving some lump sum to each municipality (equal or proportional to the area of the municipality, up to US\$ 20,000 each), managed under the responsibility of the MFG. The members of the MFG would have to decide how to use the money, using guidelines developed by the RP (that include conditions and limitations). This approach will empower the MFGs, and could be used for a better positioning of these groups. One weakness of this approach is the fact that the MFGs are often not entirely representative, as they are often dominated by municipality officials and include only individual business entrepreneurs. Again, the approach will not provide opportunities for large-scale projects.
- Identifying the appropriate pilot projects at a regional level on the base of existing information and ideas of partner organisations. With this approach, the pilot projects would be considered as a sub-component of the RP, and plans would be drawn up by the project team (perhaps augmented with specific external expertise). This is one relatively easy way to develop a few larger-scale projects (e.g. at a regional level), producing maximum demonstration effect. Some examples of include:
  - the project of Agrolink for GMO-free zone in the Rhodope, which can be developed into a project for development of a regional label for ecological food products;
  - the long running project of BAAT for a large-scale eco- and rural tourism products "The route of the Rhodope handicrafts";
  - the ideas of the Bulgarian Mycological Society for improving the mushroom collection system, etc.)

With this approach, there is no competition between the different municipalities, and no threat of them being disappointed. The developments would be considered as project implementation and have not to be subject to tendering procedures.

- Developing pilot projects on the basis of the existing or identified protected territories/zones. In the non-parks situation, the RP has to focus more on zones of high nature value identified before the project, or identified during the surveys of the first two years. The alternative "small parks" scenario needs to be mentioned here, as two important territories in the Eastern Rhodope – Madjarovo and Biala Reka, - and three important territories in the Western Rhodope – Dobrostan-Prespa, Kastrakli-Trigrad and North-Western Rhodope have been recognised as being of conservation importance. These areas are large – each including one or more municipalities and containing some existing protected areas and important biodiversity. Relating the pilot projects (say, up to US\$ 100,000 each) to such medium-scale protected areas makes it possible to use the landscape approach, favour the collaboration between municipalities and other institutions, and to demonstrate the practical economic use of protected areas to the local communities.

## CHAPTER

# 5

## Revising the Log-frame & institutional setup

## 5.1

## CHANGES TO THE LOGFRAME

## 5.1.1

## RP PMU - PROPOSAL FOR REVISION OF INDICATORS &amp; LOGFRAME

A “Proposal for revised version of the Rhodope Project Indicators and Project Log-frame” has been produced by the PMU in working-level consultation with UNDP, the MAF and MOEW, and forms: i) an analysis of the relationship between Project indicators, and the Project objectives, outputs and activities; ii) a proposal for options for simplification of the Project log-frame; and iii) strengthening of the Project indicators. The reason for conducting this was the PIR of July 2005, whereby the following difficulties were identified:

- Some indicators were meaningful, but difficult to determine;
- Some were too impractical and costly in terms of obtaining data;
- Some were very specific and with a narrow (activity) focus;
- Others were overlapping.

24 (41%) of the indicators are activity-related (good for day-to-day Project management), which is contradictory to the logframe approach that focuses on objective and output related indicators. Output indicators are seldom determined by the sum of activity indicators, and a separate, specific output indicator is to be formulated.

Simplification resulted basically in deleting the log-frame activity indicators, and a removal of overlapping indicators. This has been followed by a rewording of the Project indicators and activities. The reworded version also caters to both the non park and nature park scenarios. According to the authors, the revised version resulted in 24 Project indicators (compared to 65 originally), of which 2 are objective indicators and 22 are output indicators. In the revised log-frame (Annex 7; attached here as Annex 8), however, there are 6 objective indicators and 24 output objectives.

Overall, the revised version has resulted in simplification, but nevertheless the Evaluation Team finds that 7 outputs are still too many (this is still double that of an average GEF project), and proposes a further simplification of the project structure (see 5.1.3). Establishing of baselines and securing of finances, for example, are usually not identified as separate outputs, but added as a component of other outputs. Also, Output 4: Monitoring/

Evaluation (M&E) applied as tool for stakeholders capacity building is not regarded as a clear output (see 5.1.2 and 5.1.3).

In addition, the Evaluation Team has the following comments on Annex 7 (Attached here as Annex 8):

- Project Objective indicator 2: Will the baseline survey now being finalized by the RP provide quantifiable data against which one can measure the change in perception?
- Project Objective indicator 2(red): Are the areas with management plans a suitable indicator for measuring areas used for ecotourism under biodiversity sensitive management?
- Output 1, indicator 1. Staff assigned – this is not the same as based at site, or actively involved in management; could be “on paper” only.
- Output 2, indicator 3. Data on species. Shouldn’t this specify the number of species, or key species?
- Output 5, indicators 1 and 2: remove ‘starting end of year 2’.
- Output 5, indicator 4: what is the 15 for?
- Output 6, indicator 1: The RP aims to have at least 20 farmers interested in adopting organic farming, though participation in RP training, seminars, workshops and receive technical support. However, how does one specify organic agriculture? In communities that may be too poor to afford fertilizers and pesticides, ‘organic farming’ may be the norm.
- Output 6, indicator 2: 40 farmers utilizing indigenous breeds. What is the baseline? Surely not all farmers have lost indigenous breeds? The RP aims to have at least 40 farmers interested in adopting indigenous breeds, though participation in RP training, seminars, workshops and receive technical support.
- Output 6, indicator 3: At least 4 forest plots are certified. The RP sees this to be undertaken by international certifiers, most likely under the FSC certification type; however, this should be specified.
- Output 6, indicator 6: Small hotels (B&B) operate under “green” guidelines As explained by the RP, Green guidelines are guidelines developed through broad stakeholder participation under the RP. The green guidelines mimic a certification scheme without being official. However the RP in this connection follows very closely the efforts made in Europe on a common certification system and if possible will align itself to such a system. If a certification common for the EU system is agreed upon during the lifetime of the project, the RP will support its certification. Again, this should be specified.

## 5.1.2

### PROJECT COMPLEXITY

#### Assessment of Project complexity

The general impression of the Rhodope Project is that the design is too complex, which leads to difficulties for Project management, and for Project monitoring and evaluation. This has been voiced by UNDP, Project team, and is also the impression of the present evaluation team. Most GEF projects have 3-4 (rarely 5) project components or outputs, while the RP has 8. At the same time, the RP also has 65 indicators – that all need to be monitored for Project M&E – and 110 activities. The activities also seem to provide too much detail – in many GEF

projects, only indicative activities are listed, and these are further worked out during the Project's Inception Phase or during project implementation. This is often done for very practical reasons, as on many projects it may take several years for a project to move from proposal (-design) to project implementation, and the project context may have changed considerably. Also, new needs or opportunities may arise, and a project should not be straight-jacketed by a rigid, highly detailed design.

Much of the Project complexity arises from levels of detail provided – which is the Project design equivalent of painting oneself into a corner. Also, a number of outputs that could have logically been combined, have instead been split into separate outputs. Examples of the latter are:

- Output 1 - Eastern & Western Rhodope Nature Parks established and collaborative management structure is operational, and Output 8 - Secure financing for sustainability of applied conservation and cross-sector coordination. These should logically be combined, as establishing a structure and seeking sustainable financial support for enabling continuity of these structures and their activities are naturally closely linked.
- Output 3- Landscape-based approach to conservation established and operational, and Output 4 – Priority conservation areas established and sustainable management regimes piloted. These two outputs involve the same actors, and largely the same approach, the only difference is one of scale (landscape versus priority areas) and detail.
- Output 3 - Landscape-based approach to conservation established and operational, and Output 7 – Forestry, tourism and farming practices are re-oriented to support conservation while improving livelihoods. It is clear that in order to operationalise a landscape-based approach to conservation, you will need to re-orient the main economic sectors affecting the region, including forestry, tourism and farming.

#### Assessment of Project's prioritisation of Project activities

To date, the RP has primarily focused on establishing of MFGs, gathering baseline data and incorporating these into a GIS/database, environmental/conservation planning, workshops, meetings and provision of training. The prioritisation by the RP to date seems to be appropriate, as the four main thrusts up to now are all required as a basis upon which to establish environmental planning & management: i) creating institutional framework; ii) provision of baseline data; iii) planning for conservation and environmental management, and iv) capacity building.

Now that these four are more-or-less in place (although they will be added to over the remaining project period), more tangible outputs will be required. These should be mainly in the field of providing concrete examples of sustainable livelihoods (based on sound market analysis), and the implementation of concrete and recognisable conservation activities. Recommendations for these are provided in 5.1.3.

## 5.1.3

## REDUCING PROJECT COMPLEXITY

Recommendations for simplification of the Project outputs

In 5.1.2 it was assessed that the RP was overly complex, and that this was primarily due to provision of too much detail (i.e. at activity/indicator level), and splitting of outputs into various closely linked outputs that should have logically been combined. Project complexity at the output level could be reduced in the following way:

Output 1: Eastern & Western Rhodope Nature Parks established and collaborative management structure is operational.

As the two NPs are unlikely to be designated anytime soon, the output should be reworded as “Establishing an institutional framework for conservation and sustainable use of species, habitats and landscapes in the Rhodope region, based on stakeholder participation and collaboration”. Activities should include MFGs, and possible new structures envisaged under collaboration with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. Output 8: Secure financing for sustainability of applied conservation and cross-sectoral coordination should be reduced to the level of activity (or a subset of several related activities) under the reworded output 1.

Output 2: Information baseline established and strengthened as basis for adaptive management.

Data collection and database establishment is carried out for the purpose of managing proposed conservation areas and for sustainable management of landscapes. For this reason, it is proposed that this is included as an activity under outputs 3&4.

Output 3: Landscape-based approach to conservation established and operational.

Output 4: Priority conservation areas established and sustainable management regimes established within each Nature Park.

Outputs 3 and 4 could be combined in one new Output aimed at Establishing biodiversity conservation management at landscape level (old output 3) and at a more detailed local level (old output 4). Output 7: Forestry, tourism and farming practices are re-oriented to support conservation while improving livelihoods. This output could also largely fit under this new output, as aligning municipal and private sector priorities with landscape conservation logically combines with establishing and operationalising the landscape-based approach to conservation. In fact, in order to operationalise the latter, you will need to align this with municipal and private sector approaches. The demonstration model activities (old 7.2, 7.3 & 7.4) are also a practical part of the operationalisation process, and together fall under a category: demonstration of sustainable livelihoods.

Output 5: Monitoring/evaluation applied as tool for capacity building of stakeholders.

This output has led to a lot of confusion on the RP (dealt with in 3.3.4), as it is not clear whether M&E consists of Project implementation monitoring, monitoring of Project results/effectiveness, or monitoring of the environment. As recommended in 4.5, monitoring and evaluation of changes in habitat and the environment at large would largely consist of RS/GIS work, and this should therefore be included in the combined Output 3&4, along with information baselines. The same should also hold for species monitoring. Monitoring

of changes in perception and attitude should become part of an overall capacity building output (new). M&E of Project implementation should simply be part of Project management.

Output 6: Institutional capacity to integrate biodiversity and ecosystem management objectives into productive sector programmes is strengthened.

This should be re-worded into a Capacity building programme in support of conservation and sustainable landscape management. This should include capacity building at various levels:

- Institutional capacity building at local, municipal, and regional level in support of environmental management and conservation planning. This is to include training sessions, meetings, workshops, and planning sessions.
- Increasing environmental and conservation awareness at local and municipal levels. This would include all general awareness campaigns, including those with school children, but also environmental valuation studies that help increase environmental awareness of planners. <monitoring of changes in perception (part of old output 5) becomes part of this activity>
- Capacity building for establishing sustainable livelihoods. This would include training for ecotourism, organic farming and sustainable forestry, but also include supporting activities such as market analyses.

In the revised structure you would then have the following outputs:

- Output 1: Institutional framework & support for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity established. This would incorporate old outputs 1 & 8.
- Output 2: Biodiversity conservation management planned & implemented in the Rhodope region, both at landscape and local level. This would incorporate old outputs 2, 3, 4, part of 5 & 7.
- Output 3: Capacity building programme in support of conservation and sustainable landscape management. This would consist of old output 6, but also elements of other outputs where these were related to training. It also includes part of old output 5, related to monitoring of changes in perception.
- Output 4: Project management.  
This would include overall Project management, PMU, the RSCs, Project administration and M&E of Project implementation (now included under old output 5).

#### Recommendations for prioritisation of activities

Establishment of small PAs. A biodiversity conservation project such as the RP needs to be clearly recognisable as such, but with the non-designation of the two Nature Parks, the Project runs the risk of losing its conservation focus, and being perceived as a sustainable development project instead. It should therefore prioritise actions with a clear conservation focus and develop (clusters of) activities around these. First and foremost would be the identification of small areas that are critical for biodiversity conservation, establishing local

and regional agreements for conserving/protecting these, formulating management plans for these sites together with stakeholders, and developing small PA infrastructure such as signboards, trails and so on. The latter could be carried out in conjunction with small-scale ecotourism associations, which could assume responsibility for infrastructure maintenance, until formal gazettal and MoEW support is provided.

Designation of larger PAs. Although the focus should be on the small scale protection of key conservation areas, at the same time the Project should not lose sight of the original goal of designation of larger protected areas, even though designation might not occur within the life of the Project. Attention within MoEW on the Rhodope region has shifted from the two proposed Nature Parks to establishing the network Natura 2000 sites – understandably, as this is one of the requirements for EU accession in 2007. The Natura 2000 programme involves identification of sites (based on the EU’s Bird and Habitat Directives), surveying, mapping and preparation of management plans. However, these Natura 2000 sites do not eliminate the need for national PA networks, as Natura 2000 sites as such are not actively managed, but are only monitored for change, and penalties handed out to those impinging on the integrity of such sites.

It has been suggested by the RP Team and UNDP that production of Management Plans for Natura 2000 sites might be an important niche for the project. However, the Evaluation Team does not think that it would be useful to prepare management plans for Natura 2000 sites in the absence of management bodies for these sites. The question is then, who would implement these plans? Rather than developing documents that end up on shelves, it is better to work towards the integration of the biodiversity issues in the municipal/district plans (which the RP is already doing), and for the improvement of forest management plans. Management plans for existing (or future) small Protected Areas is another opportunity, as these PAs do have their responsible institutions, and there is a good chance that these plans will be implemented.

The RP should assess possibilities for uniting smaller PAs (protecting key biodiversity hotspots) into larger conservation areas, and actively pursue official designation by MoEW. In strategic documents such as the “How to proceed with the RP under non-designation of NPs” it is stated that the GEF would not accept designation of Nature Parks that amount to only 25% of the originally proposed area. However, this is unlikely. The original proposal of designating Rhodope Eastern and Western NPs was highly ambitious, and this has perhaps proved to be its undoing. Under the present circumstances, designation of smaller areas is preferable to no official protection status at all. Size and prestige should not be the main issue – the RP and MoEW should assess if key areas are afforded protection, and if the protected areas are large enough to support viable populations of key species.

Demonstration projects. Now that the Project has assisted by developing local capacities (by means of training), and assisted in the formulation of local and regional development plans that incorporate conservation and sustainable development principles, more tangible results are required. These are needed in order to serve as concrete examples (e.g. of ecotourism, organic farming, agri-environment and sustainable forestry), as this is what stakeholders are keen to see, instead of yet more theoretical examples and further training. Such tangible results can be in the form of demonstration projects, which up to now have

been held up. This has partially been because of for administrative reasons, but partially also because of a misconception by the RP team that co-funding of demonstration projects with GEF funds would be difficult, as these supposedly need to be based on competitive bidding. The latter has been discussed with UNDP, and it has been agreed that proposals (based on various ideas and approaches) submitted to RP and MFGs could compete amongst themselves. This would eliminate the need for competitive bidding on one type of approach or idea, and therefore not discourage submittal of proposals for co-funding. Also, the focus should not only be on large scale enterprises and entrepreneurs, as the chances of replication is smaller (there are few to follow suit). In addition, cumulative impacts of many small-scale enterprises may be greater. One reason why the RP has been slow in setting up demonstration projects is because it is in the process of verifying what successful examples already exist, for instance, as part of the UNDP JOBS Project<sup>17</sup>. The question here is whether new demonstration sites are really needed or whether already existing sites can be used to disseminate best practices.

Markets and producer associations. Prior to the development of demonstration projects, however, the RP should investigate the markets available for produce of organic farming, certified timber, and from alternative farm produce, as it would be unwise to invest time, funds and efforts in products that in the end cannot be sold. This should not only focus on the local, regional and national market, but also on the international market, as the demand for organically produced vegetables, fruit, meat, eggs, herbs and so on, may be much greater (or be more rewarding) there than on the domestic market. Encouraging the development of producer associations should also be a high priority, as markets will demand larger and constant volumes of produce of a similar high quality, and this cannot be supplied or guaranteed by producers operating individually.

#### 5.1.4

#### EVALUATION TEAM'S PROPOSAL FOR REVISION OF INDICATORS AND LOGFRAME

In 5.1.3, a proposal for simplifying the Projects complexity was provided, which would reduce the original eight outputs to only four outputs, including Project management. The original Project Document output targets are listed below in Table 2, under the new outputs.

In Annex 5 a proposed revised log-frame is provided, which includes new key performance indicators, means of verification and risks/assumptions for the newly formulated Project outputs. The Project goal and Project objective have not been reformulated as these are based on general consensus with the GEF, MAF and other major stakeholders. However, indicators and risks/assumptions have been slightly reworded.

The revised log-frame lists 15 output indicators, along with the original 6 objective indicators. Two management indicators have further been added.

<sup>17</sup> Project "Job Opportunities through Business Support" ("JOBS") is a joint large-scale initiative of UNDP and the Bulgarian Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, evolving nationwide over the period 2000-2007, and targeting the boost of employment and economic development through support to micro enterprises and SMEs by a network of especially created self-sustainable business support centers and business incubators.



TABLE 2.  
New outputs & original  
output targets

New Outputs	Original Project Document output targets
Output 1: Establishing an institutional framework for conservation and sustainable use of species, habitats and landscapes in the Rhodope region, based on stakeholder participation and collaboration.	<p>1.1 Public consulted on Nature Park issues and project offices established.</p> <p>1.2 Nature parks established.</p> <p>1.3 NPDs collaborative management capacity strengthened.</p> <p>8.1 Determine how international funding systems and EU incentive mechanisms can support the long-term funding of landscape conservation.</p> <p>8.2 Determine national options for financial incentives and mechanisms for the integration of nature conservation principles into the productive sector practice.</p>
Output 2: Establishing biodiversity conservation management, both at landscape level and at a local level.	<p>2.1 Biodiversity surveys &amp; targeted research conducted.</p> <p>2.2 Monitoring protocols established and implemented.</p> <p>2.3 GIS systems upgraded and maintained.</p> <p>3.1 'Conservation landscape' or 'Living landscape' defined and elaborated in terms of species, ecosystems and land-use.</p> <p>3.2 Landscape maps developed and distributed.</p> <p>3.3 Conservation plans for priority endangered species and ecological processes.</p> <p>3.4 nature park management plans developed and key components implemented.</p> <p>4.1 Priority areas in each Nature Park defined.</p> <p>4.2 Management plans and/or conservation agreements for priority areas developed.</p> <p>4.3 Capacity for participatory natural resources management at the regional/municipal level for priority areas is increased.</p> <p>4.4 Conservation policies and regulations enforcement strengthened.</p> <p>5.3 Best and worst practices shared among stakeholders, projects and other interested parties.</p> <p>7.1 Municipal and private sector priorities with landscape conservation priorities aligned.</p> <p>7.2 Sustainable forestry demonstrated.</p> <p>7.3 Sustainable agriculture demonstrated.</p> <p>7.4 Sustainable tourism demonstrated.</p>
Output 3: Capacity building programme in support of conservation and sustainable landscape management.	<p>5.1 Informal M&amp;E performed and documented.</p> <p>6.1 Values &amp; benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem health quantified.</p> <p>6.2 Technical capacity for integration of biodiversity &amp; ecosystem health considerations into sector programmes enhanced.</p> <p>6.3 Technical capacity for biodiversity conservation &amp; ecosystem management enhanced.</p> <p>6.4 Implementation of existing laws to integrate biodiversity into productive sectors strengthened.</p>
Output 4: Project management.	5.2 Formal M&E performed and documented.

## 5.2

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

- Recommendations for cooperation with other government agencies
- Recommendations for cooperation with NGOs (Ecologists Association, Association of Municipalities of Rhodope region, etc...) & private sector.

Recommendations for extending existing cooperation with MAF & MoEW

The current institutional setting of the RP within MAF should be re-assessed. Originally, basing the RP within MAF made sense, as four of the original eight outputs were based on the designation of the two Nature Parks, and the establishment by MAF of two NP Directorates for managing the two NPs. However, as designation has not occurred, the relationship with MAF is not as obvious as it was. Admittedly, many of the areas of biodiversity concern in the Rhodope region are forests managed by MAF. On the other hand, MAF's institutional capacity for biodiversity management is very limited, both at headquarters and in the field, and concern for conservation is hardly reflected in the ministry's organisational structure. Also, MAF has not been able to support the RP to the degree as was originally intended: the Project has had to find (and pay) for its office facilities, both in Sofia and Kurdjali, while in Smolyan this is provided by the municipality. One of the options for Project continuation in the non-designation of NP scenario is the designation of several smaller NPs (about 25% of original area). If this option is chosen as the way forward, then continuation with MAF in its current role is warranted.

At the same time, the relationship with MoEW is changing. The emphasis for conservation efforts in Bulgaria has shifted towards meeting the requirements of the EU, and establishing a network of Natura 2000 sites. This is being implemented by MoEW, supported by a host of national research institutes and several major NGOs (esp. BirdLife, Green Balkans). One of the options for Project continuation is the non-designation of NP scenario is for MoEW to gazette smaller PAs (e.g. reserves, nature monument or protected site) – these would be managed by the RIEWs, which are part of MoEW. At the same time, a way of more active management of Natura 2000 sites could be envisaged. In such a scenario it would make more sense to cooperate more closely with MoEW, and to loosen the links with MAF.

## 5.3

EFFECT OF CHANGES TO LOGFRAME & INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK ON SUSTAINABILITY

The changes to the log-frame – especially reducing the number of outputs and indicators – would make the Project easier to manage. Project administration would be less of a burden, and the PMU would also have more flexibility, as the indicators are not as detailed as they were in the original logframe.

Continuity should also not be an issue, as the same team would continue, perhaps expanded with 1-2 extra staff, with revised TORs that would be clearer and provide a better way forward for successful management.

On the whole, the changes would enhance the chances of success of the Project, lead to more concrete outputs, which is what the stakeholders would like to see. Sustainability depends on the stakeholders, and the more they are willing to absorb and take on board, the better, and they are more likely to do so if the Project matches their need for tangible results and support in this area.

## CHAPTER

# 6

## Key recommendations & steps to be undertaken

## 6.1

## KEY RECOMEMNDATIONS

The following key recommendations follow from the previous chapters:

### Overall

The Rhodope Project has been designed primarily as a planning and capacity-building project, with few concrete, on-the-ground outputs. The success of the RP would be boosted if more tangible results could be achieved, so that stakeholders are more likely to follow examples provided. Outputs should therefore be re-aligned so that more concrete demonstration and pilot projects (in the fields of 1. sustainable livelihoods and 2. nature conservation) can be implemented.

### 1. Project Management

1.1 The PSC should be used more effectively as a forum at which to lobby vigorously for obtaining the project outcomes and objectives. A strategy for this should be developed and discussed by the PMU and UNDP prior to the next PSC meeting(s). These partners should determine beforehand whether the aim is to be the original, large scale NPs, scaled down NPs, or significantly scaled down protected areas.

1.2 The PMU is to determine (with UNDP) what the future role of the RSCs is to be - that of an NGO or are they to disappear after the life of the Project? In the former case, a strategy for continuation as an NGO will need to be developed.

- 1.3 The TORs of some of the PMU members need to be revised:
- the tasks of the IPA need to be revisited: not to focus on overall Project management, but to focus on concrete outputs;
  - the PM is not to 'collaborate with the IPA', but to assume full responsibility; at the same time, lobbying among state institutions is to be added;
  - ToRs may be better structured, by grouping the different tasks into more general ones;
  - the combined job of PR and private sector development should be teased apart into two separate jobs.

1.4 The need for having all documents produced both in Bulgarian and English should be re-assessed, as this is putting an unnecessary burden on the Project team, and is costing significant amounts of time and Project funds, better spent elsewhere. It is recommended that all documents are produced in Bulgarian, and only key documents (e.g. strategic documents, annual reports) are translated into English. Documents by the IPA will be produced in English, of course, and will need to be translated into Bulgarian.

1.5 The RP should assess possibilities for institutionalising the MFGs, for example as 'municipal sounding-board groups' - not only for dialogue or discussion, but for assessing community ideas and maintaining a non-political link with local stakeholders. Such a sounding-board group should meet only once or twice a year, and intermediately to address certain issues that may arise. This would add continuity, and enhance the sustainability of some of the RP's achievements. Alternatively, MFGs could be registered as local NGOs for continuing their work.

## 2. Project structure

The Project structure is to be revised, with the following outputs:

2.1 Output 1: Establishing an institutional framework for conservation and sustainable use of species, habitats and landscapes in the Rhodope region, based on stakeholder participation and collaboration. This would incorporate old outputs 1 & 8.

2.2 Output 2: Establishing biodiversity conservation management, both at landscape level and at a local level. This would incorporate old outputs 2, 3, 4, part of 5 & 7.

2.3 Output 3: Capacity building programme in support of conservation and sustainable landscape management. This would consist of old output 6, but also elements of other outputs where these were related to training. It also includes part of old output 5, related to monitoring of changes in perception.

2.4 Output 4: Project management. This would include overall Project management, PMU, the RSCs, Project administration and M&E of Project implementation (now included under old output 5).

2.5 The revised Project log-frame is based on these four Outputs, resulting in 6 Objective indicators, 15 Output indicators and 2 Management indicators.

### 3. Prioritisation of activities

The following activities are to be prioritised:

3.1 Small PAs. The identification of small areas that are critical for biodiversity conservation, establishing local and regional agreements for conserving/protecting these, formulating management plans for these sites together with stakeholders, and developing small PA infrastructure such as signboards, trails and so on.

3.2 Designation of larger PAs. The RP should assess possibilities for uniting smaller PAs (protecting key biodiversity hotspots) into larger conservation areas, and actively pursue official designation by MoEW. UNDP can also play an important role in the designation process, as it can (and should, if the process stagnates) use its influence to persuade MoEW to not only focus on Natura 2000, and assist with the recognition and designation of NPs in the Rhodope region.

3.3 Demonstration projects. Tangible results are required in order to serve as concrete examples (e.g. of eco-tourism, organic farming, agri-environment and sustainable forestry), as this is urgently needed now to convince stakeholders and encourage replication.

3.4 Markets and producer associations. The RP should investigate the markets available for produce of organic farming, certified timber, and from alternative farm produce. Encouraging the development of producer associations is needed, as markets will demand larger and constant volumes of produce of a similar high quality.

3.5 Globally significant biodiversity. The overarching goal is conservation of globally significant biodiversity, and as information from the baseline surveys becomes available, this should form the basis for a clear strategy of which areas are to be targeted. Areas are to be listed according to their priority, and RP activities focused accordingly.

### 4. Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works

The RP is to investigate the option of cooperating with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, who are at present implementing (part of) the government's decentralisation programme. At present there is no state structure able to replace the foreseen nature park administration functions, but these could be developed. The National Decentralisation Plan that is currently being developed could be used as a vehicle for change, and one of the changes that could be suggested to the decentralisation Working Group of the Council of Ministers is that structures for regional planning and coordination (in our case, in support of the RP) be put in place.

## 5. Recommendations for the RP regarding monitoring & evaluation

5.1 Output 5 should be reworded as 'Monitoring & Evaluation of Project Results' rather than 'Monitoring/evaluation applied as a tool for capacity building of stakeholders', which is too convoluted. The following output targets can then be formulated:

- Monitoring and evaluation of changes in habitat and the environment at large. This would largely consist of RS/GIS work, as already is being implemented by the RP.
- Monitoring and evaluation of changes in attitude and perception. As mentioned above, this can include the attitude of the general public towards conservation, degree in which organic farming methods are adopted by local farmers, and the number of forestry enterprises that are certified by the FSC. The RP can possibly identify one or two more, but these would seem to be some of the key ones.

5.2 Formal monitoring and evaluation of Project progress, in the form of evaluating if activities have been carried out or not, should be included as part of overall Project management, and not included under output 5.

## 6.2

### STEPS REQUIRED FOR IMPROVING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

#### Short-term steps for strengthening RP

These are steps that are to be taken as soon as possible, and certainly within one year.

1. The RP is to investigate (before 31 March 2006) the option of cooperating with the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works on developing an institutional capacity in the Rhodope region, which can serve as a basis for regional planning and coordination (in support of the RP).
2. PMU and UNDP are to determine whether the aim is to be the original, large scale NPs, scaled down NPs, or significantly scaled down protected areas, and develop a strategy for achieving this.
3. The TORs of some of the PMU members need to be revised:
  - the tasks of the IPA need to be revisited: not involved in overall Project management, and with a focus on concrete outputs;
  - the PM is not to 'collaborate with the IPA', but to assume full responsibility; at the same time, lobbying among state institutions is to be added;
  - TORs may be better structured, by grouping the different tasks into more general ones;
  - the combined job of PR and private sector development should be teased apart into two separate jobs.
4. UNDP and the PMU are to assess the need for having each and every document produced both in Bulgarian and English. It is recommended that all documents are

produced in Bulgarian, and only key documents (e.g. strategic documents, annual reports) are translated into English.

5. The Project structure is to be revised, reducing the total number of outputs from eight to four:
  - Output 1: Establishing an institutional framework for conservation.
  - Output 2: Establishing biodiversity conservation management.
  - Output 3: Capacity building programme in support of conservation and sustainable landscape management.
  - Output 4: Project management.
6. The RP should investigate the markets available for produce of organic farming, certified timber, and from alternative farm produce. It should also encourage the development of producer associations, markets will demand larger and constant volumes of produce of a similar high quality.
7. Demonstration projects. Tangible results are required in order to serve as concrete examples (e.g. of eco-tourism, organic farming and sustainable forestry), as this is urgently needed now to convince stakeholders and encourage replication. What is required in the short-term are several pilot projects that are easy to implement, have an immediate effect, and can be used as examples of what can be done. <Only a small range of possible demonstration projects will meet these requirements, and this is what is required in the short-term>

#### Medium-term steps for strengthening RP

These are steps that are to be taken to strengthen the Project, and should be done within the next 1-2 years.

1. The PMU is to determine (with UNDP) what the future role of the RSCs is to be. If the RSCs are to continue (as an NGO, for example), a strategy for continuation will need to be developed.
2. Possibilities for institutionalising the MFGs (e.g. as a municipal sounding-board group) are to be examined, as this would add continuity, and enhance the sustainability of some of the RP's achievements.
3. Output 5 should be reworded as 'Monitoring & Evaluation of Project Results' rather than 'Monitoring/evaluation applied as a tool for capacity building of stakeholders', which is too convoluted. The following output targets can then be formulated:
  - Monitoring and evaluation of changes in habitat and the environment at large. This would largely consist of RS/GIS work, as already is being implemented by the RP.
  - Monitoring and evaluation of changes in attitude and perception. As mentioned above, this can include the attitude of the general public towards conservation, degree in which organic farming methods are adopted by local farmers, and the



number of forestry enterprises that are certified by the FSC. The RP can possibly identify one or two more, but these would seem to be some of the key ones.

4. Formal monitoring and evaluation of Project progress, in the form of evaluating if activities have been carried out or not, should be included as part of overall Project management, and not included under output 5.
5. Wider range of demonstration projects. Demonstration projects of sustainable livestock husbandry, organic farming and produce processing, eco-tourism and forestry are to be developed by the Project along different lines. This can be based on competition between proposals submitted by stakeholders for co-financing, project developed proposals, demonstration projects linked with conservation areas, or municipal proposals developed by MFGs.

## ANNEX 1

## TOR for assignment

Project No: 33627: Project short title: Rhodope

Terms of Reference for: An International & National Evaluators for the Assignment

Initial Project Evaluation:

Project management and implementation under UNDP/MAF Project “Conservation of Globally Significant Biodiversity in the landscape of Bulgaria’s Rhodope Mountains”  
Recommendations for the Way Forward.

## I. Background for the consultancy

### I. 1. General Context

The Bulgarian Rhodope Mountains covers more than 12,000 square kilometres and more than 40 municipalities fall either fully or partially within this mountain region. The Rhodope Mountains are divided into two distinct sub-regions differentiated by climatic and landscape characteristics: the Western Rhodope (WR) and the Eastern Rhodope (ER). The WR is largely forested, with over 70% coverage of mostly coniferous species with high mountain meadows and pasture lands occupying the remaining 30%. In contrast, only one-third of the ER is forested, primarily by deciduous forest; half of this is in plantation forestry. The remaining two-thirds of the ER landscape are comprised of large and diverse grassland, farmland and steppe areas.

The total population of the of the “Rhodope Projects” priority municipalities within the Rhodope region is approximately 500,000, of which between 40 to 50 percent live in city or village centres. The very centralized distribution of people has resulted in that vast areas of the Rhodope Mountains have a very low level of human habitation.

As for the rest of Bulgaria the Rhodope Region are experiencing high levels of unemployment as well as a low level of household income. In accordance job creation and improved livelihoods for the general populations is one of the most pressing issues for the regions municipalities and the district governments. The local authorities seek to address this by prioritizing activities related to infrastructure improvement and development, tourism (including sustainable tourism), improved agriculture, and effectuating the forestry sector, in addition to industry development.

Traditionally, there are two main sectors within the Rhodope Region, these are forestry and agriculture. Both sectors have received increased Governmental attention over the last couple of years particularly in connection with Bulgaria’s bid for EU accession. This has politically impacted the Rhodope Region, which is seen as both a rural and a mountainous area, which are two of the areas that are primary targets for support in the EU.

On the agricultural side the Rhodope region already in 2002 received partial attention with the presentation of a regional programme for alternative farming to be financed via the national budget and SAPARD. It is expected that further attention will be placed on the region through the National Agricultural Environmental Plan. Although this plan is not region specific Rhodope would be one of the main areas benefiting from it as the agricultural lands in the region in most cases do not encourage intensive large scale agriculture.

The forestry sector is reorienting itself towards a more sustainable industry with a main focus on environment protection and nature conservation. One of the most important steps in this connection was the development of the National Forestry Strategy (2003) which is now a principal document within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forest. On the ground changes in forestry management is becoming visible particularly in the forestry units where new management plans are being developed. This is because these plans now have to contain sections on biodiversity, which are taken into consideration in the planning process. Furthermore, the various Government/Donor initiatives focus on sustainable forest management and the Rhodope Project is currently in the latter stages of piloting the first FSC forest certifications in Bulgaria.

Aside from the two traditional sectors, eco-tourism or rather sustainable tourism is becoming more and more important. Many, if not all, municipalities see tourism as a means of addressing the dire situation that they find themselves in. As such this is a national trend as the Governmental priority sees it as the “third” tourism sector adding to the traditional “Ski and Sun” tourism. An important first step in this direction was undertaken in 2003 where a national eco-tourism strategy was developed. As part of the national strategy regional strategies and action plans were developed. Within the Rhodope region two such plans were developed. However since then little attention have been given to these strategies by local stakeholders.

Aside from being a rich cultural region the Rhodope Mountains are also one of the most biodiversity rich regions within Bulgaria. Not only that the mountains have more than 25 distinct natural habitats it also has a very high level of endemism and contains vast numbers of species including 36 of Europe's 38 raptor species and 29 of Europe's 31 bat species. Despite this the total area under protection is less than one quarter of the country's average. The NGO and academic community have found this to be very unsatisfactory and are proposing new protected areas in form of Nature Parks and Natura 2000 sites to the Government.

In connection with Bulgaria's accession into the EU many changes are occurring within Bulgaria and that also goes to the civic society, which are being asked to become more and more involved in local decision making and planning. This in particular after the adoption of the Regional Development Act of February 2004 that outlines the upstream and downstream mechanisms for regional development planning.

## I.2. Project “Conservation of Globally Significant Biodiversity in the landscape of Bulgaria’s Rhodope Mountains” (the “Rhodope Project”)

The goal of the 3.5 Million US \$ UNDP/GEF Rhodope Project is to protect globally significant biodiversity and to promote its sustainable use in the Rhodope Region. The Project aims to conserve the unique natural and anthropogenic mosaic of habitats, species and land uses that form the Eastern and Western Rhodope landscapes. Activities are focused in areas with sensitive ecosystems and landscape components, such as priority conservation areas, buffer zones and corridors, as well as more general forest, pasture and agricultural lands.

Aside from making landscape-scale conservation effective in the Eastern and Western Rhodope, the Project will also integrate biodiversity into economic and territorial planning through a bottom up stakeholder process.

Outcome 1 of the Rhodope Project generally focuses on overall Project management by the Project management Unit (PMU) and the regional Support Centres (RSC). However, the projects public campaign activities are also part of this outcome, as is the establishment of the Nature Park Directorates (if parks are established).

Under Outcome 2 the project collects all data needed for its activities related to nature conservation planning and the integration of nature concerns into territorial, sectorial and economic planning. This outcome includes activities related to the GIS establishment and involves analysis of new data from field surveys, as well as existing data from various sources (NGO, MAF, MoEW etc).

Outcomes 3 & 4, which rely on data provided under outcome 2 primarily, focus on the planning process related to nature conservation and its integration into the economic and territorial planning. One of the most important aspects of outcome 3 & 4 is the involvement of the civic society into the planning process. It is in these outcomes where the Rhodope Project will be most innovative by utilizing a bottom up approach, where local input will become an important part of the project outcomes and also the municipality agenda.

Outcome 5 focuses on the overall monitoring and evaluation of the project and its activities. The main activities under this outcome are, reporting to UNDP, MAF, GEF, event evaluation, such as municipality meeting trainings etc. However, building the projects “lessons learned” portfolio is also an important part of this outcome.

Outcome 6 primarily focuses on capacity building of key stakeholders. There is a strong inter-linkage between this outcome and outcome 3, 7 and 4 because with increased capacity for planning at regional level will become more mature and profound. The outcome also pays attention to the issue of ecosystem services and their value.

Outcome 7 can be seen as somewhat of an outside set of activities as they are supporting sustainable development initiatives. As such this outcome incorporates the results of the outcome 3, 4 and 6 stressing that with better planning and increased capacity better integration of nature concerns in to the productive sector should be obtained.

Finally, Outcome 8 looks at ensuring future financing for project activities after the project is finished. Here the Rhodope Project will be looking at how best to utilize EU funding but will also look at other funding systems. In addition the Rhodope Project will initiate a discussion on environmental services and their place in financing nature protection activities. The project will also look at incentives and their possible role within the Bulgarian setting.

## II. Objectives of the consultancy

To evaluate the overall implementation of the Rhodope Project, and to provide constructive recommendations to the ongoing process of re-formulating of the Project's log-frame.

## III. Duration of the consultancy

The contract will be for 18 working days over a period of 6 weeks and will commence upon the signing of the contract. The International Evaluator will work from home base aside from a 7 day mission to Bulgaria

## IV. Scope of work to be performed by the International Evaluator

The evaluation team will be composed of 2 external consultants - one International Evaluator and one National Evaluator. The International Evaluator will act as Team Leader.

The evaluation approach will include: desk review of documents prior to the field mission, interviews with stakeholders/donors/agencies in Bulgaria, field visits, analytical work and report writing. The evaluation will take place mainly in the field. The evaluators will work closely with UNDP and MAF officials, and will be supported by the Rhodope Project.

Interviews with stakeholders/donors/agencies in Bulgaria and field visits: A list of meetings and field visits will be suggested by UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests.

Analytical work and report writing: International Evaluator will assume overall responsibility for putting together the report outline and finalizing the report contents as per UNDP and MAF comments. The National Evaluator will provide inputs to the International Evaluator as requested. Both evaluation team members will participate actively during all stages of the evaluation exercise.

The International Evaluator will be responsible for preparing the Evaluation Report Outline – a concise initial paper, open to changes and improvements in the course of the Evaluation Report's drafting and comments process, containing the future Evaluation Report's individual sections covering each of the identified assignment areas. Input to the Evaluation Report will be made by the National Evaluator based on common agreement reached together with the Rhodope Project Team. The agreement for report input and the time-frame

should be in place no later than the last day of the International Evaluator's field visit to Bulgaria.

Minor details to this TOR could be added within the first week of the assignment and if added should be fully described in the inception report.

#### The Evaluation

The team will evaluate the overall project implementation of the Rhodope Project in the period of June 2004- December 2005 and highlight strengths and weaknesses in the project implementation with due reflection on the project design. Secondly they will outline short-term and long-term steps to how the project process and project implementation can be strengthened, so as to ensure the overall achievement of the projects main objective. In addition, the evaluation team will review and make constructive recommendations to the ongoing process of re-formulating of the Project's log-frame.

More specifically the evaluation team will review and evaluate the following:

#### Part A

Review all project related documentation provided by the Rhodope Project, as per Annex 1 to the Evaluation TOR.

#### Part B

Evaluate the status of project implementation with a particular reference to the project work-plan and the Project Results and Resource Framework.

Evaluate the individual processes related to the individual Output targets.

Evaluate the appropriateness of the Municipality Focus Groups as central components in the Rhodope projects stakeholder participation approach.

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in the overall project implementation, including project management at all levels, with due attention given to the project design.

#### Part C

Outline short-term and long-term steps to how the project process and project implementation can be strengthened so as to ensure the overall achievement of the projects main objective

Provide recommendations for improvements in the overall project management and for the implementation of selected specific project tasks (to be determined in the Evaluation Report Outline).

#### Part D

Review and make constructive recommendations to the re-formulated Project log-frame.

Review the proposed re-formulation of the RP log-frame and evaluate whether the assumptions made during the process of re-formulation are valid. Make constructive recommendations to the re-formulated Project log-frame.

## V. Outputs of the consultancy

- Evaluation Report Outline – presenting the structure (chapters, chapter sections, chapter sub-sections and envisaged sub-section contents, and annexes) of the Evaluation Report, as well as the division of work between the International Evaluator and the National Evaluator;
- Draft Evaluation Report;
- Final Evaluation Report in English.

## VI. Work plan, deliverables and deadlines

Field visit to Bulgaria (19-25 February)

Submission of the Evaluation Report Outline by the International Evaluator

Within 10 days of field visit to Bulgaria

Submission of Draft Evaluation Report by the International Evaluator

Within 10 days of receipt of Rhodope Project Team, UNDP and MAF comments on the Draft Evaluation Report

Submission of Final Evaluation Report by the International Evaluator

## VII. Terms and conditions for the provision of the consultancy services

The consultant will liaise with the RP Manager and RP International Advisor, and will coordinate the exact timing of his/her activities with them.

The consultant will submit deliverables to the RP, and will get clarifications from the RP.

The consultant will adhere strictly to all deadlines agreed upon with the RP.

The consultant shall conduct him/herself in a professional and ethical manner, and will ensure that none of his/her actions have an adverse effect on the RP.

## VIII. Payment terms for the consultancy

- 20 percent of the agreed total remuneration shall be paid by UNDP to the consultant upon contract signature and approval of the Evaluation Report Outline;
- 20 percent of the agreed total remuneration shall be paid by UNDP to the consultant upon approval of the Draft Evaluation Report;
- 60 percent final payment shall be effected by UNDP to the consultant upon approval of the Final Evaluation Report.

DSA (for the duration of the field mission – six nights) will be covered by UNDP as per approved UN rates. Air travel (economy class) will be reimbursed (through bank transfer) after presenting a copy of the flight ticket.

## IX. Qualifications required

The International Evaluator must have proven working experience with GEF and have good knowledge of GEF rules and procedures. He/she must have working experience with projects in the GEF focal area of Biodiversity. Further more the International Evaluator should have proven working experience in GEF project evaluation. Previous working experience in Bulgaria preferred, but not required.

The National Evaluator must have proven working experience with one or more International donor organisations and their rules and procedures. He/she must have working experience with projects implemented in the area of Biodiversity. Furthermore the National Evaluator should have proven working experience in project evaluation.



## ANNEX 2

## Itinerary of field visit

Date	Itinerary
Sun. 19 February	Sofia – internal meeting of the project evaluators
Mon. 20 February	<p>09.15-11.00 – meeting with the RP PMU (Aleksander Bardarov, Carsten Germer)</p> <p>11.30-12.00 – meeting with UNDP representatives (Neil Buhne, Ogniana Glavoussanova, Deni Daskalova)</p> <p>13.30-15.00 – meeting with representatives of the National Forestry board (Nikolay Yonov, Georgi Tinchev, Ani Petrakieva)</p> <p>15.00-15.20 – meeting with the MAF vice-minister (Stefan Yurokov)</p> <p>16.00-17.00 – meeting with representatives of the MoEW (Mihail Mihailov)</p> <p>17.00-18.00 – meeting with Toma Belev</p>
Tues. 21 February	<p>10.00-11.00 – meeting with UNDP projects (Tanya Shoumkova, Yanichka Trujkova, Ivanka Todorova, Veleslava Abadjieva)</p> <p>12.00-13.00 – lunch with the BSPB director Boris Barov</p> <p>13.00-14.00 – meeting with organisations working on Natura 2000 (Simeon Marin, Tenyo Meshinev)</p> <p>14.00-15.00 – meeting with agricultural and forestry projects (Donka Kalcheva, Stefan Stefanov, Mariana Petrova, Christof Duerr, Yulia Grigorova, Stanislav Lazarov, Martin Borisov)</p> <p>16.00-19.00 – travel to Haskovski Mineralni bani</p>
Wed. 22 February	<p>10.00-11.30 – meeting with local stakeholders in Stambolovo (Yordanka Djelepova, Lervin Veli Ranadan, Habib Syuleyman Habib, Stefka Latounova, Kera Deltcheva, Nedelko Georgiev, Ermet Halil Arabadji)</p> <p>11.30-12.15 – travel to Kurdjali</p> <p>12.30-14.00 – lunch with the team of the RSC Kurdjali</p> <p>14.15-15.15 – meeting with regional institutions (Aynur Ibryamova, Antoaneta Stefanova, Sabahatin Riza, Borislav Borisov, Vladimir Trifonov, Lubomir Djisov)</p> <p>15.30-16.30 – meeting with local stakeholders (Nikolay Yanchev, Yuksel Ibryam, Nadejda Tzvetkova, Kirilka Kalamova, Galina Angelova, Lidya Kirilova)</p> <p>17.00-19.00 – travel to Smolyan</p>

Date	Itinerary
Thur. 23 February	<p>09.15-09.45- meeting with the team of the RSC Smolyan</p> <p>09.45-10.15 – meeting with the PR of RIEW Smolyan (Katya Gadjeva)</p> <p>10.15-11.15 – meeting with regional institutions (Maria Slavcheva, Dimitar Kouzmanov, Stefka Garova, Georgi Popov, Salza Nikolova, Assen Karabov)</p> <p>11.30-12.30 – meeting with local stakeholders (Ludmil Gotchev, Radka Tuneva, Elena Kostadinova, Maria Bogotlieva, Zlatka Rupetzova, Fedia Argirov, Mitko Chochev)</p> <p>13.30-19.00</p> <p>Wim Giesen: visit of Shiroka laka. Meeting with local stakeholders in Devin municipality</p> <p>Rossen Vassilev: Meeting with local stakeholders in Rudozem municipality (Sava Garbelov, Vesselin Dimitrov, Shukri Halilov, Brahim Chernarev)</p>
Fri. 24 February	<p>08.00-12.00 – travel to Sofia</p> <p>15.00-16.00 – meeting with MAF – agri-environment (Viara Stefanova, Maria Yunakova)</p> <p>16.30-17.30 – meeting with MRDPW representative (Zlatina Karova)</p>
Sat. 25 February	<p>09.00-12.00 – internal meeting of the evaluators</p> <p>16:00 – flight of Wim Giesen (via Budapest) back to the Netherlands</p> <p>22:30 WG arrives at home base</p>

## ANNEX 3

## List of documents reviewed

## Official project documents:

- Rhodope Project Document of 23 April 2004

## GEF reports

- GEF Inception Report for the Rhodope Project
- Rhodope Project PIR - August 22 2005

## UNDP Quarterly reports:

- Quarterly Progress Report Rhodope Project – 4th quarter 2004
- Quarterly Progress Report Rhodope Project – 1st quarter 2005
- Quarterly Progress Report Rhodope Project – 2nd quarter 2005
- Quarterly Progress Report Rhodope Project – 3rd quarter 2005
- Quarterly Progress Report Rhodope Project – 4th quarter 2005

All quarterly reports include quarterly work plans

## Project Management Committee Meeting Minutes:

- Minutes of Meeting PMC 16.09.2004
- Minutes of Meeting\_PMC 24.02.2005
- Minutes\_Meeting 28.11.2005\_ENG final

## UNDP Annual reports

- Rhodope Project Annual Report 2004 (with changes after PMC)
- Draft Rhodope Project Annual Report 2005

## Monthly Project Reports and Examples of Monthly work-plans:

- 2006-01 work plan
- Draft 2006-02 work plan
- Monthly Project Report 2005-08
- Monthly Project Report 2005-09
- Monthly Project Report 2005-10
- Monthly Project Report 2005-11
- Monthly Project Report 2005-12
- Monthly Project Report 2006-01

## Rhodope Project Strategic documents:

- How will a change from nature parks to a non park scenario affect the Rhodope Project (Draft November)
- Indicator Analysis December 2005 (draft) including revised project logical framework and set of indicators
- Lessons Learned Document 2005 – Draft currently under review by UNDP;
- Project Strategy for Engaging the Private Sector;
- Rhodope Project Promotion Strategy and Strategic Action 2006 final draft -December 28

Examples of mini projects:

- 33627 TD 16-001 Lessons learned;
- SC Environmental Services and Incentive Measures\_2005;

Examples of co-financing documentation:

- Implementation arrangements National Forestry Board 2005 report;
- Implementation arrangements SRD co-financing 2005 report;

Public information material including declarations:

- Declaration\_ER\_ENGL
- Declaration\_WR\_ENGL
- GIS Brochure\_ENGL
- People and Parks Booklet\_ENGL

Municipality Focus Groups:

- Report on the establishment of Municipal Focus Groups.
- Municipality Focus Group work plan for 2006

Other Documents:

- Country programme document for Bulgaria (2006-2009)
- PDF B surveys

## ANNEX 4

## List of persons met

Person	Position
Aleksander Bardarov	RP Project manager
Carsten Germer	RP International advisor
Niel Buhne	UNDP Resident Representative
Ogniana Glavoussanova	UNDP Program analyst
Deni Daskalova	UNDP Chief of POG
Nikolay Yonov	MAF – Head of department “Protected areas, International cooperation and NGO sector collaboration”
Georgi Tinchev	RP NPD and MAF - Chief expert in the “Protected areas, International cooperation and NGO sector collaboration” department
Ani Petrakieva	MAF - Expert in the “Protected areas, International cooperation and NGO sector collaboration” department
Stefan Yuroukov	MAF – vice minister
Mihail Mihailov	MoEW – Head of Protected areas department of the National nature protection service
Emilia Kraeva	MoEW – GEF operational focal point
Dimitrinka Marinova	MoEW – International department
Toma Belev	Green Balkans Association – President, Parks association – President, MAF – Vitosha Nature park Directorate - Director
Tanya Shoumkova	UNDP project “Sustainable Development of Rural Areas”
Yanichka Trujkova	UNDP project “Job opportunities through Business Development”
Ivanka Todorova	UNDP project “Sustainable Land management”
Veslava Abadjieva	UNDP GEF Small grants program
Boris Barov	Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds – Executive Director
Simeon Marin	Green Balkans Association, Coordinator of Natura 2000 project
Tenyo Meshinev	Institute of Botany, Head of Department “Phytosociology”
Donka Kalcheva	Agrolink Association
Stefan Stefanov	Bulgarian Farmers Association
Mariana Petrova	Bulgarian-Swiss Forestry Program
Christof Duerr	Bulgarian-Swiss Forestry Program
Yulia Grigorova	WWF - Danubian-Carpathian Program
Stanislav Lazarov	GTZ – Forestry project
Martin Borisov	GTZ – Forestry project
Yordanka Djelepova	Stambolovo Municipality – senior expert, forester
Lervin Veli Ranadan	Stambolovo Municipality – senior expert
Habib Syuleyman Habib	Stambolovo Municipality – expert “Sport, health and activities with the youth”

Person	Position
Stefka Latounova	Stambolovo Municipality – senior expert “Local incomes”
Kera Deltcheva	Stambolovo Municipality – director “Administrative, legal and information services”
Nedelko Georgiev	Stambolovo – private entrepreneur
Ermet Halil Arabadji	Stambolovo Municipality – director “Territorial management and technical services”
Daniela	RSC Kurdjali - regional manager
Hristo Hristov	RSC Kurdjali – landscape expert
Aynur Ibryamova	RFB Kurdjali - director
Antoaneta Stefanova	RFB Kurdjali
Sabahatin Riza	Kurdjali District Administration
Borislav Borisov	RIEW Haskovo – biodiversity department
Vladimir Trifonov	RIEW Haskovo – biodiversity department
Lubomir Djisov	Kurdjali State forestry
Nikolay Yanchev	Kurdjali District Administration – senior expert forestry
Yuksel Ibryam	Kurdjali District Administration – senior expert agriculture
Nadejda Tzvetkova	Kurdjali Municipality – senior expert project department
Kirilka Kalamova	Kurdjali District Agriculture Extension service
Galina Angelova	Kurdjali District Agriculture Extension service
Lidya Kirilova	Kurdjali Regional museum, biology expert
Ema Eneva	RSC Smolyan – regional manager
Katya Gadjeva	RIEW Smolyan – PR
Maria Slavcheva	RBF Smolyan – expert “Afforestation and Protected areas”
Dimitar Kouzmanov	Smolyan District – “Social activities, culture and tourism”
Stefka Garova	Smolyan District
Georgi Popov	Smolyan district Agriculture Extension Service
Salza Nikolova	MAF Smolyan district service “Agriculture and forests”
Assen Karabov	RFB Smolyan – director
Ludmil Gotchev	Smolyan municipality – Ecology expert
Radka Tuneva	Smolyan district – Programs and Projects expert
Maria Bogotlieva	Smolyan municipality – European integration expert
Zlatka Rupetzova	Plovdiv university in Smolyan– Landscape ecology department
Fedia Argirov	Smolyan - private entrepreneur – rural tourism house owner
Mitko Chochev	Mogilitza tourism council - President
Sava Garbelov	Rudozem – Municipal Tourism council
Vesselin Dimitrov	Rudozem municipality – Land commission
Shukri Halilov	Rudozem – private entrepreneur
Brahim Chernarev	Rudozem – family hotel owner
Viara Stefanova	MAF – Head of Agri-environment Department State expert
Maria Yunakova	MAF – Less favorite areas and local initiatives Department
Zlatina Karova	MRDPW – Director of “Territorial Governance and Decentralization” Directorate

## ANNEX 5

### Proposed revision of the log-frame

PROJECT	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004)	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
<p>GOAL:</p> <p>The biodiversity of the Eastern and Western Rhodope landscape is conserved.</p>						<p>⇒ Continued GoB support for conservation. Biodiversity conservation will continue to be a government priority.</p> <p>⇒ Natural factors/disasters will not unduly harm local communities.</p> <p>⇒ Current economic development trends will continue or not significantly worsen, thereby affecting budgetary processes or stakeholder aspirations</p> <p>⇒ Natural conditions alter baseline level of diversity &amp; ecosystem health.</p>
PROJECT OBJECTIVE:	<u>Objective Indicator 1:</u> Biodiversity conservation objectives integrated into municipality plans. (# of plans)	0	Process under way	27	Municipality document, Regional plans.	<p>⇒ GoB support for conservation. Biodiversity conservation &amp; sustainable development will continue to be a government priority.</p> <p>⇒ Stakeholders increase their interest and see the need for integrating nature conservation concerns into local planning and practices</p>
Stakeholders integrate landscape – scale biodiversity conservation into resource management and economic	<u>Objective Indicator 2:</u> Stakeholders general perception on the importance of integration of nature conservation into local development initiatives increased (expressed in % of baseline).	Base line	75%	150%	Peoples attitude survey results. (repetitive test)	
	<u>Objective Indicator 3:</u> Local administrations general perception on the importance of integration of nature conservation into local development	Base line	75%	150%	Peoples attitude survey results. (repetitive test)	



PROJECT	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004)	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
development Policy and Practice in Eastern and Western Rhodope.	initiatives increased (expressed in % of baseline).					
	<u>Objective Indicator 4:</u> (#) forestry units (FU) covering (#) hectares (ha) is certified or incorporates areas of High Conservation Value Forests and other biodiversity concerns into the forest management	0 (FU) 0 (ha)	6 (FU) 49.500 (ha)	19 (FU) 140.000 (ha)	Forestry plans, Certification documentation	
	<u>Objective Indicator 5:</u> natural areas covering (#) hectares) used for ecotourism under biodiversity sensitive management	0	0	200	Project reporting, management plans	
	<u>Objective Indicator 6:</u> Land farmed covering (#) hectares managed under the National Agri-Environmental Plan	0	In the process of development	50	Government field interviews; surveys of attitudes before and after.	
OUTPUT 1  Institutional framework & support for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity established.	<u>Output Indicator 1:</u> Sustainable institutional structures for conservation management and extra conservation areas/zones are designated in the Rhodope region.	0	20%	100%	Quarterly and Annual reports.  MoEW and MAF annual reports on protected areas.	⇒ GoB willing to designate new PAs, in one form or another ⇒ Institutional barriers to cross-sector collaboration can be overcome. ⇒ Funding for additional staff will be made available by GoB.

PROJECT	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004)	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
<p>OUTPUT 2</p> <p>Biodiversity conservation management planned &amp; implemented in the Rhodope region, both at landscape and local level.</p>	<p><u>Output Indicator 2:</u> Management plans for PAs and landscapes developed and partially implemented, including conservation activities and pilot examples of sustainable livelihoods.</p>	0	30	100%	<p>Management plans at various levels.</p> <p>Quarterly and Annual reports.</p> <p>MFG reports.</p> <p>Sector reports on livelihood development.</p>	<p>⇒ Local &amp; municipal interest in implementing sustainable agriculture, animal husbandry, tourism &amp; forestry</p> <p>⇒ Plans are adopted by municipal &amp; regional administrations</p> <p>⇒ Co-financing for pilot projects can be identified</p>
<p>OUTPUT 3</p> <p>Capacity developed in the Rhodope region in support of conservation &amp; sustainable landscape management.</p>	<p><u>Output Indicator 3:</u> Awareness of environmental issues and capacities for sustainable environmental management are enhanced at local, municipal and regional levels, both within government agencies and in civil society.</p>	0	75% above baseline	150% above baseline	<p>Quarterly and Annual reports.</p> <p>MFG reports.</p> <p>Training reports.</p>	<p>⇒ Local &amp; municipal interest in sustainable environmental management &amp; conservation remains.</p> <p>⇒ Trained persons at municipal &amp; regional level are not (directly) transferred.</p>

OUTPUT 4  Project management for the Rhodope Project.	<u>Output Indicator 4:</u> Project management operational and capable of running the Rhodope Project successfully and on schedule.	0	50%	100%	APR/PIR reports Quarterly & Annual Reports Monitoring & Evaluation Reports.	⇒ Support to RP management remains, both from GoB and UNDP/GEF ⇒ RP management can remain focused on project implementation, and do not become side-tracked by other priorities.
ACTIVITIES						
1. Institutional framework & areas for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity established.						
1.1 Sustainable institutional framework in support of conservation management established and supported.	<u>Output Indicator 5:</u> Institution or agency present in the Rhodope region, with a recognised mandate for conservation and environmental issues, both at a local and at a wider (landscape) level.	0	30%	100%	Quarterly & Annual Reports.  Formal agreement between RP and the agency.	⇒ Good collaboration between agencies. ⇒ Continued GoB support for conservation at local and landscape levels in Rhodope region.
1.2 Additional PAs or zones established in the Rhodope region.	<u>Output Indicator 6:</u> Current protected areas are expanded in area.	0	1 key site, at least 1000 ha	3 key sites, at least 5000 ha	Quarterly & Annual Reports. MoEW and MAF annual reports on protected areas.	⇒ GoB willing to designate new PAs, in one form or another ⇒ Local & municipal support for designation of new areas.
1.3 Secure financing for sustainability of applied conservation and cross-sectoral coordination	<u>Output Indicator 7:</u> Budgets available for continuation of conservation activities (both in PAs/zones and for work of responsible institutions) in Rhodope region.	0	10% of required budget	30% of required budget	Quarterly & Annual Reports. MoEW and MAF annual reports on protected areas.	⇒ Continued GoB support for conservation at local and landscape levels in Rhodope region.

2. Biodiversity conservation management established, both at landscape and at local level.						
2.1 Information baseline established and strengthened as basis for adaptive management.	<u>Output Indicator 8:</u> Environmental information upon which to base conservation efforts, PA/zone management, and environmental planning is sufficient and reliable.	Baseline	Baseline + 30% of key areas covered	100% of key areas covered	Quarterly & Annual Reports. Survey reports. Biodiversity reports. Database & GIS	⇒ Stakeholders willing to share & use RP information ⇒ Stakeholders begin to utilize provided information for adaptive management.
2.2 Landscape-based approach to conservation established & operational.	<u>Output Indicator 9:</u> Plans developed and implemented at the regional/municipal level incorporate environmental & conservation concerns.	0	In 50% of municipal plans.	In 100% of municipal plans.	Municipal plans. MFG reports. RSC reports. Quarterly & Annual Reports.	⇒ Local & municipal interest in incorporating environmental concerns into local planning ⇒ Lobbying by mining & other sectors does not overly affect local planning
2.3 Sustainable management regimes established within protected area/ zone.	<u>Output Indicator 10:</u> Management plans developed for newly designated key areas, and a start made with implementation.	0	1 site	3 sites	Management plans for the sites. Quarterly & Annual Reports.	⇒ GoB willing to designate new PAs, in one form or another ⇒ Local & municipal support for designation of new areas.
2.4 Monitoring and evaluation of effects of biodiversity conservation efforts in protected areas/zones	<u>Output Indicator 11:</u> Area of key habitats remain stable, and populations of key species remain stable for the majority of key species.	Declining	Slowing of decline	Stabilisation of habitats & majority of species	Habitat/species monitoring & evaluation reports; Quarterly & Annual Reports. Database & GIS	⇒ Natural conditions do not alter baseline levels of biodiversity ⇒ External impacts on far ranging species remain constant
2.5 Forestry, tourism & farming practices are re-oriented to support conservation while improving	<u>Output Indicator 12:</u> Programme and plans for sustainable forestry, agriculture, livestock husbandry and tourism are developed and demonstration projects implemented.	0	Baseline + 25% for each of the four sectors	Baseline + 100% for each of the four sectors	Quarterly & Annual Reports. MFG reports. RSC reports Reports on sustainable	⇒ Stakeholders are willing to adopt sustainable livelihood forms. ⇒ Markets can be found for newly developed products.

livelihoods in/around protected areas/zones					livelihood programme.	⇒ Co-funding available for demonstration projects.
3. Capacity developed in support of conservation and sustainable landscape management in the Rhodope region.						
3.1 Institutional capacity to integrate biodiversity & ecosystem management objectives into productive sector programmes is strengthened.	<u>Output Indicator 13:</u> Local, municipal and regional level stakeholders are able to integrate biodiversity and ecosystem concerns into local development plans.	0	25% of development plans	50% of development plans	Regional and municipal development plans. MFG reports RSC reports Quarterly & Annual Reports	⇒ Local, municipal & regional interest for incorporating environmental concerns into productive sector planning
3.2 Capacity building for establishing sustainable livelihoods.	<u>Output Indicator 14:</u> Local stakeholders show an increased capability for establishing sustainable livelihoods.	Baseline	Baseline + 6 entrepreneurs	Baseline + 20 entrepreneurs	Quarterly & Annual Reports. MFG reports. RSC reports Reports on sustainable livelihood programme.	⇒ Stakeholders are willing to adopt sustainable livelihood forms. ⇒ Markets can be found for newly developed products. ⇒ Co-funding available for demonstration projects.
3.3 Increasing environmental & conservation awareness at local/municipal levels	<u>Output Indicator 15:</u> Local communities and municipalities show an increased environmental awareness.	Baseline	Baseline + 75%	Baseline + 150%	Quarterly & Annual Reports. MFG reports. RSC reports	⇒ Local & municipal interest in sustainable environmental management & conservation remains

4. Project management for the Rhodope project.						
4.1 PMU operations.	<u>Management Indicator 1:</u> PMU operational & capable of running RP Project successfully & on schedule.	0	50%	100%	Quarterly & Annual Reports, APR/PIR, M&E	⇒ Support to PMU remains, both from GoB & UNDP/GEF
4.2 RSC operations.	<u>Management Indicator 2:</u> RSC operational & capable of running regional programmes successfully	0	50%	100%	Quarterly & Annual Reports, APR/PIR, M&E	⇒ Continued support for RSCs from municipalities

## ANNEX 6

## Minutes of meetings of evaluation team

During the week 20-24 February a series of meetings were organised by the Rhodope Project team (PMU and the RSCs), both in Sofia and in the Rhodope region. The itinerary of this programmes – including the meetings – is provided in Annex 2, while a list of persons met is provided in Annex 3. This annex consists of the minutes of all of these separate meetings.

Meeting with UNDP (Neil Buhne, Maria Zlatareva and Ogniana Glavoussanova), 20 Feb. 2006, 11:30-12:30

NB presented the UNDP portfolio in Bulgaria: the accent of the UNDP programme is on working at a municipality level – with active involvement in more than 170 municipalities. In the Rhodope region some UNDP projects have been implemented, and the RP is taking advantage of this experience. However, the RP also experiences some problems, as they sometimes associate UNDP as a donor, while the RP is a technical support mechanism.

OG reminded the team that during the project preparation phase, the international consultant Geoffrey Griffin worked together with the biodiversity coordinator of GEF in Bratislava. Together they devised this complex logframe, which later has been revised (simplified).

NB: the project is based on the assumption that nature parks will be established (RV: with the project agreement it is not anymore an assumption but a commitment from Bulgarian side). UNDP has submitted a letter to the MoEW, with copy to MAF, asking what is the current official attitude towards the nature parks establishment idea.

WG proposed the option of involvement of Ministry of Regional Development (MRD) and making a “Rhodope Master Plan” – an intermediate level strategic planning document (between municipality and planning region).

NB accepts that this idea is very much in line with the entire UNDP programme. There are many problems with the planning, coordination, capacity of institutions, but it sounds logical to enhance this line in the RP.

OG is more sceptical, saying that UNDP has already established a good relationship with MAF and that it will take time to establish such relationship with MRD. In any case, GEF procedures require a stakeholder’s workshop to discuss and accept any project modifications.

WG: Question about the co-funding and the possible use of EU funds

NB: It is difficult with the pre-accession funds as they are already distributed. Is better to work for the structural and CAP (Leader+) funds. Maybe we should work in some municipalities, not in all of them. The municipal focus groups are well established and perform well, but can be better used, perhaps as a bridge to other funds and as a tool to avoid unsustainable projects.

WG: the issue of the sustainability and the capacity transfer. For instance – how the voluntary students monitoring groups will continue to work after the project?



Meeting with MAF representatives – Directorate of Protected Areas, etc... (Nikolai Yonov, Georgi Tinchev, Ani Petrakieva), 20 Feb. 2006, 13.30-14:45 p.m.

GT explained the distribution of tasks between MAF and MoEW concerning the nature parks – MoEW is declaring, MAF is managing. The project was expected to finance the management plans preparation. While revising the logframe the option of a Biosphere Reserves has also been articulated, however, this did not receive enough support. The most interest has been expressed in favour of the Natura 2000 option. MAF is still well positioned to be the main project partner as they will distribute the EU money for compensations in Natura 2000.

NY stressed the good relationship between the two ministries (MAF and MoEW). In the Rhodope area the biodiversity resources are to be found mainly on territories under the responsibility of MAF (forests or agriculture land) – another argument for MAF to remain the main project partner.

GT reminded the Team of the progress and the successes of the RP – working on some forest management plans, organising FSC forest certification for the first time in Bulgaria (with the Dospat Forestry and the Borika Forest Cooperative from the village of Stoykite). Now WWF is developing the methodology of identification of high nature value forests. It will be used for issuing the official “Methodology of Biodiversity Identification” which is required by the Forest planning regulation.

For coordinating the efforts of the MAF and the RP special workshops have been organised (one for Eastern and one for Western Rhodope) with participation of the heads of Forestries and Regional Forestry Boards. The activities planned by the forestries (and their budget) are waiting to be approved by MAF – it will be the real contribution to the project.

On a recent meeting on forest certification the National Forestry Board (NFB) has taken the commitment to have in 5 years 30% of the state owned forests certified. The estimation shows that for the certification of all the Bulgarian State Forests about 2,5 mln Euro are needed (for comparison – the overall budget of NFB is 50 mln Euro).

Meeting with MAF vice-minister Stefan Yuroukov, 20 Feb. 2006, 15.00-15:30 p.m.

SY: 84% of the forests in Bulgaria are state owned. An important part of them will be included in Natura 2000, but the European funding (compensation) instruments are not open for states. Austria has made a proposal in this direction.

Concerning the attitude of the government towards the nature parks, the vice-minister stated that the establishment of nature parks is a positive signal, but the development of the network of protected areas should be well balanced to avoid problems like the widespreading of "diseases" from one strict nature reserve. He mentioned the famous case of Bistrishko Branishte Reserve in Vitosha Nature Park where windfalls three years ago have provoked an active debate pro and against extracting the fallen wood mass. MAF is looking for opportunities to stabilize the Nature Parks through public-private partnerships, but actually this depends on the political will of (at least) three political forces (implying the three-parties coalition ruling).

MAF is obliged to reduce the number of its civil servants with 10% by the 1 of April 2006. In this situation, it is not possible to increase the number of biodiversity related staff. The certification itself is made by external companies. There is an active NGO – Bulgarian association on forest certification which has developed the certification criteria. There is no need to make by-laws, such as the Organic Agriculture Regulation.

Meeting with MoEW (Mihail Michaylov, Dimitrinka Marinova, Emilia Kraeva), 20 Feb. 2006, 16:00-17:00

- During project formulation period, MoEW only had the PA Act of 1998 to work with, and had no knowledge about Natura 2000 and its obligations, hence the focus on the two Nature Parks.
- There seems to be a legal obstacle now to the designation of the two NPs (see earlier statements about obligation for involving stakeholders in NP commissions).
- Because of the new EU obligations, the focus is now on the designation of Natura 2000 sites – this is the current priority because by the end of 2006 a list of primary sites <the IBAs/SPAs> must be submitted <together with supporting documentation>
- In the Rhodope Mts the focus is now also on establishing the Natura 2000 sites. However, the establishing of Nature Parks still remains a possibility, following amendments to the legislation.
- The Natura 2000 efforts have had a significant focus on the Rhodope region, and a large part of the Rhodope region is covered by potential Natura 2000 sites – these are proposed sites <showing map>, and MoEW will need to negotiate with other ministries, especially MAF, for final designation. When it comes to the obligation of preparing management plans, MoEW will start with areas such as the already existing protected areas within the Rhodope region that have MPs, and update/expand these.
- Natura 2000 MPs also include sustainable development objectives, and these can be included into municipal development plans. MPs for Natura 2000 sites do not, however, have obligations for active management.
- Eventual activities and monitoring programmes re managed by the Regional Environmental Inspectorates, of which four <is this correct, Rossen?> cover the Rhodope region. These four all have 2-4 staff members with biodiversity, ecology or forestry background: Smolyan (2 persons), Plovdiv (4), Chasko (3) and Pazakjic (2).
- The REIs are to develop monitoring systems for Natura 2000 sites: what to monitor, when, information flow, who takes decisions, etc... At present the REIs are not capable of this, and all are to recruit one additional staff member this year specifically for Natura 2000 related work. This is in addition to the staff mentioned above, and runs contrary to the national development, whereby the number of civil servants are to be reduced by 10% by 1 April 2006 <presumably an IMF requirement?>
- Regarding simplification of the RP, MoEW has participated in discussions with the project and MAF, and agrees to the changes proposed in the revised logframe.
- At the end of the month (Feb.) all IBAs (SPAs) are to be finalised, and these extend over about 22% of the country. In addition to these, the habitat areas (SACs) are to be completed later – these will extend over more than 30% of the country, but largely overlap with the IBAs.
- Mining conflicts. In areas where mining / surveying permits had already been issued prior to Natura 2000 designation, these will not be reversed <although, presumably, there will still be an obligation for EIA>. New permits will not be issued in these sites.
- Hydropower. Quite a number of small rivers in the Rhodope region have been designated as potential Natura 2000 sites (esp. the eastern side of West Rhodope), and these sites have also been earmarked for development of small hydropower plants (mini hydels). In a way it is strange to recognize these rivers as separate Natura 2000 sites, as they are embedded in larger Natura 2000 sites. Other rivers have been recognized as being of importance as corridors for Natura 2000 sites, and are therefore of concern.

### Meeting with Toma Belev, PMU office 20 Feb. 2006, 17:15-18:30

- The decision to stall the process of Nature Park designation is in violation of the law and in violation of the official decision and deadline for designation.
- Another option available for designation is the recognition of Protected Zones (PZs; e.g. via Natura 2000), however, in the Rhodope region these will not be officially gazetted (as IBAs) until the end of 2006. The Regional Inspectorates of Environment & Water (RIEWs) are to manage these sites; however, when it comes to biodiversity management and conservation the RIEWs do not really have the capacity, nor do any of the other agencies at the regional level, in terms of personnel, training, and availability of funds to do anything. In short, PZs do not provide a usefully tool for sustainable management.
- The reason given by MoEW for not designating new Nature Parks (too many stakeholders to involve in commission) seems an excuse, as this was never a reason in other areas, even in the Sofia region where there definitely are many local stakeholders. <TB considers this simply an issue of laziness, of not doing their job properly>
- The options for Rhodope are i) Nature Park, ii) Protected Localities, and iii) Natural Landscapes. The other two designations in BG (National Parks and State Reserves) are too restrictive to be a viable option.
- It may be an option to have the area managed by an association of local people, in the form of municipal alliances, in a way similar to what you have in France and the U.K. (English Parks).
- Designation as PZ under Natura 2000 will not provide management required to prevent degradation – under Natura 2000 you will be able to penalize those that impinge on the area, but then you are already too late, you want to be able to prevent such things happening, and want to direct development.
- The project could experiment for 3-6 months to find out what local support there is for the parks, ask the municipalities. It is TB's opinion that many are for establishment, and relatively few are against. On the other hand, not all municipalities can be relied on as allies, as due to changes in the political landscape the support may change as well.
- <WG: do the declarations of the two regional workshops provide support for establishment?>
- In the Eastern Rhodope area support is provided via political paths – if you have political support, the rest will follow. In Western Rhodope the attitude is far more clannish – the local powerful stakeholders determine where things are heading, also with regard to support for NPs. In WR some mayors were supportive, but others say the NP would destroy business and they were very much against the idea. In general, smaller municipalities are easier to motivate: you provide them with ecotourism and organic agriculture as options, and they are for the NPs. The larger municipalities have bigger requirements and are more difficult to motivate or convince. The project should be pragmatic and focus on municipalities that can be easily convinced.
- UNDP can play a political role by orienting public resources to these communities and local groups which are in favour of the conservation ideas.
- The state budget in BG for biodiversity is terribly small, only 0.000001% of the total state budget, scarcely enough for 1 km of road, 1 landfill, or 1 step in a treatment plant. There is no money available for biodiversity, no-one sees an economic incentive for this. <WG: what about if an economic evaluation were to point out the values of biodiversity in terms of goods and services?> Even then there would be no interest, as it depends on

who obtains these benefits – if it is for the Bulgarian people, no-one is interested. If water resources are degraded because of deforestation, water companies will be glad as they can then invest in a water purification plant. Look at the WB Danube project, where large sums were invested in civil engineering that also requires lots of maintenance and operational costs – the same could have been achieved with a softer approach, but they were just not interested. Economics doesn't help.

- The option of designating just 25% of what was originally proposed as a nature Park is a good idea, especially if it is embedded in the Natura 2000 sites, and if smaller strictly protected areas can also be expanded. This is certainly worth pursuing. The question is, will funding be available in MAF and MoEW, even if you go for only 25%?

## Meeting with UNDP projects & programmes, 21 February 2006, 10:00-11:00.

1. Sustainable Rural Development Project (SRD) – Ms. Tanya Shoumkova
  2. Job Opportunities through Business Development (JOBS) – Ms Yanichka Trujkova
  3. GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) – Ms. Veleslava Abadjieva
  4. Capacity Building for Sustainable Land Management in Bulgaria (SLM) – Ms. Ivanka Todorova
- SRD project: operates in 11 municipalities, of which 8 are in the Rhodope region. In these established 1 Local Leader Groups (LLGs) for the formulation of project proposals, in three main areas: sustainable agriculture, forestry and ecotourism. All have developed strategic plans.
  - 11 small pilot projects have been implemented in year-1, and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year there were funds for demonstration projects in 3 basic schemes. Stakeholders can apply for funding of project proposals under the EU 'Prepare' programme for future funding.
  - The LLGs include representatives from all major stakeholder groups, including farmers, businesses, municipalities and NGOs.
  - The project started with baseline surveys, carried out by an institute in Sofia with territorial development capacity; this institute surveyed land quality, past development, land potential, ideas of stakeholders (facilitated by a moderator). At the same time, GEF experts from the RP included biodiversity issues, and multifunctional aspects in forests. These were all incorporated into municipal plans.
  - One of the focal areas is the tobacco growing region, where the project aims to provide alternatives. Tobacco subsidies will be phased out in three years starting in 2007, and alternatives need to be provided. At present it is still a monoculture – demand is decreasing, the product is not so valuable <and according to others, it has a high content of less desirable products> One of the things the SRD is considering is aquaculture, but there are three schemes:
    - Public benefit projects, for which the local administration can apply;
    - (open to all) 'innovative' projects <which are often not so innovative> for which 50% co-funding must be provided locally; and
    - Loans – in rural areas people have little access to loans: land and houses are not worth very much, so they cannot easily obtain loans from banks; the SRP provides micro-credit (e.g. for seeds or for stock), amounts up to leva 2000 per application.
  - MoEW landfills have been located near large regional centres, and for smaller towns this is a big burden, as they cannot afford the transport costs; as a result, waste is often inappropriately dumped. The SRP is investing in landfills for smaller communities.
  - The interaction with the project has mainly been through coordination meetings and presentation of plans (e.g. for training in municipalities), in order to avoid overlap of events, and to encourage LLG members to participate in MFGs, and transfer information about biodiversity concerns to the LLG.
  - Strategies for sustainable development in 11 municipalities have been produced with very valuable GEF RP input.
  - Protection of landscape and biodiversity could be very valuable in the Rhodope via ecotourism.

- RP provides information about LEADER programme approach, and the government can provide funding, but at local level there must be a capacity for developing ideas into proposals for projects. From 2007 onwards leader access could lead to more projects, esp. if they have stronger leader groups.
- SLM: started in September 2005 and will last for 3 years. Focus is on capacity building for agriculture, forestry and 'other' sectors.
- They have produced a baseline report that outlines options for sustainable land management, and measures that can be applied in Bulgaria, not just in the field of biodiversity, but general environmental concerns.
- They are producing a "Strategy & Action Plan for Sustainable Land Management" (with focus on land degradation & combating desertification), which will be ready by May 2006.
- The baseline document targets areas and groups, which will be used to formulate demo activities.
- One area where RP has provided concrete input is on how to arrest erosion; on project they are to share information from RP, disseminate RP results in meetings with local experts.
- Have been present in preliminary meetings on landscape approach to biodiversity conservation, and how to incorporate this into the planning process.
- JOBS: works together with the Ministry of Labor and UNDP. The programme started in October 2000, with the development of 24 Business Centres (BCs) in 24 municipalities. The focus in the BCs is the development of teams for supporting four target groups in the region: i) microfirms; ii) farmers; iii) unemployed (to start businesses) and iv) vulnerable groups.
- The instruments for this are: information & consultation, organization & training of the different target groups.
- An important aspect is the microfinancing scheme, of which 50% is for agriculture, 20-30% for start-up firms, and 20% for existing firms. In 2003, after assessing that the programme was operating well and that the BCs were functioning well, the Ministry of Labor helped with the establishment of 30 new BCs (funding for these, as to date a total of 40 have been established). In addition, there is funding provided by Swiss Gov. for 2 BCs (for Roma minority near Burgas) and UK funding as well.
- Association of business centres established in 2003, with 6 BCs in the Rhodope region. Financing in the agricultural sector has been for potatoes, tobacco, herbs and the wood processing industry. Micro-finance has been provided, for an average of 15,000 leva (max 25,000 leva) for individuals and for start-up companies. Training provided using the ILO methodology, and funded by the Ministry of Economy & Energy. In all, 300,000 leva has been provided into the funded, which will be used 3x over (after repayment).
- Also participates in meetings with RP for coordination of activities.
- SYB methods (Start Your Business) are taught – so far to three groups in the Rhodope region.
- PPP skills have been taught in 93 municipalities some of which in Rhodope, and in 7 municipalities they have been taught how to clear PPP projects.

- SGP: began in August 2005, with \$250,000-350,000 for 2006 – amount is still uncertain. At present, no funding of projects in Rhodope region together with RP.
- Aims at co-funding sustainable development projects that focus on one of the five focal areas for GEF.
- Maximum funding is \$50,000 per project, which then also requires at least 50,000 co-funding from an external source.
- For now, the programme will run for 3 years, but at present it still has to be officially launched.
- Comments on the SGP strategy have been provided by the RP.
- The RP has also been involved in the screening of local development projects.
- What the SGP expects from the RP is well-targeted biodiversity projects, e.g. on ecotourism for biodiversity conservation.
- The SGP is also interested in funding a biodiversity valuation study (one of the mini projects), and in mainstreaming RP work into local development.
- SGP has no geographic focus, can therefore not explicitly focus on Rhodope.
- Interest: sustainable organic agriculture, ecotourism. ...



- Meeting with Birdlife, Bulgarian Society for Bird Preservation (BSBP)  
Boris Barov, 21 February 2006, 12:00-13:00

- In the Eastern Rhodope Birdlife recognized 4 IBAs, which cover about 60% of the area of the proposed ER Nature Park. The idea was that the four IBAs would be protected by the NP, as a kind of buffer zone.
- The reason that the Nature Parks are not being designated by MoEW is due to a conflict of interest: MoEW issues permits for mineral extraction, and in 2 of the 4 sites there are mining interests.
- The IBAs were established in 1997 (with 3 IBAs in Eastern Rhodope) - this has since been updated and expanded to 4 sites, in a 2004 revision, and a new IBA inventory will be published and placed on the Birdlife website in 2006. SPAs cover 23% of the country.
- 17 established PAs occur in Eastern Rhodope, covering about 5-6% of the IBAs in ER. What would be good is if existing PAs are consolidated.
- Majorolovo = site being managed by Birdlife for MoEW (REI): Birdlife has a visitor's centre, staff working on conservation project, tourism facilities – in all 10 staff, of which 4 on vulture projects and 2-3 on ecotourism. Projects in the area are mainly related to the Black Vulture.
- So far Birdlife has not been involved in biodiversity surveys with the RP, as much lies outside their area of expertise (focus in surveys is on habitats, not birds). However, they would like to be much involved in the upcoming management planning process, especially in the Arda region.
- Birdlife has a bold idea, and that is that they would like to apply for concessions to manage protected areas. They are already involved in this at Mojorevo, where they are managing the site for the REI. They consider that in many cases it is not expensive to do so, as it mainly involves monitoring what is happening, and mobilizing actions if something occurs. In the Mojorevo area, for example, they were able to mobilize locals to protest against a hydropower plant, which was thereby prevented.
- The current Biodiversity Act calls for the possibility of NGO involvement in PA management, and this opportunity is now being utilized by Birdlife. At present 25% of Birdlife's funding (i.e. 100,000 leva) is provided by the Bulgarian government for managing the PA. It is expected that this will rise in the future. At the Mojorevo site, there is official delegation of responsibility to Birdlife, but this is the only official example in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Wilderness Society is involved in the management of a wetland site near Sofia, which is being managed very well, although this area is not an official PA.
- Tourism: the environmental aspects of (eco-)tourism are to be managed by MoEW – tourism is otherwise not managed by any single ministry or department.
- In Western Rhodope, there is the option of synergy with Game parks and PAs. While there may be conflicts in some areas, Birdlife has been able to convince the Game Park next to Mojorevo that wolves taking deer and sheep in the adjacent park were beneficial (by taking weak stock); at the same time, wolf kills were beneficial to the vultures.

Meeting with Natura 2000 NGOs , 21 February 2006, 13:00-14:00

Simeon Marin (Green Balkans), Tenyo Meshinev (Institute of Botany, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

- According to the Green Balkans project's results on Natura 2000, almost 42% of the country's territory should be classified as Natura 2000 sites (22% Important Bird Areas + 37% Habitats). At the same time the Government has accepted a National environmental strategy forseeing 18-20%. 150 people have been included in the project.
- The RP is helping the process with scientific inventories. During the field study of the Smolyan potential site – 60% is covered by 20 habitats of the Annex 1 of the Directive (46 000 ha) – to compare with North-Eastern Bulgaria, which has a lot of small and very fragmented sites.
- Information on the economic use of the natural (biodiversity) resources has not been collected during the surveys organised by RP.
- Problems identified : the mountain pastures and meadows are losing quality and biodiversity due to the decline in number of livestock; the hay meadows are being ploughed.
- Until now, only 20% of the territory of Western Rhodope has been inventoried for Natura 2000.
- The national coverage has been agreed only on the basis of the Important Bird Areas. At present, Green Balkans are trying to estimate the national coverage of 29 recognised forest habitats, and habitats important for bat species, fish species and the souslik.
- The Green Balkan's Natura 2000 project has not been able to meet with foresters for a long time. On a recent meeting they have just learned that such thing as Natura 2000 exists.
- The Hunter's union is interested in the Natura 2000 process and has started to accept the programme.

### Meeting with agriculture and forestry projects , 21 February 2006, 14:00-15:00

Donka Kalcheva – Agrolink, Stefan Stefanov – Farmer’s association, Mariana Petrova and Christoph Durr – Bulgarian-Swiss forestry program, Yulia Grigorova – WWF, Stanislav Lazarov and Martin Borisov – GTZ

- Agrolink: the RP is too much concentrated on biodiversity, not enough on interaction with people.
- Farmer’s association: the association has no information on the RP, they find that the coordination is not satisfactory.
- Swiss forestry program : there is good collaboration with the Smolyan RSC office; there is preliminary information on the planned events. The Swiss-Bulgarian project will continue till May 2007. Plans for multi-functional forest management on municipal level. There are also ideas for a district-level strategic structure.
- WWF : there is good coordination (monthly meetings) and collaboration on rural development and forest certification.
- GTZ : good coordination avoiding duplications. There will be another phase of the GTZ project, till 2008.
- Only the Kurdjali has a District development plan but the forestry sector is not well developed. The same plan for Smolyan is being developed.
- The RP can work more in the field of biodiversity management in forests – demonstration projects, forest certification, legislation changes. The forest system is highly hierarchic, the project should start from the top – introducing new norms and regulations.

### Meeting with MFG Stambolovo, 22 February 2006, 10:00-11:30

- Originally the MFG included more representatives from private businesses, foresters and NGOs from Haskovo, this lasted for 1.5 years, but they are generally too busy at present.
- The municipality has worked on the municipal strategy for the last 3 years; this initially focused primarily on disadvantaged minority groups, but later broadened out. Later this included inputs in environmental sector from Birdlife. The current strategy is for 2007-2013, and they are now in the process of developing a regional development strategy for beyond 2013.
- The Strategy focuses on: infrastructure, human resources, forestry, health care, ecology, formulating priorities and objectives. The municipal strategy is detailed down to a project level, which includes required budget, and where the municipality will be looking for funding. Not only municipal funding, but also by businesses. At present there is no direct link between the municipal plan and the GIS, but they will be working on developing this link.
- Development Strategy in Stambolovo: formulation did not involve outside companies, but was facilitated by an NGO from Haskovo – nearly all municipal departments were involved, about 15-20 persons, although they could not be called together at all times. Road commissioning, waste water treatment and sewerage treatment plants are all included in the strategy. This strategy is not definite, but provides a framework, as the strategy is to guide development in the municipality. If large scale investors came with projects – these must be in agreement with the plans.
- All in focus group prepared rough ideas for their own part, with NGOs to add some other levels. At the public hearing, more than 100 persons discussed the draft, and disseminated this. Together with RP at later stage they included ecotourism, biodiversity, organic farming. The local population is mainly involved in tobacco farming, and need to alter this after 2013.
- Organic farming is part of the strategy. There is no large scale farming in Stambolovo – the largest farmers are tobacco growers, all tobacco growers are registered, as they receive quotas. Many breed animals, but farmers are afraid of establishing associations as they're worried that this will resemble the old system of cooperatives, dominated by 1-2 persons. With quotas, they are best off individually, as long as there is a market they will produce tobacco. Tobacco is a good item as you can wait before taking it to market, it does not spoil, and you can wait until the market is right. Other products need to be brought to the market much quicker.
- Herbs have been tried – a local MP tried farming 1,5 ha of thyme, but had to abandon this, as he could not sell the produce. When people see an example such as this they become worried about trying new products, and if even an MP could not succeed, then how could they? New markets need to be established, and the local farmers need assistance with this. Any farmer would benefit from visiting other areas to see other opportunities, elsewhere in Bulgaria.
- Another plan for the Stambolov area is vineyards – the local winery would welcome more local produce, as the transport costs would be a lot lower. After disintegration of the old system, many owners of the vineyards left, and the system collapsed. Not many local vineyards are looked after properly.

- So far there have been 3 Municipal Focus Group meetings in Stambolovo, and some have participated elsewhere in seminars, Leader programme, training sessions on ecotourism (2x), seminar on starting of business (with JOBS, 2-day and 5-day module), plus a recent meeting for the presentation of the database and GIS; we also frequently receive information about new financing mechanisms and seminars via email.
- NGOs in Stambolovo: Arda 2003 (small environmental NGO), 10 reading libraries (these are registered as NGOs), union of disabled. The hunter group of Stambolovo is not registered as an NGO, but are well organized via the national hunting association.
- The idea for developing a Nature Park does not really 'live' among the stakeholders here, as to develop a NP you need infrastructure, rest areas etc..., but the terrain is difficult, it is rocky and hot.
- Local entrepreneur: there are lots of areas that are of interest for ecotourism, often that people do not know about – for example, you have a chestnut forest in the municipality – if you ask they foresters they know of 2-3 trees, but there is actually a forest with >300 trees. Also you have Thracian rock tombs in the vicinity, which in combination is very interesting.
- During business training, posters were received from the RP along with leaflets, and these were distributed to the mayor's office and the libraries. Also, there was a picture and essay competition among students. However, not many people would be able to tell you about the project, the level of general knowledge is not so high.
- From the RP they look for information about what to protect, how to protect, with brochures, leaflets. We need someone to move things along, and the municipality cannot always be involved. They look to the RP to provide structure and continuity. But continuity ends at the end of the project?
- Information centre would be useful, but this is not enough you need guides and committed people, etc...

### Meeting with Kurdjali regional institutions - 22 Feb. 2006, 14:15-15:15

Aynur Ibriamova, and Antoaneta Stefanova – Regional forestry board, Sabachatin Riza – District administration, Borislav Borisov and Vladimir Trifonov – RIEW, Lubomir Djisov – SF

- DA: There is a satisfactory collaboration with the RP. They are more as observers and try to support the project. They had apprehension about negative attitudes of the local people towards protected areas, but this is <now> not the case.
- RIEW: They are not direct partners of the project, but they participate in all the meetings and in some of the field surveys. Earlier projects were involved directly in conservation efforts, but the RP is only carrying out training programmes.
- The reasons not to have declaration of nature park are the interests for extraction of underground resources. The EIA is not effective mechanism – since 13 years in the RIEW Haskovo they have never seen negative a EIA. The investors pay for the assessment, so this never works out in a negative way.
- The surveys of biodiversity are very important – for Natura 2000 and protected area declaration, and as a motivation for refusing certain construction projects.
- RFB: This is the only regional board of the country which doesn't have a nature park on its territory. They need management plans for protected territories (like Gyumurdjinski snejnik). Among the 80 protected territories none has a management plan.
- Certification is not listed as a priority for RFB. The forests are predominantly planted coniferous forest, and 79% of the forests are state-owned. The state will have to pay the certification process and to pay the compensations to itself when Natura 2000 is declared (!). They know that till 2013 all the forests in Natura 2000 sites have to be certified.

Meeting with MFG Kurdjali, municipal headquarters, 22 February 2006, 15:30-16:45

- Museum. The RP helped and made a success of developing displays on natural history of Rhodope for the museum. The museum staff member also participated in the practical field surveys monitoring maidenhair fern, which is very rare. RP funded some of the exhibits in the nature department. At the museum we have lots of ideas, but these stop as soon as funding is required, so we were very grateful when the project helped out. Last year on Earth Day, the RP funded activities for children – there was a drawing competition in Kurdjali, they helped with small gifts for the children in general and for the winners. We have developed a very good working and personal relationship with them.
- Junior staff in EU integration & tourism department. There were discussions about development possibilities with the RP, and their input on environmental matters came just at the right time. In Kurdjali we do not have a specific database on natural conditions in the Oblast, for example, and the recent presentation on GIS was very useful. RP showed us how this new technology could be applied to planning and development works. They demonstrated new methods of town planning and municipal development, and how GIS could be applied and used. We would like to use this technology to a maximum extent. The training provided on ecotourism helped a lot, as it helped entrepreneurs in developing ideas, and helped orient them towards where they could seek assistance. The municipal government cannot help businesses <financially>, it can only facilitate. We also have a good relationship with the RP, not only between people, but between the agencies.
- Regional Agricultural Extension Service. There are three areas where we would like to work together with the RP:
  - Organic farming
  - Alternative farming (providing alternatives to tobacco farming, esp. animal husbandry and technical crops, orchards...)
  - Preparation of the agricultural sector for EU accession.
 So far (last year) we have not had any joint projects with the RP, but we would certainly be interested. Recommendations:
  - Promote farming and forestry structures in Rhodope; should develop a plan for joint activities.
  - We would like to learn if there is any chance of funding. Last year we submitted a proposal package for addressing the EU's CAP, and waited and waited, but nothing happened and we were not informed. These things should be coordinated better.
  - RP provides for pilot projects, but these have yet to happen. We know how difficult it is to identify farmers willing to participate in pilot projects, they need to be identified early.

Contacts within the MFG are very beneficial, as these are the contacts that generate ideas for future work, for example, our programme on breeding of rare breeds and alternative farming. For alternative farming we would like to organize activities beneficial for farmers (esp. animal breeding), and could think of organizing seminars together with the RP.

- Agriculture, Forestry, Environment & Water Department. (Nikolai Yanchev, forester): participated in the setting up of the RP team, and was involved with RP from beginning. RP works with regional administration in a very good way, and has been very helpful in organizing the MFG, and providing information. The projects should focus on a number of issues:
  - Many forests that are replanted are planted with <non-native?> conifers. This creates a problems with fires, which regularly occur and cause lots of damage. At the same time, broadleaf forests are being cut <and converted> Forestry is becoming commercialized, and lots of roads are being constructed in forest areas.
  - We have a problem with degraded lands, partly as a legacy from the past – these areas are unsuitable for pastures as they are heavily eroded.
  - Application of GIS and databases. This modern system was demonstrated by the RP – we see lots of advantages in applying this technology to our work and would be very keen to do so.

They are happy to be in the MFG and find it very useful. The structure for part of the Regional Development Strategy was created by the RP, where it focused on profiles and strategies for conservation of protected species.

- General discussion:
  - Many projects and programmes involve the establishing of focal groups – this is not new for us – they all revolve around various areas: e.g. so far this has been on education, culture, social issues, they all work differently as a result. So far there have been 4 or 5 MFG meetings in Kurdjali for the RP. At each meeting a particular issues is discussed. Other issues are also discussed, but we always get down to addressing the issue at hand. The project would be very different without the focus group, as you need to balance all the various points of view.
  - We are delaying the pilot projects, and this is not good, as people need to see examples on how to protect the environment, how to conduct organic farming, and so on. We need to look for funding of these pilot activities. We have for e.g. discussed a pilot eco-trail – what does this look like? We need clear examples. If things do not happen, we need to hear why this is the case, it should be explained to the MFG.
  - In Bulgaria many things are happening in this pre-accession period – institutionalizing an office for dealing with this will create easy access, raise issues. Funding is often a problem, but some of the problems can be caused by the donors, who tend to pick and choose.
  - We receive lots of training, training, training, but if you cannot invest even in minimal infrastructure for a project, how can you then use the training? The RP has provided know-how and training in GIS, but needs to be expanded with cadastral information for us to be able to tap into EU funds.
  - (Some of the MFG) look forward to future designation of the Eastern Rhodope Nature Park, and expect the RP to help with this process of designation. The project could finance some subprojects for scientific research of nature in ER related to nature areas- there are many ideas for study but no funds available. To be able to manage and protect natural resources you need information, and in this the RP can help. Not a single institution can do all this, provide this information – we are all aware of the uniqueness of Rhodope, but none are capable of providing the information.



- The park was not established, but the natural resources in the ER area are nevertheless still well managed, despite the abandoning of the Nature Park designation <for now>. No calamity has resulted because of this lack of designation, no extinction of species. <not all agree to this opinion by the forester; others argue for establishment of the NP>
- The designation has been delayed because of the mining concessions, which cover a large area for surveying, and it is not known exactly where the mines will be developed.
- Many people in the municipality are aware of the RP, but there could be more public promotion – pilot projects would help a lot in this area, and help the public understand.
- <in response to RV's question re an umbrella for planning> The GIS system has been an eye opener for us – at present we are primarily involved in administration and represent the central administration, but now it is time for us to be more pro-active, need to go out and collect data and information ourselves. Central government does not provide us with even basic information, not even proper maps.
- <in response to question about the issue of marketing of products> This is the most serious problem we face as agricultural extension service. The service cannot help in any way there was a seminar last year, and we need to build upon this effort. Kurdjali has no business centre, and we really need one for this purpose. We can identify companies that may promise to purchase certain products, but they often break their promises.
- Before assessing markets, farmers need to form associations, certainly for certain groups <of farmers> or certain products. The 5-year period required for developing organic farming is a problem.
- <in relation to organic farming> pollution with heavy metals needs to be addressed. In the past this was mapped, but this needs to be updated as it is no longer accurate, and people are building in polluted areas, dust is spreading from polluted areas.

Meeting with Smolyan Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water  
23 February 2006, 09.30-10.00

Katya Gadjeva – Public Relations officer

- The RIEW Smolyan has 30 people staff, including 2 experts on biodiversity and 1 warden. A new position has been announced for that of a Natura 2000 expert. The Inspectorate is covering the Smolyan district and the Laki municipality (from Plovdiv district).
- There are 46 protected territories on the territory of the RIEW Smolyan (including the newest one – Slivovdolsko padalo, from December 2005). They are small – between 0,3 and 600 ha.
- The RIEW doesn't find the declaration of a Nature Park necessary. The statute on Nature Parks is creating many complications for the peoples' activities. There are ideas for 3 new large protected territories (1000 ha) instead of the two Nature Parks.

## Meeting with Smolyan regional institutions 23 February 2006, 10.00-11.00

Asen Karabov, Maria Slavcheva – Regional Forestry Board, Dimitar Kouszmanov, Stefka Garova – District Administration, Salza Nikolova – District Service Agriculture and Forests, Georgi Popov – District Agriculture Extension service

- DA: It is a very good situation for the project office to work before the park is being declared. There is a need to first make an inventory of the biodiversity and to take into account the needs of the local people. The RP office is doing very well – collecting information, organising events and meetings.
- RFB: Making for a first time in Bulgaria a forest certification was big success. Here 26% of the forests are non-state owned, and the owners have to pay the certification. There is software bought and training provided to the RFB. The entire territory of the RFB will be in a Natura 2000 site.
- Agriculture extension service: We will have more common work to do after the acceptance of the National Agro-environmental Plan (which has 50% of the measures for high nature value farmlands) – the project can help the preparation of projects. The RP are good partners.
- District agriculture service: There is a need for promotion and development of the organic agriculture, and certification of a region – this is according to the District strategy, which will be discussed on Monday. Such certification has been successfully made by the Jobs center in Velingrad. There is no mechanism for financing the implementation of the strategy.
- Very good and useful work with schools, teachers and children.
- Agriculture – currently mainly potatoes and tobacco. Alternative : strawberries, raspberry, blackberry, blueberry, medicinal plants, aronia. There is a raising market in Europe. Possible action – support for establishment of an association of the producers of berries. (There are already such associations of the sheep-breeders, milk-producers, tobacco-producers, bee-honey-producers). In Orehovo there will be an enterprise for processing medicinal and aromatic plants.
- Expectations from the project: marking and promoting the protected territories, mapping the distribution of protected species, methodological help – how to interpret the habitats management in the forest management plans, how to make the ToRs for the new forest management plans. There is a need for intervention on a central level! There is a need to create a NGO after the project, based on the activities and experiences of the project office!

## Meeting with Municipal Agencies in Smolyan, 23 February 2006, 11:30-12:30.

- NGO Tourism Council of Mugavitra village: this council covers 3 villages and 270 km<sup>2</sup> in upper Arda basin. Typical is the well preserved nature – both in past and at present there are no enterprises, and this provides a good setting for rural tourism. They began in 2001, when they had a chance for starting a project under the Phare programme, whereby 10 hiking trails were created, guides were trained, and a tourist information centre was established. At the time there was only 1 guesthouse for visitors, now there are 30. In 2001 we had 7000 tourists, now 43,000 (2005). Problem: in the region we do not know enough about biodiversity yet, what to offer tourists, what to manage, we've had contacts for many years with organizations about biodiversity – we had ideas for a joint project about biodiversity conservation and ecotourism, how to manage a trail for hiking. Another line along which we work – there are three NGOs, and an idea we've had is to resurrect traditional crafts. This year in Sofia we have a crafts stand in Sofia with products from our villages. We had an excellent training session in Devin on ecotourism, but funding of ideas and plans remains a problem. 2 years ago we gathered people who wanted to improve houses for tourism, and SAPARD was involved. Some tried funding via banks, but were unsuccessful as the mortgage value of property in the region is very low. SAPARD is good but only if you already have money. Currently we are trying to obtain funding under the 'Beautiful Bulgaria' project, and will discuss things with the banks.
- Municipality of Smolyan Ecologist. In Smolyan we've been working on many environmental issues, and have developed an easy going relationship with the RP, looking at areas where we have a joint interest/overlap. They help us with biodiversity information – the municipality has never had an interest in funding such studies, but we need such information to find out which areas are important for conservation. Another line of cooperation is discussion of alternative energy resources, whereby the RP assisted in a seminar. There is 30,000 ha of municipal forest – now we know who owns what we can work together on management issues. We now also know about water treatment, sites and terrains for treatment of former industrial sites, eroded and abandoned areas, as all this has been entered on the database we have been presented (and will obtain in near future).
- Private hotel owner: (member of the Tourism Council) also participated in the ecotourism training in Devin. Initially, ecotourism was not trusted by many as a good investment, but now this has changed. Met with RP <at training session> and lots of issues were clarified, especially on how to combine local products, beauty of nature, and natural landmarks. The training helped him <and others> to gain confidence. At the training session, RP explained about the various forms of tourism and how to distinguish between them. Biodiversity based tourism is not yet well developed. Prior to the RP we locally organized a clean-up of the upper Arda River. This was organised by 3 villages under the Phare project – we cleaned up household waste out of the riverbed, and introduced a waste collection system. The presence of features such as many endemics and the many caves are not well appreciated. Together with the RP we would like to develop and maintain a network of nature trails.
- Smolyan Municipality Tourism Expert in Programs and Projects department: The RP has managed to get interested stakeholders together – most businesses usually did not

respond <to our invitations> but RP managed to do this by providing specialists that can tell interesting things that benefit them. One of the largest tour operators in Bulgaria, for example, also came and provided information. People now believe in themselves and in their ideas – the seminar served as a place where to exchange ideas and information, for example, about the changes in legislation. Training also provided inputs by people practically involved in tourism, not only accommodations but in related services. RP presented ideas about signboards, marking protected areas and areas good for ecotourism, and providing information. Persons provided presentations about how to produce brochures and leaflets, based on ideas about target groups.

- Smolyan Municipality Senior Expert Programs & Projects: There are lots of mutual benefits between RP and municipality. The municipality provided the office facilities and the regional administration provides information and access by RP. On a regular basis they meet to discuss and exchange information, not only in digital but also in printed form. The local school children have been very enthusiastic about the favourite animal and plant contest held by the RP, whereby they produced drawings, paintings and wrote poems and essays. This really made the children very happy, and campaigns such as that should be continued – the RP provided banners, pencils and small prizes. The region needs small projects that can be financed by the RP, to provide real examples of what can be done. For example, a project for the establishment of a nature trail - the MFG could discuss ideas and proposals for such projects. In the Rhodope region NGOs are very active, producing many proposals, although they are not always of a very good quality.
- Teacher at Plovdiv University: Many teachers participated in RP (and Green Balkans) organized field studies – also in the preparation of plans and in the management of protected areas. There is an urgent need for solutions. The Nature Park idea originated in the academic community, and via NGO involvement has now become the RP. The GIS system is a new way of management, and we hope that contacts and practical applications can be made. We have established many informal contacts, and on Earth day, for example, we were actively involved with the RP. The concept of the Nature Park is our guiding idea, and it will be good for both the region and for Bulgaria if more is done in this field. We have an agreement with the Greeks and would eventually like to establish a transboundary park; our contacts are with the town of Drama.
- Business community representative: I participated in the seminar (organized by JOBS) on “I have an idea” last year – there were many participants – on how to develop business ideas. I have the ambition to start up a tourism business with my husband and son – as a private person I already work at the Pampolovo ski resort. We were taught at the seminar on how to look at the business proposal from all angles and to analyse this – we learned also to take external factors into account. Financing is the main problem, but things also need to be done by the municipality, for example, we need a sewerage collector system. The location we have in mind is not located in a backward area, so we have to target commercial banks for financing. The Devin seminar and the ‘I have an idea’ seminar provided very practical exercises – we had to compete among ourselves on how to best organize businesses, not only for making the greatest profit, but also taking all the costs into account. The seminars also created very friendly relationships. One third of those present wanted to develop private businesses for ecotourism. We have now concluded that it would be better for several families to combine efforts and

organize things among ourselves, with each specializing in a separate aspect of the business, as to do things properly is not as easy as expected.

- MFG: So far there have been 3 focus group meetings in Smolyan municipality, although further meetings are called for if these are needed, and minutes are distributed. Sometimes smaller meetings were also held, depending on the specific needs. MFG handles certain interests – during the first meeting these interests were outlined in order to be able to meet and work more efficiently.
- Non-park scenario: The Park was an idea, but we need to collect a lot of information first about the area <and put this in a GIS>, as this can help us justify where the park is to be located, which species are to be protected, etc... The area is very diverse, and certain areas are suitable for only a specific type of management. The Nature Park is not in conflict with tourism. In the Rhodope region people were against the Nature Park because they thought this would stop forestry activities. The municipalities support the NP and smaller parks, but non-tourism businesses are <or at least were against because they think this will restrict the use of water, etc... Locally, non-tourism business is in conflict with tourism business: the PA would be the more profitable scenario than simply extracting wood from the forests, and benefits should be assessed along these lines – people should be made aware.
- Development strategy: information obtained by the RP contributed to the regional development strategy, and studies will be the basis for what to do from now on. Next week the regional development strategy will be discussed. Permits issued are to be based on the municipal strategy, and we have to find a balance between options. Permits are often issued in Sofia, and coordinated with the local municipality. Not many permits <for large scale development> have been issued in Smolyan.
- Tourism is recognized as a priority, but it is not specified in the strategy as to what type of tourism. The municipal development strategy will be more detailed <than the regional> about what type of tourism that is to be developed. At present there is a slightly negative attitude towards the proposed Perilik <spelling?> complex, as this will undoubtedly affect nature. People are still looking for funds for Perilik, and this will need to be a large scale investor, as the costs will be huge. The idea includes ski slopes and tea houses, but not accommodations. Neighbouring villages will benefit by offering rural tourism and homestays. The Rhodope region is a good area for living in as it is a healthy environment, but it is also very poor. In general people agree that the Pompolovo area has been over-developed – water and power were already a problem in the past, but now it is a major obstacle. Does the municipality have a strategy for overcoming this?
- Natura 2000 expectations: If a sufficient number of areas are stimulated under the Natura 2000, agriculture, organic farming and so on would also be stimulated. Logging won't be stopped, and that is not the intention, as that would be absurd. However, high altitude areas need to be protected from logging.

### Meeting in Devin with MFG, 23 February 2006, 16:00-17:15 (WG)

- Municipality ecology & tourism expert: In Devin we were extremely pleased with the RP, as we did not have any proper information about biodiversity, just old information from the ministries about designated areas. Also, we have two reserves in the municipality, but these are not visited as reserves elsewhere are better studied and are more accessible. Our environmental department did not have this option <for study>. The RP can help in the future by helping us plan for biodiversity conservation <and sustainable use>, in joint activities with the forestry board, and by helping us with education activities. Young people must become aware of our natural heritage and our obligations, so that we can rely on them in the future. Devin municipality aims to develop ecotourism based on biodiversity. We must be able to establish conditions so that biodiversity is not destroyed, as we want to attract tourists. Joint actions carried out with the RP: 2 meetings with the MFG <that I have attended>. We received all the information provided, including a map of the resources. We also had an ecotourism training seminar here in Devin, conducted jointly with hotel managers who play a role in biodiversity conservation.
- Teacher: An extremely good initiative by the RP was involving children, as they must now about the mountains and their natural biodiversity riches. Lots of information was provided to children and schools, and there was a competition. My 10<sup>th</sup> grade girl students won the prize from the RP for their efforts in art and essays. They <the students in general> are interested in biodiversity conservation, biology, chemistry. We do not have a computer and beamer, but the RP brought everything and showed us some wonderful presentations. On Earth Day there was also a very beautiful exhibition related to the conservation of nature. This was all very beneficial for the children. The students have made field studies, making herbarium collections and studying plants in the forest.
- Devin Business Center: The BC was established in 1998, and have conducted several projects in the Devin region, including the establishing of a tourism network. Worked together with UNDP in starting up the RP and getting it connected locally. The BC provided logistical support to connect to the right people. There are 13 persons in the MFG in all, and we have outlined a strategy with the RP. The RP has managed to clarify things related to development. The BC supports the transformation of the area into a Nature Park. If this had been suggested 5-6 years ago the local businesses would have been against the idea, as the focus was on wood, mushroom collecting and so on. Now the focus is on rural tourism and spa's, and we can see that there is a flip-side: if we preserve nature we can earn more. So yes, we are in support of the project and the NP concept. At the BC we also study attitudes, what people want and need. We have distributed promotional material produced by the RP. We have a number of recommendations for the RP:
  - Sustainability of the project should be made clear.
  - If the Rhodope region does not become mainly protected, they should find an alternative way in which to do this.
  - There should be a clear strategy for the region and what the project wants to achieve.

What happens if I start a business based on organic farming – OK, the costs go up, as will the price, but who will buy the produce? People use manure and not fertilizer, as they are too poor.

Together with the RP we were involved in preparing a declaration that was supposed to be sent to legislative authorities to help conserve nature. This was after the focus group had developed their own vision.

- State Forestry Board: in the short time we've cooperated with the RP – we've managed to understand the main objectives of the RP, and understand the ecology of the region. We have joint activities:
  - We've developed a joint strategy about what should happen on the project.
  - Non timber related uses should exceed timber related uses by far in the future.
  - In the rapidly changing global situation and increasing population, timber will be more and more in demand. We need to manage our timber resources. If a forest is left to regenerate on its own this can take a long time, or may not happen at all, and often human intervention in this area is desirable.
  - Protecting areas in Rhodope with the aim to protect biodiversity is a noble idea, but does not conform to what the Rhodope and Bulgarian people want. The wild tulip, for example, which occurs naturally in our pastures. These have survived, not because of protection, but because it was used by people and livestock. In some protected areas this species has disappeared because of prohibiting livestock and cutting of grass. Grasses grow and aggressive, competitive species dominate – also increasing the fire hazard.
  - Bulgarians are skeptics: the eyes should see and the hands should touch. Providing training, meetings, information and a great seminar is not enough, this disturbs people. What they need is a network of people/small farmers that provide visible examples. In a nearby village, where the biggest farmers are potato farmers, someone began with raspberries, first 0.2 ha, then 1.0 ha the next year, now everyone in the village has planted raspberries.
  - Hotel managers object to felling of trees, they fear that flows will decrease and that tourism will be affected. If the RP could help with EU funding, for rural tourism & agro-tourism....
- Devin Municipality Project Designer: RP sent us information about funding opportunities, and information about SAPARD. Devin decided to apply – one application was related to sowing or planting of trees in eroded areas, to preserve biodiversity and preserve ecotrails. Unfortunately, in the end we could not apply, as the municipality could not prove that it owned the land. Another proposal was related to improving forest and farm roads, but again, we could not prove municipal ownership of the land. The municipality has sent information about cultural heritage and other aspects upon which the RP needs to build. The municipality has developed and accepted the 2007-2013 development plan. Part of the project was used as a basis for selecting areas for tourism areas designated – these were marked, etc... The plan needs updating at any point in time, as it is not set in stone. The plan is to be discussed with the public, and accepted by the council. The development plan is amended or supplemented each year in March – there was a public hearing. The current development plan extends over 87 pages. The GIS presentation in Smolyan was attended by people from Devin. We have a similar system here in Devin, with the municipal development plan. After the meeting we asked the RP to receive more



information on crises management (floods, fire, environmental damage), aimed at forecasting and addressing the calamities. For biodiversity and tourism GIS is a very useful tool.

- With an area of 550km<sup>2</sup>, the forests of Devin extend over 72% of the municipalities territory. Care for these resources should therefore not be neglected.
- Nature reserves that are state owned need management plans, and are to be managed by certain structures. \
- Small trails were constructed, but these have no management plans and need to be managed and improved in the future.
- Enforcement of the development plan: if changes anticipated are insignificant, then the go-ahead is given. However, it is up to the mayor and the municipal architect to decide, and this is a big responsibility for them. The support of this decision making process by NGOs is important. In Devin, certain hydropower investments were not allowed due to a combined action of NGOs and municipality.
- There is a contradiction between state that manages water resources, and at the same time the municipality that manages infrastructure. The river basin directorate may allow the use of water and issue a permit, and man in the municipalities then think that they must therefore also follow suit and cannot refuse. However, this presents them with a difficult situation, as this is not the case.
- We have managed to stop gold mining in the region, due to NGO assistance.
- Devin <mineral water company> has supported cultural events, but has not supported environmental causes, and the fees for the use of plastic <paid to central government> are not received locally.
- 30% of annual concession fee is used annually for infrastructure. There are four spas in the area, 3 are state owned, one is municipal.
- There is little outward migration of young people in the municipality, certainly compared to other areas, and people tend their pastures and farms.
- A water reservoir is to be constructed in 2007 by an Austrian company, and this will be for hydropower, plus drinking water for Plovdiv and Haskovo. We could not refuse this because of outside pressures, and at the same time it creates jobs and invites the arrival of construction companies.

### Meeting with Rudozem focus group members 23 February 2006, 16.00-17.00

Sava Garbelov – Municipality expert, Ibrahim Chernarev – Municipal Tourist Council, Veselin Dimitrov – Municipal service Agriculture and Forests, Shukri Halilov - businessman

- Everybody finds the project very useful, but expect more practical activities. The local people need to see working examples – the promised “demonstration pilot initiatives” are expected.
- On the previous presentations of the idea of designating a Nature Park, this was not been accepted by the local people because they have been told that economic activities will be forbidden. Now they are willing to accept the declaration of small protected areas (near the border) – primarily as tourist attractions.
- The Municipal Tourist Council has developed an eco-tourism project with 6 eco-trails, a tourist information center (the space is given by the Municipality for 7 years), training of guides, and a ‘green school’ for children (there are 2 secondary schools and others).
- Agriculture: potatoes and tobacco. Alternatives: berries, aronia, cassis (black currant). The organic agriculture is not a priority for the region. Important are local varieties of beans. There is an enterprise for processing of medicinal plants, and another one for processing berries. Problem : the small scale of farmlands, there is no people for the livestock breeding, and there is no dairy.

Meeting with MAF, Agriculture section, 24 February 2006, 15:00-16:00

- Ms Viara Stefanova, State Expert, Head of Agri-environment Department
  - Ms Maria Yukanova, Head of Department, Rural Development Directorate
- VS has contacts with the project, and developed the following ideas:
    - The initial idea (and this is still valid) is to provide training in agri-environmental planning. Under a separate programme, MAF would prepare materials for farmers. Last year, however, national accreditation (for organic farming was not received as was initially anticipated, but this has now been granted three days ago.
    - WWF has prepared guidelines for incorporating environmental targets into farming practices, and the exercise would involve programming of an environmental checklist<sup>18</sup>.
    - Programme involving the calculation of payments that are necessary in order to limit farmer's activities in and near sensitive areas – i.e. payment of compensation for income foregone. The exercise would involve a calculation of the compensation rate. Birdlife is doing this for the IBAs: grouping activities and calculating the foregone income. The RP could do this for habitat areas in the Rhodope region.
    - Training for farmers in how to apply for funding & compensation.
  - Under the SRDP programme, MAF has created close relations with the RP, and created local initiative groups for the formulation and implementation of a commonly agreed agenda of activities. This was used for promoting the RP as well. The SRDP programme was the first in Bulgaria that established so-called Leader+ groups (EU). Some of the inputs required <for successful implementation of this Leader programme> were incomplete, and the RP was able to fill (some of) the gaps. In the next programming period for rural development, 2007-2013, the Leader approach is to be included, and the local initiative groups for the Leader programme are to be arranged per 'territory'. Such a territory group is to include a core of 10,000 (to max. 100,000) persons. The territory may follow municipal boundaries, but does not need to do so. Some municipalities will have to cooperate with other, neighbouring municipalities, and that is not always easy, as attitudes vary a lot. In practice, it has been very difficult to create local leader groups, even within one municipality. The initiative groups have to develop their own strategy and own ideas for development. In order to achieve such cooperation means you really have to have an independent moderator or facilitator, someone from outside who is not perceived as being biased. In 11 municipalities, pilot groups have been established under the SRDP, of which 8 are in the Rhodope region. People decide which projects are to be financed – what has been identified to now include eco-parks, organic farming, etc.... Through the RP it would be good if such moderators/facilitators could be trained, so that their mode of thinking is sensitized to environmental issues.
  - A large part of the Rhodope region will be classified as an area 'unfavourable' for agriculture, and is therefore eligible for state payments. These will be based on the area of land an individual farmer has, as this is the criteria under discussion with the EU.

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<sup>18</sup> WWF (undated?) – Rural Development Environmental Programming Guidelines.

Unfavourable areas include those above an altitude of 600m, or on slopes of 20% or more.

- Can other activities be seen as co-funding for the RP? All other programmes under the (SRDP?) project can be seen as co-funding for the GEF project, including anti-erosion measures, reduction of pesticides, and so on. Another GEF project (medium-sized) by Birdlife aims at reducing pesticide use, and even future pesticide reductions can be regarded as co-funding.
- The National Rhodope programme announced by the government includes credits for subsidizing the interest <on loans>. Local people are using this programme more than SAPARD, as it is more accessible.
- The Biomass Action Plan provides subsidies for stimulating biomass crops (esp. rapeseed) at a rate of 45 euro/ha.yr. This amount may be increased by the EU, and in all, subsidies are available for subsidizing a total area of 1.5 million ha.
- The Organic Farming Action Plan includes measures to improve the external market; this includes a compensation payment for income foregone by farmers making the transition to organic farming. MAF does not find that it needs to help farmers identify markets as well.
- SAPARD has helped organic producers to look for markets. The most difficult part is establishing producers groups – these need to be registered, have an office and apply for support.

### Meeting with Ministry of regional development - MRDPW 24 Feb. 2006, 16.30-17.30

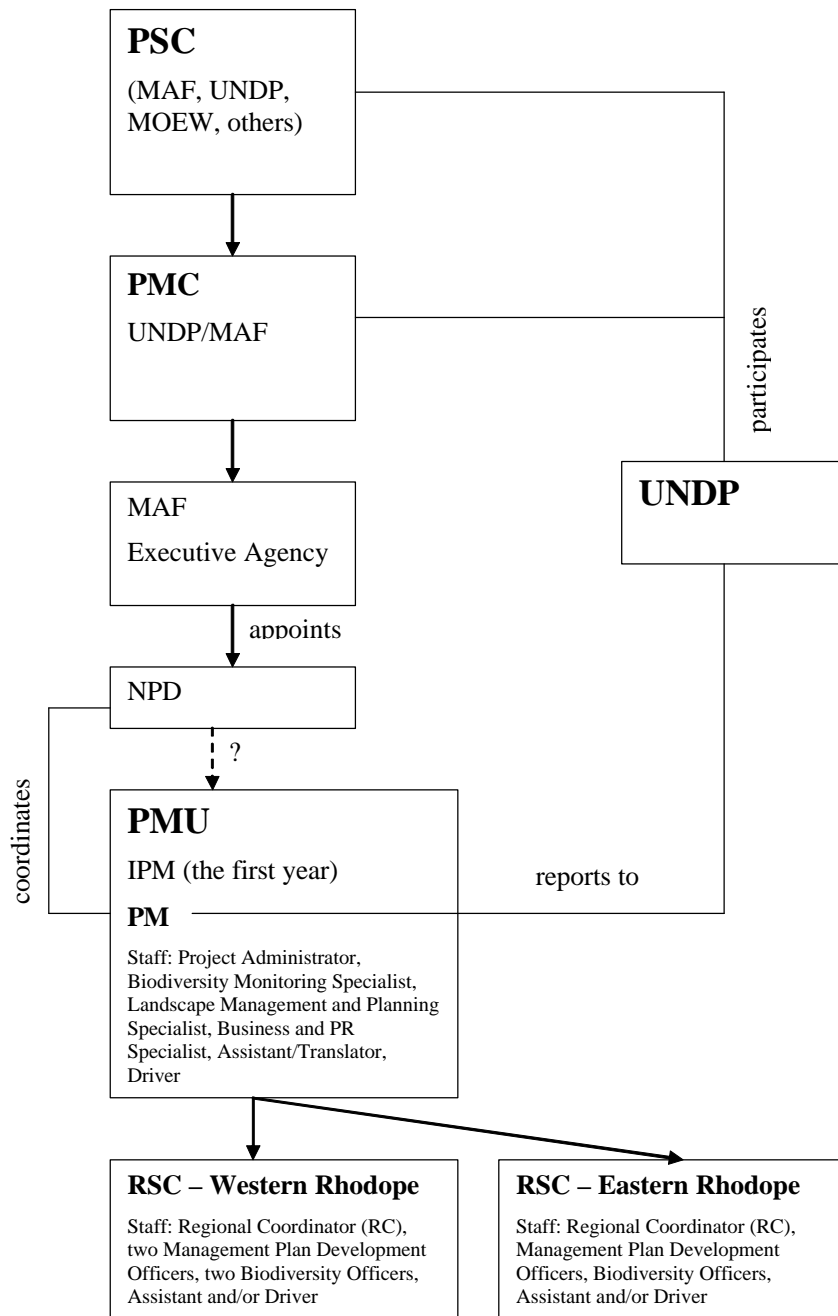
Zlatina Karova – Director of the Territorial governance and decentralization Directorate, to be renamed soon as Administrative and Territorial Governance and Local Self-governance

- Ms Karova is born in Smolyan. She is legal advisor of the Association of the Rhodope municipalities.
- The RP is a combination of strategies, it has helped the formulation of many strategies and plans, but this is the first step. There is a need of creation of real partnerships in the municipalities and between municipalities. The MRDPW is trying to promote such partnerships. (With the new UNDP/MRDPW Public-private partnerships project – PPP, they will try to make people from 2 or more municipalities, or a municipality and a district administration to work together and prepare projects.)
- The RP should offer small grants, but the projects have to be developed with citizen's participation. The scope of beneficiaries and activities has to be enlarged in order to also include universities and schools. She is ready to participate in such forums.
- Actually there is no state structure able to replace the foreseen Nature Park administration functions; it has to be developed. The RP can suggest this to the Working group (of vice-ministers, district governors and mayors), which is at present developing a national Decentralization Plan. The deadline for this plan is the end of March 2006. This should be kind of strategic plan, without details, and the concrete steps, structures and required legal changes will be developed further by the respective ministry of inter-ministrial group – there is a committed PHARE project for that. For suggesting something to the Working group a letter with the proposal should be addressed to Mrs. Snejana Dimitrova – Director of the Strategic Planning Directorate of the MRDPW a.s.a.p.
- Groups of municipalities can also form regional structures – on agreement basis. It is not forbidden by the law but it is also not foreseen by the law. Such structures can have consultative and information functions, but can not enforce decisions.
- Such a regional structure could be the Regional Council – a new structure developed following the requirements of the EU ensuring the implementation of the South-Central planning region development strategy and plan. This resides in Plovdiv, but only 40% of the municipalities that it covers are in the Rhodope. The functioning and capacities of this council are under development.
- One possible legal solution is the formulation of Law (act) for the Rhodope – as it is actually made for the Black Sea coast which has to determine some rules, procedures and structures.
- Important partner of the Rhodope project should be the Association of the Rhodope municipalities. Founded 1992, now executive director is Zlatka Nikolova, president Dora Yankova, mayor of Smolyan, it has its funding from USAID through the Foundation for local government reform (100% in the beginning, 20% now). They have regular General Assembly (annually), which includes all the mayors and presidents of municipal councils. There is an elected Steering Committee of three mayors (actually Smolyan, Kurdjali and ???).
- The idea of having the Nature Parks (in general) under the responsibility of the MRDPW is acceptable, but has to be further developed.
- For helping the development of the Bulgarian network of protected areas, a Compensation fund has to be established. It can be supported by the EU.

## ANNEX 7

## RP Organigramme

**GEF Rhodope Project Organigramme**  
**based on the Project Document 23.04.2004**



## ANNEX 8

## Log-frame revisions as proposed by the RP PMU

PROJECT	VERIFY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004) <sup>19</sup>	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
<p>GOAL:</p> <p>The biodiversity of the Eastern and Western Rhodope landscape is conserved.</p>						<p>⇒ Continued GoB support for conservation. Biodiversity conservation will continue to be a government priority.</p> <p>⇒ Natural factors/disasters will not unduly harm local communities.</p> <p>⇒ Current economic development trends will continue or not significantly worsen, thereby affecting budgetary processes or stakeholder aspirations</p>

<sup>19</sup> In the new Project Log-Frame the values for year 2004 (i.e. project start) is set as nil (0). Further more the results listed for 2007 and 2009 will be the result of direct or strong indirect project interventions, unless other wise noted.

PROJECT	VERIFY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004) <sup>19</sup>	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
						⇒ Natural conditions could alter baseline level of diversity and ecosystem health.
<b>PROJECT OBJECTIVE:</b>  Stakeholders integrate landscape – scale biodiversity conservation into resource management and economic development Policy and Practice in Eastern and Western Rhodope.	<u>Indicator 1:</u> Biodiversity conservation objectives integrated into municipality plans. (# of plans)	0	Process under way	27	Municipality document, Regional plans.	⇒ Continued GoB support for conservation. Biodiversity conservation will continue to be a government priority. ⇒ Stakeholders increase their interest and see the need for integrating nature conservation concerns into local planning
	<u>Indicator 2:</u> Stakeholders general perception on the importance of integration of nature conservation into local development initiatives increased (expressed in % of baseline).	Base line	75%	150%	Peoples attitude survey results. (repetitive test)	
	<u>Indicator 3:</u> Local administrations general perception on the importance of integration of nature conservation into local development initiatives increased (expressed in % of baseline).	Base line	75%	150%	Peoples attitude survey results. (repetitive test)	
	<u>Indicator 1:</u> (#) forestry units (FU) covering (#) hectares (ha) is certified or incorporates areas of High Conservation Value Forests and other biodiversity concerns into the forest management	0 (FU) 0 (ha)	6 (FU) 49.500 (ha)	19 (FU) 140.000 (ha)	Forestry plans, Certification documentation	
	<u>Indicator 2:</u> natural areas covering (#) hectares) used for ecotourism under biodiversity sensitive management	0	0	200	Project reporting, management plans	
	<u>Indicator 3:</u> Land farmed covering (#) hectares managed under the National Agri-Environmental Plan	0	In the process of development	50	Government field interviews; surveys of attitudes before and after.	



PROJECT	VERIFY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004) <sup>19</sup>	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
OUTPUT 1  Protected areas/zones established and collaborative management structure operational.	<u>Indicator 1:</u> (#) Protected areas/zones (PAz) established and (#) staff (management/ oversight/ enforcement) assigned <sup>20</sup> .	0 (PAz) 0 (staff)	5 (PAz) 25 (staff)	15 (PAz) 75 (staff)	Official documentation; staff interviews.	⇒ Institutional walls blocking cross-sector collaboration can be overcome. ⇒ Funding for additional staff will be made available by GoB.
	<u>Indicator 2:</u> Collaborative management structures meetings held (#) with local stakeholder representation (MAF and MOEW structures, Municipalities, private landowners and NGOs) held.	0	20	80	Expert reports; collaborative management agreement; meeting minutes.	
OUTPUT 2  Information baseline line established and strengthened as basis for adaptive management	<u>Indicator 1:</u> Information gathered from large field surveys (# of man days (MD)) stored on an ongoing basis in simple (#) database/data sets (DB).	0 (MD) 5 (DB)	2500 (MD) 5 (DB)	4000 (MD) 5 (DB)	Contracts for project assignments; Stored data on RP computers	⇒ Stakeholders willing to share and use RP information. ⇒ Stakeholders will begin to utilize the provided information in an adaptive management approach.
	<u>Indicator 2:</u> Annual GIS upgrades provided to project partners (#) such as government institutions, municipalities and NGOs starting end of Year 3.	0	0	25	Technical report; field visit; office reports	
	<u>Indicator 3:</u> The Rhodopean Voluntary Monitoring Network provides data on species from monitoring sites (#) to MOEW for integration into the National Biodiversity Monitoring System.	0	10	50	Review of collected data/information; handover protocol	

<sup>20</sup> The assigned staff is here understood as either new staff hired, or all ready hired staff which duties has been "re-directed" partly or fully to cover activities related to the protected areas/zones.

PROJECT	VERIFY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004) <sup>21</sup>	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
OUTPUT 3  Sustainable management regimes piloting a landscape-based approach to conservation undertaken within the Rhodope region	<u>Indicator 1:</u> Municipality Working Groups (#) take active part in the development (in the period year 2-4) and approval (in year 4-5) of protected areas/zones management plans <sup>21</sup>	0	5	15	Management plan; documentation of planning process; interviews.	⇒ Communities will obtain and maintain their interest and support of habitat conservation and sustainable development
	<u>Indicator 2:</u> Conservation plans (#) for priority species underway (U) by middle Year 2 and (#) under implementation (I) starting Year 4.	0(U) 0(I)	6(U) 0(I)	finalized 6(I)	Meeting reports; project reporting; planning documents; interviews.	
	<u>Indicator 3:</u> (#) Municipal Habitat Conservation (MHC) plans act as modular component of the protected areas/zones management plans by end Year 3 and under implementation by middle Year 4.	0	5	15	Municipal plans and reports from planning process	
	<u>Indicator 4:</u> (#) Priority protected area/zones management plans prepared by Year 4.	0	5	15	Management plan; documentation of planning process; interviews.	
OUTPUT 4  Monitoring/Evaluation	<u>Indicator 1:</u> Best practice approaches to ecosystem management and conservation fine-tuned by end of year 5	0	0	Report prepared	Best practice documents.	⇒ The key aspects of adaptive management; questioning, analyzing; and

<sup>21</sup> There is not an inseparable link between the protected areas/zones and the consultative committees, Municipality Focus Groups, Municipality habitat Conservation Plans etc. While bigger protected areas will have such a link smaller protected areas/zones might not. In some cases a group of smaller protected areas/zones will be pooled to make more functional units for which local planning can occur.

PROJECT	VERIFY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004) <sup>19</sup>	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
n (M&E) applied as tool for stakeholders capacity building	<u>Indicator 2:</u> Annual lessons learned retrospective involving stakeholders from all relevant sectors summarizes the year's issues in short, simple lessons learned updates. (# of retrospectives produced in total)	0	2	5	Meeting notes/summary; lessons learned updates.	re-orienting – will be successfully adopted by stakeholder partners.
	<u>Indicator 3:</u> Project monitoring conducted annually beginning end of year 1 through quarterly and annual UNDP and GEF reporting and monitoring (# of reports)	0	15	30	Monitoring reports	
OUTPUT 5  Institutional capacity to integrate biodiversity and ecosystem management objectives into productive sector programmes strengthened	<u>Indicator 1:</u> 75 staff from MAF MOEW and MRDPW structures, trained in adaptive management and ecosystem management starting end of year 2.	0	25	75	Reports from training,	⇒ Institutional walls blocking cross-sector collaboration can be overcome. ⇒ Incorporating conservation objectives into development planning will proceed with minimal resistance.
	<u>Indicator 2:</u> (#) Municipalities trained in applying Ecosystem Management (EM) principles to development planning Starting beginning of year 3.	0	In progress	27	Reports from training,	
	<u>Indicator 3:</u> (#) MAF staff at local and regional level trained in integrating biodiversity into productive sector activities reflecting Landscape Ecology principles in natural resource use.	0	25	75	Reports from training,	

PROJECT	VERIFY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004) <sup>19</sup>	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
	<u>Indicator 4:</u> 15 Collaborative management structure capacity to act as effective ecosystem managers is strengthened through training and partnership building by Year 4.	0	5	15	Reports from training,	
OUTPUT 6  Forestry, tourism and farming practices reoriented to support conservation while improving livelihoods	<u>Indicator 1:</u> At least 20 farmers adopt organic agriculture in E & W Rhodope by end of the project.	0	10	20	Field visits; interviews with participants; Project records	⇒ Communities and central Gov't collaborate effectively in project-inspired activities. ⇒ Targeted levels of funding will be realized ⇒ External factors do not inhibit the development of tourism in site areas. ⇒ Local residents are willing to change resource use practices given certain benefits.
	<u>Indicator 2:</u> 40 farmers utilizing indigenous breed of cattle or sheep for grazing and milk production by end of Year 4.	0	10	40	Field visits; interviews with participants; Project records	
	<u>Indicator 3:</u> At least 4 forest plots is certified by end of Year 4	0	2	4	Field visits; interviews with participants; Project records	
	<u>Indicator 4:</u> 6 tour operators provide services in accordance to identified best practice behavior by the end of year 3.	0	6	8	Project records; surveys	
	<u>Indicator 5:</u> 25 entrepreneurs, farmers and forest owners accessing EU funding for business development, organic agriculture, and certified forestry (# of beneficiaries).	0	5	25	Field visits; interviews with participants; Project/ EU records	
	<u>Indicator 6:</u> Small hotels (B&B) operates under "green" guidelines. (# of B&B)	0	20	50	Project records; surveys	

PROJECT	VERIFY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	Project start (2004) <sup>19</sup>	Mid term (2007)	Project end (2009)	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS
OUTPUT 7  Financing for sustainability of the applied conservation and cross-sector coordination secured	<u>Indicator 1:</u> Collaborative management structure approves (#) plans for achieving financial sustainability of nature conservation areas.	0	5	15	Sustainability plan	⇒ EU agricultural policy will evolve to encompass the maintenance of traditional landscapes as a legitimate agricultural practice. ⇒ Economics will maintain a dominant influence over environmental action. ⇒ GoB and partners will succeed in fully funding the protected areas trust fund.
	<u>Indicator 2:</u> (#) Specific fiscal and tax incentives recommended for farmers to adopt organic practices and foresters to adopt certified practices and tourism operators to adopt low-impact practices recommended by end Year 4.	0	In Progress	10	Mechanism policy docs; legal document	

