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ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP/GEF Project “Development of the Econet for Long-term Conservation of Biodiversity in the Central Asia Ecoregions”

Project Number GF/2010-03-03; GF/2711-03-4609

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Acronyms and abbreviations.

| | |
|-----------|--|
| CA | Central Asia |
| CAREC | the Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre |
| CBD | Convention on Biological Diversity |
| CD-ROM | Compact Disk Read-Only Memory |
| CDE | Centre for Development and Environment, Institute of Geography, University of Berne, Switzerland. |
| CoE | Council of Europe |
| COP | Conference of the Parties (CBD) |
| ECK | Ecological Codex of Kyrgyzstan |
| ECNC | The European Centre for Nature Conservation |
| Econet | Ecological network |
| ECONET | UNEP/GEF Project “Development of the Econet for Long-term Conservation of Biodiversity in the Central Asia Ecoregions” |
| EE | Econet Element (component of Econet – core area, buffer zone or a corridor) |
| ENVIRC | Environment Research Centre (NGO, Kazakhstan) |
| FCEPSD | Framework Convention on Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development in Central Asia |
| FR | Final Report |
| FZS | The Frankfurt Zoological Society |
| GBIF | Global Biodiversity Information Facility |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| GIS | Geographic Information System |
| IC | Incremental Cost |
| ISDC | Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development |
| IUCN | World Conservation Union |
| LF | Project Logical Framework |
| LGIBP | Laboratory of Geobotany of the Institute of Botany & Phytointroduction (Almaty, Kazakhstan) |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| MNPT | Ministry of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan |
| MSP | Medium-Sized Project |
| NFP | National Focal Point – official representative of a national agency, designated contact for ECONET project |
| NGOs | Non-Governmental Organisations |
| PA | Protected Area |
| PD | Project Document |
| PDF-A | Project Development Phase A |
| PEEN | Pan-European Ecological Network |
| PIR | Individual Project Implementation Review Report |
| POA | Project Objective and Activities (Section 9 of the ECONET PD) |
| PSC | ECONET Project Steering Committee |
| REAP | Regional Environmental Action Plan |
| RPO | Russian Programme Office (WWF) |
| RSPB | The Royal Society for Protection of Birds |
| SIC | Scientific Informational Centre of ISDC |
| SMART | Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Realistic and Trackable – the GEF requirements for monitoring indicators. |
| UNCCD | Convention to Combat Desertification |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UNEP/DGEF | UNEP Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination |
| UNEP/ROE | UNEP Regional Office for Europe |
| WDPA | World Database on Protected Areas |
| WWF | World Wide Fund for Nature |

Executive summary.

1. The “Development of the Econet for Long-term Conservation of Biodiversity in the Central Asia Ecoregions” (ECONET) (No GF/2010-03-03) is a medium-sized project (MSP) executed by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Russian Programme Office (RPO). The project was implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and funded with \$750,000 from Global Environment Facility (GEF) Trust Fund, with \$410,000 in co-funding from WWF, Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), The Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZC) and The Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB). Governmental co-funding and associated funding together amounted to \$6,400,000. The project commenced in April 2003 and ended in June 2006.
2. The objective of this terminal evaluation is to establish project impact and performance, to review and evaluate the implementation of planned activities and outputs against actual results and to derive lessons and come up with recommendations for the project follow up or design and implementation of similar projects.
3. The aim of the project was to create an ecological network scheme in Central Asia (CA), to integrate it into regional and national sustainable development plans and to develop viable mechanisms for long-term inter-state co-ordination and collaboration to conserve and sustainably utilise biodiversity.
4. The objectives of the project include: development of a regionally unified biodiversity and natural resource geographic information management system (GIS) based on extensive existing data and complemented by limited research. This included elaboration of an agreement for the regional ecological networks development plan on the basis of an in-depth analysis of current Protected Area (PA) systems, key biodiversity protection needs, regional ecology, natural resource use and economic development context in the region. The activities also included establishing necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region to allow effective joint implementation of the ecological network (Econet) plan.
5. The project was completed with a minor delay pre-approved by UNEP. It utilised all resources contributed by GEF Trust Fund in accordance with the overall goal and objectives and received co-financing and leveraged resources in excess of the originally planned level.
6. The project intervention resulted in a substantial change in national and regional conservation policies and decision-making. It has facilitated the move away from the practice of setting aside isolated protected areas (“islands in the ocean”) towards the adoption of a well-defined concept of an interlinked ecological network based on biodiversity values, conservation priorities and practical measures. This approach is more likely to ensure long-term sustainability and preservation of biodiversity in the region.
7. Political impact, a successful promotional campaign and participatory approaches were the strongest components of the project. However, the project objectives were overambitious and could not be fully achieved within the timeframe and resources of an MSP. Implementation of technical tasks suffered because of insufficient investment in capacity and training and redistribution of funds between project tasks has weakened the development of biodiversity information system. Some key outputs were not delivered. Based on the evidence gathered throughout this evaluation, the project is rated as moderately satisfactory.
8. The project was participatory; it engaged a multinational core team as well as volunteers from all CA countries, including a number of leading environmental scientists and experienced conservation specialists. The ECONET involved a broad range of stakeholders and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) representatives in the consultation process. The Project Team maintained regular contacts with national environmental agencies, the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ISDC) and was also frequently advised by the UNEP personnel.
9. The Econet scheme for the entire CA region was successfully developed. It represents an effective tool for promotion of an ecological network approach and provides an indicative (low resolution) outline of sites with high biodiversity value and transboundary conservation

areas in CA. ISDC has endorsed Econet scheme in November 2006 and recommended its use as a basis for development of protected areas network and land-use strategies in the CA countries.

10. The project influenced all CA countries through ISDC decisions and an intensive promotional campaign. It has initiated changes in legislation in three countries. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project that helped Turkmenistan to formulate a more detailed national plan of Econet was a follow-up to this project. Capacity for planning of ecological networks was increased in the institutions that hosted ECONET GIS in Kazakhstan and analytical centres in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, although the sustainability of these capacities is not guaranteed under the conditions of a transition economy.

11. The ECONET GIS has integrated a unique set of information about biodiversity, socio-economic factors, protected areas, wetlands of conservation importance and key base maps data and developed a new complex scientific product – the digital map of CA ecosystems. Information accumulated in ECONET GIS far exceeds the resources available nationally or internationally prior to the project intervention. It is recommended to publish these products in order to ensure the availability of project outputs for future conservation planning in the region.

12. The project benefited from environmental expertise of GIS team members but it did not provide executants with sufficient technical training, and that has negatively influenced the completeness of information system structure and outputs delivery. Not all of the initially planned data collection was completed and the GIS system inherited discrepancies and inconsistency from various data sources. Standards and metadata were not produced; a planned GIS Operational Manual was not delivered and published data lacked appropriate documentation. Data is available on request to stakeholders in the region subject to a satisfactory justification of the request to the executing agency or former national coordinators of the ECONET.

13. Advanced analysis of collected biodiversity and socio-economic information generated multiple supporting GIS maps and a draft scheme of Econet that passed through three rounds of consultation with national experts, various stakeholders and NGOs. Impressive promotional material was developed on the basis of these maps. A combination of a well-justified scientific concept coupled with an intensive promotional campaign allowed support for the ECONET to be acquired from both the research community and the public, and has also helped to convince national governments of the suitability of the Econet approach and its relevance for national planning of PA systems. The regional scheme incorporated comments and accounted for needs from a broad range of national agencies and stakeholders, including industries.

14. The project attempted to initiate important changes in the national legal systems. A partial success was achieved and three countries did include definitions of ecological networks in their legislative frameworks. The Econet scheme was endorsed by ISDC as a component of the Framework Convention on Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development in Central Asia (FCEPSD). National delegations of all CA countries presented the Econet plan at 8th Conference of the Parties of the CBD (COP) and agreed to accept it as a plan for future work towards implementation of CBD goals.

15. The project was less successful in identifying and putting in place mechanisms for sustainable financing of the Econet implementation; this objective was ambitious and not achievable within MSP, in particular because of the region's size and the socio-economic instability prevailing in CA countries.

16. The evaluator shares the opinion expressed by the project staff that the project can be replicated in other regions. The approach is particularly suitable for those transition economy countries where conservation planning underutilises previously accumulated research outputs due to current limitations in technical capacity in conservation and natural sciences institutions.

17. The performance of the executing agency was good; in particular the financial reporting to UNEP was comprehensive and timely. The core project team included highly regarded specialists who understood the political and cultural specifics of the region. This knowledge

allowed for highly adaptive management, and was particularly valuable during periods of political instability in the region. However, some decisions that amended initially planned activities and expenditure were not optimal. Project coordination and interactions between project executants suffered because the planned e-mail network was not established.

18. UNEP supervision and backstopping was sufficient to ensure smooth implementation of the project, although there was no good Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) plan elaborated and no relevant resources for this were budgeted. New reporting formats introduced during the implementation period were better structured. The UNEP Task Manager regularly reviewed project reports, participated in Steering Committee meetings and provided valuable recommendations to improve outputs. Currently applied reporting formats are still too burdensome and require further restructuring to assist in project management, coordination and monitoring.

19. The project objective *“to establish the necessary legal ... and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region to allow the effective joint implementation of the Econet plan”* was unrealistic within the resources and timeframe available to the MSP. An excessively high number of meetings and events (99) consumed considerable resources, including resources initially planned for GIS development. The preparation and quality of training workshops was uneven. Some of them were well-organised and involved prominent lecturers, however the majority of training events suffered because few or no training materials were made available. In contrast to the excellent promotional publications, the ECONET methodology was poorly documented and the way in which the GIS database and ecological maps were formatted devalued their content and reduced their practical applicability.

20. The evaluation identified a number of lessons to be learned. Inasmuch as the project was completed by the time of the terminal evaluation, analytical lessons represented an attempt to provide general recommendations for similar project’s design, monitoring and evaluation.

21. The evaluation recommends that implementing and executing agencies should work together and urgently identify resources and arrange publication of the important and scientifically rigorous project outputs – A Map of the Ecosystems of Central Asia and the ECONET GIS, as these outputs could provide a valuable basis for future conservation activities and relevant research in CA.

22. The Econet scheme elaborated by the project was approved by ISDC and agreed with countries that have joined the FCEPSD. This outcome de-facto set up new region-wide measurable targets complementary and even exceeding current CBD benchmarks. Monitoring of progress towards these targets is an apparent area for joint activities among CA countries and agencies that endorsed the Econet scheme.

23. The evaluator recommends to ISDC and national conservation agencies to consider capacity created by the ECONET at the host institution Laboratory of Geobotany of the Institute of Botany & Phytointroduction (LGIBP) for incorporation into the structure or affiliation in another appropriate format with the Scientific Informational Centre of ISDC (SIC) and to identify a stable mechanism to finance ECONET information system. Monitoring of the Econet implementation, continued collation of biodiversity, land use and conservation information and its dissemination will support sustainable development of CA nations and assist in reporting on achievement of targets set up by ISDC through Econet endorsement as well as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) targets.

24. The Evaluator agrees with the opinion of the project team members that sustainable implementation of the Econet requires resources far exceeding those available from the national governments in a foreseeable future. Current conservation initiatives and projects undertaken in the region address just a fraction of priorities identified by the project. Consistent implementation of the Econet in CA will depend on the inflow of external resources. The ISDC supported a WWF initiative for the development of a proposal for a full-sized project for Econet implementation. The evaluator considers this approach as fully justified and believes that UNEP’s attention to elaboration of a relevant proposal and its submission to GEF may be crucial for the future of Econet CA.

I Introduction and background.

A. Project Identifiers

Project title: “Development of the Econet for Long-term Conservation of Biodiversity in the Central Asia Ecoregions”
Project No: GF/2711-03-4609 and GF/2010-03-03
Duration: 39 months 1.04.2003 – 30.06.2006 (including extension for three month – 04.2006-06.2006)
GEF Implementing Agency United Nation Environment Programme
GEF Focal Area Biodiversity

B. Background to the project.

25. The overall goal of the project was “*the creation and integration into the regional and national plans of sustainable development a joint scheme of Econet development in the Central Asian Region and the development and implementation of viable mechanisms for long term inter-state co-ordination and collaboration to conserve and sustainably utilize biodiversity*” in five countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

26. The project conforms to the GEF Biodiversity – Operational Program 1 on arid ecosystems with relevance to Operational Programs 4 on Mountain ecosystems; CA region expands mainly over dry lands; mountains occupy 15% of its area. All five countries in the region are eligible for GEF funding as they have ratified the CBD (Kazakhstan in 1994, Kyrgyzstan in 1995, Tajikistan in 1997, Turkmenistan in 1996 and Uzbekistan in 1996).

27. By the time of project inception, creation of effective PA areas systems and issues of biodiversity information management and dissemination were included in all National Strategies and Action Plans which have already been developed in the region (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan) or were identified as important components of plans/strategies that were still under development (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan).

28. The initial concept of the ECONET was elaborated by the WWF RPO in collaboration with regional experts, NGOs and national agencies. It was formally endorsed by the national GEF focal points of all five CA countries and national Environment Ministers and, preliminary, by ISDC decision of 12.04.2000. Detailed project concept was presented to and has been approved by ISDC; its decision No 7 of 12.04.2001 recommended the project for incorporation into Regional Environmental Action Plan (REAP). This ensured high visibility of the future project within the region, recognition and support of official bodies and various stakeholders to project activities during its implementation.

29. A proposal, the ECONET Project Document (PD) was developed within the Project Development Phase A (PDF-A), project GF/1100-95-12 (sub-project number GF/2010-95-76; 01-04.2001). UNEP provided substantive assistance in the development and final approval of the medium sized project that emanated from the PDF-A process.

30. In brief, both unique ecosystems and a wide range of globally significant biodiversity components were under threat because of the severe economic and social constraints that are common in countries going through major socio-economic changes. At the same time, the region possessed significant conservation assets and resources inherited from the former USSR, including an established PA system, educated environmental specialists and a wealth of relevant past scientific research work and assessments. The barriers preventing efficient incorporation of biodiversity conservation considerations into policies and utilisation of valuable scientific resources into planning and decision-making process were identified by ECONET PD:

- a. Lack of utilisable data for biodiversity planning and management decision making;
- b. Lack of a basis and mechanisms for regional co-operation and integrated actions to conserve biodiversity and
- c. The concept of ecological network (Econet) is not developed for the region and its approach is integrated neither into current practice nor in regional and national development plans.

31. Clear understanding of initial conditions made it possible to formulate main objectives that would address relevant issues in order to achieve the overall goal of the project:

Objective 1. To develop a regionally unified and integrated biodiversity and natural resource information management system (a GIS) based on extensive existing data together with limited research necessary to fill key gaps.

Objective 2. To elaborate and achieve agreement for a regional “Econet” development plan, on the basis of in-depth analysis of the current PA systems, key biodiversity protection needs, regional ecology, natural resource use, and economic development context in the region.

Objective 3. To establish the necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region to allow the effective joint implementation of the Econet plan.

32. The project was executed in accordance with UNEP procedures by the WWF RPO normal execution modality. The project activities were completed by 30.06.2006 and the report together with required complementary documentation was submitted to UNEP Division of Global Environment Facility Coordination (UNEP/DGEF).

33. Important implementers included the Central Asian Regional Environmental Centre (CAREC) and the Laboratory of Geobotany in Almaty (Kazakhstan). Over 240 experts from scientific institutions, NGOs and various stakeholders’ representatives contributed to the project implementation; national experts constituted more than 90% of the project team.

34. The project coordinator and project administrator (employees of the WWF RPO, based in Moscow, Russia) executed general project management, coordinated thematic experts and national teams, and provided financial and logistic support to all project activities. The project involved over 20 international experts (often referred to as “regional experts” in project documentation), mainly from leading universities and scientific institutions in Russia. These experts provided a crucial input into highly specialised activities ranging from socio-economical analyses and analyses of rare species ecology to the cultural know-how necessary for dealing with regional and national bodies and officials. The group of WWF RPO experts were experienced in running large-scale regional and international conservation projects strengthened the team.

35. The project activities were finalised within the agreed period (including 3-months extension approved by UNEP/DGEF) and the ECONET Final Report (FR), financial documentation, copies of relevant deliverables including publications, Compact Disk Read-Only Memory (CD-ROM) publications and websites) were made available to the implementing agency.

36. The official language of the project was Russian, so communication with regional experts, experts’ reports, training material, workshop minutes, database content and promotional material were completed in Russian. Technical and financial documentation/reports were prepared in English and communication with an implementing agency (UNEP) was also conducted in English. Simultaneous translation and translation of working documentation was provided at the events involving representatives from international agencies. Particularly important promotional material and presentation at the CBD COP-8 were translated to / presented in English.

II Scope, Objective and Methods of the Evaluation.

37. The evaluation was commissioned by the Evaluation and Oversight Unit of UNEP and undertaken by an independent evaluator.

38. This terminal evaluation was conducted as an in-depth evaluation using participatory approach. UNEP/DGEF Task Manager, UNEP/EOU staff, key representatives of the executing agency and national coordinators of the project were consulted throughout the evaluation. UNEP/EOU has provided guidance for evaluation, all necessary documentation and logistic support.

39. The objective of this terminal evaluation was to determine to what extent the project objectives were achieved, to assess project performance and the implementation of planned project activities and planned outputs against actual results. The evaluation also aimed to assess project impact and to formulate recommendations for UNEP and GEF that would help to improve the benefits and efficiency of similar projects and programmes in the future.

40. The evaluator carried out five principal sets of activities:

- a. A desk review of project documents: project contract, progress reports to UNEP and GEF, annual Project Implementation Review reports (PIRs), Final Report, notes from the Steering Committee Group / coordination workshops / meetings, and relevant correspondence provided by the OEU and by the project executing agency.
- b. A desk review of financial documentation – quarterly and final reports to UNEP, co-financing commitment letters and reports, international audit report, summary outputs and selected detailed

extracts from WWF RPO accountancy database, selected detailed extracts of documentation on randomly chosen budget lines and selected payees in conjunction with relevant grant letters, ToRs, reports and/or deliverables.

- c. A desk study of background material, specific products and publications: ECONET map/plan REAP, ISDC decisions on ECONET, ECONET Implementation Strategy, ECONET GIS operational guidelines, country endorsement letters on the ECONET plan, the technical report on legislative review, Draft Ecological Codex of Kyrgyzstan (ECK), awareness materials and national legislation of CA countries.
- d. In depth analytical and technical review of ECONET GIS (provided on CD-ROM), including crosschecking with variety of global databases, materials published on the web sites maintained by WWF, Environment Research Centre (ENVIRC) and REC, and an electronic publication (CD-ROM) "ECONET: Web for Life".
- e. Personal interviews with the project coordinator, project administrator, other key specialists of the executing agency were conducted during a mission to Moscow; personal interviews with project contributors - leading regional experts on GIS, ecosystems, biodiversity and legal issues conducted during a mission to Almaty (Kazakhstan) that allowed acquisition of first-hand knowledge of operational, technical and scientific capacity of LGIBP, CAREC, ENVIRC and details of their contribution to the project objectives; telephone interviews with international ECONET Project Steering Committee (PSC) members, regional coordinators and national experts from all five CA countries and selected international project experts, the UNEP/DGEF project task manager and Fund Management Officer. A broader perspective was gained from consultations with relevant GEF Secretariat staff.

41. The evaluation was carried out a year after the project was finalized (project ended 30th of June 2006). For this reason it was difficult to get in touch with some of the contributors, however it also allowed assessment the degree of impact the project had within this one-year period and to get a clearer understanding of the long term effects the project is likely to have on the preservation of natural diversity in the region.

42. The text of evaluation includes a number of quotations taken mainly from the ECONET PD and FR (unless other source stated). Quotations are marked by italic and preserve the grammar of the original source.

III Project Performance and Impact.

A. Attainment of objectives and planned results:

1. Achieving the Overall Goal of the Project

43. *The global environmental objective of this project is to conserve representative and ecologically viable samples of the unique ecosystems and globally significant biodiversity of the Central Asian Region through the creation of a regional protected areas system based on sound scientific and socio-economic planning, effective regional level collaboration, and the establishment of key technical and financial capacities* (cited from ECONET PD).

44. The overall goal of the project was *"the creation and integration into the regional and national plans of sustainable development a joint scheme of Econet development in the Central Asian Region and the development and implementation of viable mechanisms for long term inter-state co-ordination and collaboration to conserve and sustainably utilize biodiversity"* in five countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

45. The ECONET PD formulated the concrete overarching indicator for assessing realisation of its overall goal:

"Regional plan for econet development is worked out (integrating biodiversity conservation and sustainable development approaches), approved by ISDC, integrated in the REAP and used by all 5 states as a base for the national system of PAs reorganisation and expansion by yr. 4".

46. Indeed, within the timeframe of the project the multinational project team has developed the scheme of Central Asia ecological network – the Econet. The final outline of Econet incorporated multiple recommendations from a broad range of stakeholders, scientists and governmental officials at multiple national and regional events, including ISDC sessions. As a result, a number of ISDC decisions endorsed integration of the ECONET project into the REAP as a its major biodiversity conservation component. In June 2005 ISDC incorporated Regional Agreement on Econet implementation into the

concept of FCEPSD. The Econet scheme and development of a full-size project based on its practical implementation received preliminary endorsement by ISDC decision No 5 of 02.03.2006; by the same decision environmental ministers of 5 CA countries recommended presentation of the Econet scheme at the CBD COP-8.

47. By the end of the project, the environmental agencies of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan issued corresponding directives and letters endorsing Econet implementation. Uzbekistan has also approved outcomes of the projects, although with some reservation, limiting its support to unspecified “separate elements” of the Econet plan.

48. Important processes leading to changes in national programmes and legislation were directly initiated and catalysed by the project. Econet approaches and terminology (core areas, buffer zones, and corridors) were included in the national Governmental programme of Kazakhstan on PA development for 2005-2008, the National programme to Combat Desertification of Uzbekistan, the Governmental programme on PAs development of Tajikistan for 2005-2015. The draft Ecological Codex of Kyrgyzstan has also incorporated concept of ecological networks.

49. The specifics of the legal system in Turkmenistan, in particular greater power of local authorities and communities in defining land use patterns, made straightforward incorporation of Econet into national legislation amendments difficult. Nevertheless, a number of projects implemented in the country within the ECONET timeframe directly referred to the Econet concept and utilised it in their activities, e.g. Ministry of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan (MNPT) of Turkmenistan and the UNDP project “Improvement of Protected Areas System in Turkmenistan (ECONET)”. Turkmenistan conservation practitioners and official representatives of national conservation agencies demonstrated generally positive perceptions of the ECONET. An interview with the national coordinator for ECONET in Turkmenistan and comments of national representatives recorded at a number of project workshops, confirmed the high value of the Econet scheme and ecological network concept for promotion of biodiversity conservation among local authorities and communities. Their role in decision-making and agreement to establish ecological network elements is particularly crucial and should not be underestimated in planning conservation activities in the country. This level of impact was the most that was realistically achievable in this country.

50. There was a general consensus among the project executants, experts and officials interviewed that **the project intervention resulted in a substantial change in national and regional conservation policies and decision-making. ECONET demonstrated that the traditional practice of establishing and preservation of isolated protected areas (“islands in the ocean”) had become obsolete. The project introduced and widely promoted the concept of the interlinked regional ecological network elaborated and being constantly enhanced through scientific analysis identifying biodiversity values, conservation priorities and practical measures ensuring long-term sustainability of ecosystems and maintenance of species diversity in the region. ECONET initiated important political decisions and catalysed first steps towards accommodation of ecological networks and their elements in the legislative frameworks of CA states** (*see paragraph 48*).

51. Evaluation findings confirmed the statement above and the evaluator considered it as the most concentrated and true description of the major outcome of the project. Considering the extent of operational area of the project, the ambitious policy-oriented goal and diversity of legal and socio-economical systems in the region, the level of political impact achieved should be treated as a great success.

52. Implementation of project components aiming to remove barriers for efficient realisation of practical conservation activities in the region had both considerable strengths and a number of apparent weaknesses. Although not all project interventions were entirely successful, they did produce highly visible positive outcomes that were achieved through the collective work of a highly dedicated project team supported by a large number of volunteers and stakeholders in all five countries.

2. Achieving project objective 1:

To develop a regionally unified and integrated biodiversity and natural resource information management system (a GIS) based on extensive existing data together with limited research necessary to fill key gaps.

53. This broadly defined objective was accompanied in a ECONET PD (section 2/9.1) by a rather vague general indicator:

“A regional biodiversity database and GIS in existence by 3q. Yr.2 and mechanisms for its maintenance approved and put in place by the countries”.

54. Both this generic indicator and indicators applied in project Logical Framework (LF) for activities and outputs of this component lacked clarity, were not measurable and did not satisfy GEF criteria for monitoring indicators, that are expected to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Realistic and Trackable (SMART). This incomprehensive initial outline of a project component was maintained through the entire implementation period. At no stage did the project elaborate more detailed specifications for the information system design, technical implementation plan, data quality control procedures, etc. Technical reliability and the efficiency of day-to-day use of information systems depends a lot on comprehensive design, as well as on the organisational solutions applied. There are far too many examples of expensive attempts to develop Conservation GIS/database systems that went further than producing illustrations for reports and disappeared as soon as the relevant projects were completed. The ECONET manager and coordinator did not analyse relevant lessons and some omissions in information management system implementation repeated known mistakes from earlier GEF projects.

55. The team of dedicated experts did their best to develop an information management system and managed to overcome some consequences of imperfect planning, unclear directives and chronic under funding of the activities planned. The GIS team managed to accumulate a large volume of environmental and biodiversity information and delivered impressive results. The digital map of Econet, as well as a broad range of very informative support maps were designed, and efficiently applied in the process of consultations with national experts and various stakeholders. System outputs supported this iterative process during the second half of the project that included three rounds of consultations and distribution of intermediate plans among multiple national agencies and stakeholders.

56. Conditions for implementation of this activity did vary across the region, in particular with respect to the technical level of national executives. The most impressive results were achieved in Kazakhstan, where the GIS unit was affiliated with LGIBP and based in the long-established scientific institution, and in Kyrgyzstan where GIS Laboratory worked under supervision of an experienced GIS specialist and coordinator of WWF national projects. ECONET benefited from materials and analytical support provided by the well-established GIS team of Tajikistan. Newly trained specialists implemented relevant activities in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

57. In the most general terms, objective 1 was partially achieved and, in particular, GIS and capacity developed to the level that allowed timely delivery of a variety of outputs - ranging from sufficiently informative working material to exceptionally high quality illustrations for ECONET promotion and scientifically vigorous publications (e.g. map of Kyrgyzstan PA). These outputs provided input into Activity 2 and 3, notably the final Econet scheme for all five CA countries as well as illustrative material for training, consultation with stakeholders, the ECONET website and the Econet CD-ROM “Web for Life”. Selected GIS outputs were used for illustration in multiple publications promoting an integrated approach to the development of ecological networks and biodiversity conservation matters in CA. The status of particular outputs is analysed in section III of this evaluation and summarised in Annex I.

58. Implementation of activities relevant to Objective 1 suffered because of insufficiently rigorous planning, lack of qualified supervision and insufficient provision of training for project personnel. Funding from GEF was not entirely sufficient for an undertaking of this scale; in addition part of this component’s budget was reallocated to other activities. There is no evidence that the expected \$710,000 governmental co-funding for this objective materialised. As a result, the overall impact of this element of the project was sub-optimal; some of planned outputs were delayed or not produced; the GIS database accumulated a number of discrepancies that reduced its suitability for practical application. Mechanisms for sustainable financing and maintenance of the information system were not identified; sustainability of this important project outcome will depend upon further efforts of the executing agency and national governments. Nevertheless, outcomes of relevant activities did contribute to lowering one

of the main barriers for efficient conservation activities in the region identified in project document – “*Lack of utilisable data for biodiversity planning and management decision making*”.

3. Achieving project objective 2:

To elaborate and achieve agreement for a regional “Econet” development plan, on the basis of in-depth analysis of the current PA systems, key biodiversity protection needs, regional ecology, natural resource use, and economic development context in the region.

59. Activities in the project plan, reporting documents and relevant outputs were very much overarching and lead to the achievement of this overall goal.

60. The ECONET project document specified a general indicator to verify successful completion of this objective:

A regional ECONET plan approved by the ISDC (in consultation with land- and resource-use bodies) by 1q. yr.3

61. Although the ECONET plan was not officially endorsed by ISDC by the date specified and the process took longer, there is no doubt that this ambitious target was gradually achieved. Objective 2 is close to an overall goal of the ECONET project. To avoid repeating previous discussion of relevant achievements, we just point out the last (within the project implementation period) ISDC decision No 5 of 02.03.2006 that gave a preliminary endorsement of the Econet scheme and recommended the development of a full-size project on Econet implementation. 23.11.2006 ISDC decision No 7 officially endorsed Econet scheme and recommended using it as a basis for national PAs system development and land use planning. Gaining this level of official support from an important international body responsible for strengthening and harmonising CA countries’ efforts in sustainable development of the region was crucial for ensuring long-lasting political impact of the project.

62. Objective 2 was mainly achieved within the timeframe of the project (see Annex I). Some delays in finalising relevant activities resulted in extension of project timeframe that is entirely justified when complicated external factors are taken into account, in particular, political instability in the region and the necessary adjustment of activities targeting policy-making processes to a schedule of ISDC events.

4. Achieving project objective 3:

To establish the necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region to allow the effective joint implementation of the Econet plan.

63. The ECONET PD provided expanded general indicators for verifying successful achievement of this objective:

- a. *Base national components included in the national plans of econet development with committed governmental funding, and funding committed from various donors for its implementation of the key transboundary elements by year 4;*
- b. *Legal, institutional and technical capacity in place by yr.3;*
- c. *Adequate financing mechanisms for maintenance of regional co-operative structures and instruments identified, initial commitments made by yr3;*
- d. *Financing mechanisms for implementation of ECONET plan identified, national commitments made and approved for the next 3-5 years; system of joint financing of transboundary elements of econet put in place by yr3.*

64. The Econet concept is currently officially endorsed through direct references to ecological network elements in national legislation in three CA countries. Both methodological aspects and the Econet scheme were included in the national Governmental programme of Kazakhstan on PA development for 2005-2008, the National programme to Combat Desertification of Uzbekistan, and the Governmental programme on PAs development of Tajikistan for 2005-2015. These legal documents created a favourable climate in which governmental conservation agencies, public entities, NGOs and international initiatives will be able to function more successfully and apply a coherent approach for establishment of ecological networks with consideration of transboundary and regional aspects identified by ECONET.

65. A number of the experts interviewed expressed an opinion that identification of general Econet elements (EE), e.g. core areas, buffer zones and corridors in legal framework documents has already

sped up the process of preliminary endorsement of projects aimed at the expansion of existing PAs and planning new ones. Prior to Econet concept endorsement, the procedure for establishment of a new PA quite often required complicated justifications linked to very specific conditions, criteria and land use restrictions applied to a particular category of PA as defined and described in detail in national legislation.

66. The project was less successful in identifying financial mechanisms to support Econet implementation. The Strategy for Econet Funding Development incorporated into ECONET FR goes no further than providing a short review of previously known potential sources of support for conservation activities, references to names of some major international donors and a two-page brief on economic situation in CA countries. The main conclusion from this strategic document is: *“conservation success depends not just on the amount of money ... but on the cost-effectiveness of the nature conservation activities”*. Although correct, by itself it is still unlikely to serve as a replacement for a practical fundraising strategy that could have guided national conservation agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders targeted by the project.

67. ECONET supported regional capacity building through a number of training and expertise exchange sessions. Although there were apparent weaknesses in the way training was organised and how target audiences were determined (see comments on output 3.4.), the capacity of national planners and managers still benefited from acquaintance with the ECONET approach as well as from information materials helpful in promoting basics of ecological network concept.

68. Efficient external communication of the Econet concept, high-quality promotional material distribution, high impact “information attack” on high-level policy makers resulted in making national ministers, ISDC members and many lower level decision-makers into strong supporters of the Econet concept. Efficient external communication is one of the strongest components of this project.

69. Looking at the outputs in a strictly formal way, an ambitious objective 3 was partially achieved (see Annex I). Not all expected outputs were in place by the end of the project, necessary changes in legislation were not adopted in all countries, although now they are incorporated into the strategically important FCEPSD that ensures consequent assimilation of Econet into regional agreements and the REAP in particular. The “Strategy for Sustainable Funding of Econet Implementation in Central Asia” suggested by the ECONET PD was not elaborated to the level of being an instrument for directing practical activities or catalysing the Econet implementation. A *“System of joint financing of transboundary elements of Econet”* was not created although the executing agency did pursue a number of practical actions in this direction through elaboration of relevant project proposals to external donors.

70. It should be noted that real-life circumstances, the size of the region and inevitable problems that arise when operating in countries undergoing economic transition were underestimated when objective 3 was formulated. Outcomes of relevant activities, as stated in ECONET PD, assumed considerable changes in national legislation within a strictly specified timeframe and were expected to impose unspecified financial commitments from governments. That would not have been an easy goal to achieve anywhere in the world and was particularly unrealistic when operating in countries with developing economies.

71. Political impact, in particular, transformation of regional policy frameworks and changes in how ecological networks are viewed by decision makers across the region, endorsement of the Econet at intergovernmental level and incorporation of its elements into laws in three countries are an achievement that goes far beyond the original expectations, outlined in 2001-2003, when the medium size project was planned.

72. Despite multiple shortcomings in outputs relevant to objective 3, the level of compliance with the indicators and relevance of outputs suggest that achievement of this objective be considered moderately satisfactory.

B. Achievement of outputs and activities:

1. Output 1.1:

The design and setting-up of a Geographical Information System (GIS) capable of incorporation in standardised formats all relevant spatial and attribute data on biodiversity, land use and other key baseline information.

73. An approach to design of the ECONET GIS system, the processes used and justifications for solutions chosen are poorly documented and evaluation relied upon: examination of information available in PDF-A documents, familiarisation with GIS systems maintained in WWF RPO and in

LGIBP, personal communication from experts involved and examination of GIS outputs. That included maps, statistics, presentational materials and collection of datasets due for distribution to regional environmental centres and interested institutions, both within and outside of Central Asia (ECONET GIS CD-ROM).

74. Designing of an integrative GIS system, which can hold standardised spatial cross-disciplinary information from five countries is not a trivial task by any measure. Lack of concrete specifications for such a system is an apparent omission in a project design. Although it would be unrealistic to expect these specifications to be developed within the PDF-A, it is a good practice requirement to define an extent and limits for functionality, types of information handled, expected outputs, their quality, precision limits and cost/needs for system maintenance. No specifications for GIS were documented in project working materials or final outputs although activity 1.1 in the original project budget did allocate sufficient resources for setting up of a GIS system suitable for the purpose of the project.

75. The plan envisaged in the PDF-A document allocates a budget of \$130,000 for activity 1.1, including \$80,000 governmental co-financing. This budget was preserved in a final version of the ECONET PD, but the content of activities was changed considerably. In response to correct observations by the UNEP Task Manager about the absence of a plan for establishment of a Project Steering Committee, a new activity 1.1.2a: *“Establishment of the project steering committee, including representatives of a wide variety of stakeholders”* was inserted into budget at the expense of initially planned activity. There is no evidence that expected governmental co-financing relevant to activity 1.1 materialised, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan. With little or no governmental co-funding, the remaining part of the budget (close to \$35,000 GEF contribution indicated in the PD; see Annex III - budget line 2201) was insufficient for developing a proper GIS system.

76. It is apparent that project executants had no illusions about co-funding availability from the very beginning; they relied mostly on GEF funding and rightly considered the cost of potentially suitable international consultants to be prohibitively expensive. At the same time the stereotypical perception of countries with developing economies as a playground with cheap, highly qualified labour led to expectations that a number of high-tech activities could easily be managed within the budget provided by the GEF contribution. It turned out though, that this assumption was incorrect. The cost of comparable services from providers within the region was comparable to the cost of similar GIS support available internationally. This situation was due to a high demand for professional services from many rapidly expanding industries, lack of specialised education institutions and, according to the opinion of Project Coordinators, the cornering of a GIS-related market in CA by a limited number of professionals. As a result, the project could only engage specialists with no systematic training in GIS technology or environmental GIS specialization and relied mainly upon the enthusiasm and devotion of the individuals selected.

77. Interviews revealed that the costs involved were the main factor when deciding what solutions to use for GIS construction, as the budget available for the GEF-funded part of the project was quite limited. Apparent lack of knowledge about the choices available and insufficient understanding of these decisions' consequences had a great impact on the efficiency of task implementation. Examples include insufficient training, choice of base maps providers, forgoing the purchase of technical support and software upgrade. As the decision making process was not properly documented, it is now impossible to discover justifications for these decisions and the expert advice (if any) that executors may have received on this matter.

78. Essential professional training was not made available for personnel involved in GIS implementation. The main training activities relevant to GIS that ECONET FR referred to as to “training workshops” were undoubtedly useful but limited to exchange of personal knowledge and experience about particular technical operations between project personnel. At least in two countries (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) there were no efficient partner institutions identified and individuals with limited experience were appointed to run major GIS activities.

79. Although the outputs produced by the task team were generally impressive, the structure, content and functionality of the GIS system developed have a number of apparent omissions, documented in paragraphs 80-91:

80. ***Lack of metadata (sourcing of information collected).*** The information about origin of GIS layers, authors/providers, date of inception into GIS and dates to which relevant data relates to, is not in any of the project deliverables. This is the case for base maps (topography, hydrography, infrastructure and administrative boundaries) and for original biodiversity data collected by the ECONET. Some efforts were made to properly reference the information on species locations but over 80% of all records had missing or incorrect observation dates. Similar numbers of records identified the source by

reference to surnames with no clarification whether it referred to data operator, researcher or publication author etc. Limited information on species observation dates was included for about 10% of all records but about half of these records do not match the dates in the date field of the GIS database. These irregularities make it challenging to interpret the extensive collection of data that covers almost a century. Metadata is only present in the collection of base maps that were purchased from a commercial provider.

81. ***Lack of proper documentation for GIS database content.*** Layers were not accompanied by individual descriptions; measurement units and origin of information of multiple database fields are not explained. In many cases this made interpretation of information complicated or even impossible for an external user (e.g. in forest or ecosystem maps).

82. ***Incomplete structure of GIS and GIS data package intended for distribution.*** A number of valuable layers were developed within ECONET but attribute tables for GIS layers (e.g. in forest, ecosystem, ecoregions, socio-economy maps) contain only undocumented codes and no meaningful legends. Some explanatory information is only available in tables (MS Word documents) that are separate to the GIS data and spread across other deliverables (e.g. WWF website and ECONET CD-ROM “Web for Life”). Linking it to GIS would require considerable effort. It is unlikely that relevant processing and formatting can be implemented properly without direct involvement of the original developers. Moreover, even these existing textual documents were not included in the collection of datasets distributed to partner organisations. This makes applicability of data developed by ECONET rather limited because in some cases, recipients of ECONET GIS were unaware of the existence of complementary information, while others were aware but could not download it due technical problems.

83. ***Undefined procedures for GIS data quality control.*** The experts interviewed indicated that the most apparent mistakes, e.g. in geo-referencing of species observations, were identified by experts involved in GIS development and corrected mainly on the basis of their individual familiarity with the particular thematic area. There were no systematic procedures developed or applied for ensuring the quality of data content and preservation of correct GIS topology (maintenance of proper spatial interrelation and correct positioning of mapped objects). Overlaps between neighbouring mapped objects occurred in most of the datasets. The precision and accuracy of PAs and species location mapping is unknown; dozens of species observation points were placed outside of suitable habitats and in some cases even shifted by over 20 kilometres outside of the relevant country.

84. ***Incorporation of information from outdated sources*** e.g. Kaplankyr Reserve is digitised in its extent of 1979 although its size reduced by half in recent years.

85. ***Occasional digitising of map symbols from a paper schemes and incorporation them into polygonal layers*** (e.g. circles originally depicting an approximate location of protected area have been captured in GIS as boundary outline for some reserves in Turkmenistan). As a result, actual size and boundary of these reserves were incorrectly represented in GIS and accuracy of GIS-calculated statistic was affected.

86. ***Mismatches in resolution and accuracy of base maps used.*** At least four sources were used for GIS mapping/analysis of the region, namely topographical maps produced by a commercial provider, a map of administrative districts (*rayons*), a vegetation map accompanied by complementary topography layers (Rachkovskaya, 2000) and an undocumented 2-km resolution raster datasets derived from satellite images. There are considerable discrepancies (up to 50 km) in how geographical features are depicted in datasets used for overlay type of analyses.

87. ***Spatial topology rules were quite often ignored*** and relevant quality control procedures were not put in place. Maintenance of a proper topology (spatial interrelation of GIS objects – e.g. correct depicting of objects contained by another feature, adjacent or coinciding ones, etc.) would have prevented a number of typical discrepancies observed within ECONET GIS. In particular, the map of administrative districts allowed significant overlaps of district boundaries and in an extreme case (Panfilovsky rayon, Kyrgyzstan) the total area of the district in GIS exceeded its actual size by 5 times and was depicted mainly on a territory of a neighbouring country. GIS-estimated areas of more than 12% of all districts differ by over 50% from numbers stored in a database; in several instances these numbers differ by over a 100 times. Similar discrepancies were identified in PA maps and Econet scheme maps. These irregularities affected GIS-based analyses and reduced the accuracy of country-level statistic by estimated 2-5%. Potentially much higher distortion for district-level statistic would require a special care whenever it might be applied for planning or reporting purpose.

88. ***Software compatibility issues were not resolved*** - in particular with respect to projections that were used by different data providers. As a result, the data represented in ECONET GIS in latitude/longitude format (geographical coordinates) are accompanied by supplementary “projection”

files originated from sources in at least 6 projections based on different parameters describing curvature of the Earth (e.g. Krasovsky, 1940; World Geodetic System, 1984; Clarke, 1866; insufficiently documented “normal equidistant projection”, etc.). About half of the datasets are missing projection files or any other descriptions of projections. Applying data originally produced in different projections in a correct way may cause only minor misalignments between maps, normally not exceeding a few centimeters or meters at most. Much greater, up to 5-10 kilometers discrepancies (systematic shift) between various layers in ECONET GIS indicate deficiency in handling projection issue. As a result, suitability of ECONET spatial data for planning at national level is below the level potentially achievable for outputs of this MSP.

89. ***Dataset versioning was not applied***, in particular for the Econet scheme maps. Demonstration materials developed during the project displayed some changes in the outline of a scheme developed, apparently related to assimilation of findings and recommendations provided by experts during the consultation process. The ECONET GIS data collection distributed by the project has a single version of the Econet map, presumably a final one. The evaluation revealed that GIS-calculated country totals for Econet extent depicted in this final version do not match the numbers reported in ECONET FR and in promotion publications; they vary in a range of $\pm 1.5\%$ for 3 countries that could be explained by noted above discrepancies in Econet map topology and placement of Econet features outside of country boundaries. For Turkmenistan, the reported area of Econet exceeded the GIS-calculated estimate by 8%. It is likely that the error is due to addition of the marine and the terrestrial parts of the Econet and comparing it to the terrestrial part of the country; unless another GIS layer was applied. The reported extent of the Econet in Kyrgyzstan exceeded its GIS estimate by 27%. It is likely that another version of the map was used to calculate the numbers reported.

90. ***Lack of standards for data collection, processing, digitising and integration*** into GIS. Limited project resources prevented project executants benefiting from existing international experience. Basic standards and approaches for similar international processes were already developed, e.g. Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) for the collection of species data, World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) for protected areas, etc. There were no definite standards adopted between multiple contributors engaged in data collection and national experts who digitised the acquired information. Reasonable instructions were provided through a number of mini-workshops organised for data providers and attended by WWF GIS expert and GIS specialists from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This level of coordination was sufficient for the initiation of the data collection process but did not ensure the consistency and completeness of data collected. As a result, a number of inconsistencies are observed in a final GIS layers. Inconsistencies included: mismatches in locations noted above, omissions (empty fields) in attribute tables and information entered in the wrong fields (e.g. mixture of common and scientific species names in the same database field, multiple versions of species or PA names, mixture of individual PA names and names of PA sub-sites, etc.).

91. ***GIS database did not conform to the principles of a relational database design***. Simple and affordable structuring of information, e.g. organisation of data sources cited or species names in a separate table could have reduced the amount of manual processing. Unfortunately, thematic specialists dealing with hundreds of records were unnecessarily burdened with a redundant task of typing in or manually copying identical information. This resulted in an extensive use of non-documented abbreviations, omissions in records and mistyping that affected the suitability of collected information for automated processing. As a result, statistical outputs and lists generated by the ECONET currently require thorough verification, manual formatting and additional post-processing.

92. Despite the above noted constraints, the ECONET GIS accumulated an impressive amount of newly digitised or expanded species datasets. This GIS data collection, in combination with the high proficiency of project staff in a variety of ecological subjects, formed a necessary prerequisite for the production of essential outputs that supported other major activities of the project. Notably, the consultation processes that lead to the elaboration of the Econet scheme relied to a great extent upon excellent demonstration materials and maps prepared by the project GIS team. Efficiency of the task implementation could be greater if more attention was paid to proper training of personnel involved and by the provision of adequate resources in-line with the project plan. Overall, the quality of output and outcomes achieved are rated as moderately satisfactory.

2. **Output 1.2:**

Existing and newly gathered data computerised and accessible to all stakeholders for analytical purposes and dissemination.

93. A large amount of information was computerised and stored in the form of GIS layers during the project's lifetime. It included: a set of 1:1,000,000 base maps from a commercial provider and a socio-

economic database incorporated into an administrative districts layer, a new ecosystems map covering the entire region, an ecoregions map, newly digitised PA maps, a map of important wetlands, and species maps.

94. The “Ecosystems of the Central Asia” map was compiled and digitised by a team lead by an internationally recognised expert in environmental mapping. The map represents a scientifically rigorous product based on data from an enormous number of field studies. It contains information of about 6,500 mapped habitat units, individual ecosystem descriptions and a hierarchical classification system that allows for ecological modelling. The map of ecoregions was derived from an ecosystem map and individual ecoregions were analysed with respect to their potential conservation value, in particular with respect to species richness. It provided useful material for consultation processes. There is no doubt that many conservation projects in a region will benefit from applications based on this product and application of this ecological map will extend far beyond current objectives of the project.

95. Over 10,000 observation locations for over 400 species were digitised, potential distribution maps were elaborated for a selection of sites to protect rare and endangered species, in particular those included in the global list of threatened species and national Red Data Books. This collection exceeds the amount of georeferenced data for the region held in the most prominent global species databases, e.g. number of species held in the ECONET GIS is about 15 times higher than that held in the GBIF information system.

96. National protected areas GIS data are likely to be complete in respect of strict nature reserves (*zapovedniks*) and national parks. National lists of protected areas are currently available from ministerial websites and include more sites than ECONET GIS, which missed in particular many nature monuments and managed resource PAs. Project documents do not clarify whether cross-checking of ECONET database with official national PA lists was conducted. Information on completeness of the database would be useful for those who intend using its PA data for practical purposes.

97. The map/database of socio-economic factors uniformly integrated statistical data on a variety of parameters important for conservation planning. Its outputs were widely used during consultations about Econet delineation. This product can serve as a basis for long-term accumulation and interpretation of statistical information needed for environmental planning, assuming that discrepancies in district boundaries are eliminated.

98. ECONET PD allocated sufficient resources for preparation of general maps of wildlife reserves and forestry. These outputs were not produced because 75% of resources allocated to their preparation were reallocated to promotion activities. Mapping of wildlife reserves was complete with respect to one particular category only (“*zakazniks*”) and incorporated into PA maps. No information on other game management sites was collected and no indication of the number or extent of relevant sites was provided in project materials although in Kazakhstan alone there are over 380 hunting reserves which occupy over 810,000 km² or 30% of total country territory. The forest cover map reported as a corresponding to this activities’ output represent an extract from an overall ecological map and does not contain any additional spatial information relevant to forest cover or forestry activities.

99. The “*Cosmoconet*” dataset, which is included in the GIS distributed, apparently represented some output from satellite imagery analysis. No non-zero values were found in multiple fields of its attribute tables and the meaning behind the polygonal structures presented on this map was impossible to establish. The list of GIS data on the ECONET GIS CD-ROM does not provide sufficient details on datasets and attribute tables’ content; it also refers to some datasets that were not in the collection of data provided for this evaluation, e.g. Landscape Map, 1:500,000.

100. At the final stage of the project and soon after its completion the ECONET GIS was requested by and distributed to over a dozen of users, including stakeholders in the region, international organisations and experts. The UNDP project “Improvement of Protected Areas System in Turkmenistan” directly benefited from using ECONET materials in developing a more detailed national Econet scheme.

101. The usefulness of GIS outputs and, in particular the value of a unique region-wide digital map of Central Asia ecosystems elaborated by the ECONET was undermined by the lack of corresponding documentation and a poorly elaborated approach to distribution of potentially highly valuable information. To a large extent these shortcoming arose from underestimation of importance of tangible outputs documenting and unfamiliarity of the project team with lessons and outputs of similar projects, e.g. Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN) maps and reports. Publication of potentially valuable scientific outputs should have been incorporated into the projects plans from the very beginning. Currently available means for electronic publication may reduce costs and allow data access via Internet, but the need for proper publications should be also considered, especially for the regions where access to the web is not sufficiently developed. The omissions noted could easily be corrected by the

experts directly involved in ECONET GIS development but would become a time-consuming and costly undertaking for any external user. Current outcomes of this activity lag far behind its potentially high level of positive impact on efficiency of conservation planning. Success in the implementation of this activity is evaluated as moderately satisfactory. Special action to recoup the full possible positive impact on conservation planning in the region and long-lasting effect of valuable outputs delivered by this activity are required.

3. Output 1.3:

Institutional responsibilities and roles in the development and maintenance of the GIS agreed and adequate technical capacity in these institutions to fulfil responsibilities/roles present.

102. Within the project implementation period development and maintenance of the GIS was a sole responsibility of the host institution (LGIBP); all data was periodically shared with the executive agency and collaborators within countries. GIS team engaged many national specialists into compilation and digitisation of biodiversity data.

103. To avoid the loss of resources related to taxation of financial transactions with legal entities and overheads, the Project Coordinator abstained from officially engaging national institutions or other legal entities in the implementation of tasks. National experts' work was supported through individual (non-taxable) grants arranged by WWF. Exceptions to this approach extended mainly to purchase software for LGIBP and digital base maps from an official distributor. This approach was undoubtedly the least cost option for utilising limited resources available for putting together a GIS group in a host institution and data collection across the region. It allowed avoidance of paying institutional overheads; at the same time it limited the options available for capacity building due to lack of official arrangements with national institutions.

104. Institutional capacity was reinforced in a host institution – LGIBP and in the GIS centre in Kyrgyzstan. GIS training relied upon the exchange of expertise among project executants. No systematic approach to technical training was formulated and no GIS training material was developed or acquired.

105. Throughout the whole project period there was a general tendency to replace the in-depth specialised training for the project team members with various and mainly promotional events and workshops oriented towards broader audiences. Two more technically-oriented workshops included lectures on satellite imagery applications for conservation purposes and promotion of an interesting approach referred to in the project documents as “*Cosmoeconet*”. The approach was based on a highly specialised analytical method and relied on proprietary software created by the authors specifically to the purpose of testing complex scientific hypotheses. It is unlikely that a reasonably high proportion of attendees were able to acquire sufficient practical knowledge of methods presented at these short training sessions.

106. The project budget allocated (\$31,500) for Operational Guidelines (GIS manual) preparation and this budget was sufficient for production of a detailed and informative product. Potentially, it could and should have filled the gaps in GIS documentation, data management standards, quality control procedures, layers descriptions and could have incorporated recommendations on practical use of biodiversity databases. Gradually references to “Operational Guidelines” in reporting documents became limited to the context of responsibility sharing between the host institutions and other partners; in the ECONET FR it was demoted to “Manual on GIS Maintenance”. The relevant output was substituted by a 4-page template for “*Agreement on the delivery of unexceptional rights*”. According to the project documents this output was presented to and approved by national authorities, National Focal Points (NFPs) and finally by a project Steering Committee. The evaluator considered that this simple copyright agreement template by no means could be accepted as a reasonable output for one of the key project activities. Activity 1.3.1 “*Preparation of guidelines for the operation and maintenance of the Regional Biodiversity GIS*” was not implemented. Unfortunately, effectiveness of the whole GIS component of the project has suffered because of this omission. Efficiency of conservation activities in the region, whenever they may require utilisation of the ECONET GIS output will also be affected by the absence of an appropriate manual.

107. In brief, achievement of activity 1.3 was limited to a substantial increase of digital data holdings for biodiversity and conservation in a region; a noticeable increase in capacity in two countries, assigning responsibility for distribution of GIS data to the Executing Agency (WWF RPO), LGIBP, and to national coordinators of the ECONET. Basic training and promotional events (including the ones consistent with the project objective 1) were open to representatives of stakeholders from all countries

involved. A major planned tangible output (“Operational Guidelines”) was not produced. An informal agreement with individual former project executants on distribution of GIS layers cannot substitute for adequate technical capacity and institutional arrangements for GIS maintenance that were suggested as an indicator for this activity’s achievement. The success of this activity is evaluated as moderately unsatisfactory.

4. Output 1.4:

GIS providing concrete analytical and modelling outputs necessary for developing a scientifically and socio-economically sound plan for regional Econet development.

108. The GIS development took longer than it was envisaged on the project workplan and the ‘critical mass’ of information required to deliver advanced analytical outputs only became available during the second year of project implementation. The GIS team utilised the information as soon as it became available, in particular for production of draft maps of protected areas, species richness, ecosystems and variety and socio-economic indicators. The project has benefited from illustrative materials and maps supporting consultations on Econet delineation.

109. An additional component (“*Cosmoeconet*”) was incorporated into the project plan in order to initiate consultations at the earliest stage possible. It included satellite imagery analysis for identification of potential areas of high landscape diversity that was interpreted as an indicator of biodiversity hotspots. This task was outsourced to a group of appropriate experts. The supervising agency approved this amendment in the project work plan *post-factum*, after requesting additional clarifications on this output content from the Project Coordinator.

110. WWF tested “*Cosmoeconet*” methods within a number of earlier projects that addressed ecological networks planning for other regions, mainly considerably smaller than CA extent. The geographical extent of the ECONET required an adjustment in method. In particular, available computing power imposed limitations on the resolution of datasets to be processed, and analyses relied upon use of an undocumented low-resolution region-wide dataset. As a result, a method tested and tuned for 240-meters resolution images was applied to region-wide 2-km resolution dataset, that reduced accuracy (inversely proportional to raster cell area) by about 70 times compared to earlier projects. Outcomes of analyses of hugely generalised images are far from reliable. In particular “*Cosmoeconet*” interim outputs displayed an artefact – an apparent presence on maps of regular diagonal structures repeated at 80-90 km intervals. In addition, due to a technical oversight in defining analysis extent, over 500,000 km² (13% of the CA region) were not represented in the outputs, including the whole sub-Caspian region. The evaluation compared the draft of priority areas identified by “*Cosmoeconet*” exercise with the final outline of the Econet scheme. These two spatial layers displayed only minor and statistically insignificant correlation. It supports the conclusion that the impact of the “*Cosmoeconet*” was rather psychological; basically this exercise delivered an indicative outline of areas with potentially higher biodiversity and this map was sufficient to serve as a reasonable starting point and catalyser for discussions with national experts. Their comments and suggestions on particular Econet elements were captured on paper maps, digitised for incorporation into GIS and served as a basis for production of a final digital version of the Econet scheme. It is unlikely that the introduction of “*Cosmoeconet*” was a cost-effective option. A number of data sources that are freely available from the internet could have provided materials sufficient for initiating consultations on Econet outline, e.g. maps of global land cover, tree cover, biodiversity hotspots, and Central Asia landscapes and vegetation maps. The cost of this activity was comparable to the cost of full-time recruitment of a qualified GIS specialist for about a year or the provision of proper professional training to 2-3 members of a GIS team.

111. ECONET collected official statistical data on socio-economic parameters from all countries involved and analysed them from a point of view of optimal representation in cartographic outputs. An indicator of “total anthropogenic transformation” was developed. Relevant maps contributed to a consultation process and were highly regarded by the experts involved. This socio-economic analysis is among the best-documented component of the project. It provides detailed explanations of all methods for development of relevant indicators and would allow easy replication or its further fine-tuning within similar projects. Inasmuch as some discrepancies appeared in both spatial and statistical components of a relevant dataset, applying it for conservation planning at the national level will require additional crosschecking against original data sources and correction of discrepancies noted earlier.

112. Most advanced analytical outputs included elaboration of potential distribution maps for species of special conservation importance, identification of biodiversity hotspots and indicators for ecoregions rich in biodiversity. At the later stages of the project these outputs contributed to setting priorities for ecoregions and were used for preparation of site-sheets for selected ecoregions. Detailed fact sheets

elaborated for a number of ecoregions directly contributed to practical activities and provided an invaluable resource for drafting project proposals addressing practical implementation of the Econet and development of detailed plans for expansion of PA systems.

113. Utilization of GIS capacity was intensive at the initial stage when the system was set up and databases were populated with the necessary base maps and thematic content. In particular, a team of dedicated national experts was engaged in formatting and classifying existing information on over 400 different species. By the beginning of the 3rd year of the project, this data was incorporated into the GIS and formed the most extensive and complete set of spatially referenced species data available for the region.

114. There is no evidence that GIS update continued within the 3rd year of the project. Valuable additional data that was available at a later stage and was mentioned in the project documentation was not retained within the information system. For example, the references to a number of endemic species identified within the “Collection of Fact-Sheets” (ECONET FR: Annexes 7-11) were not added to the resource. In fact, this is a rather annoying omission inasmuch as some of these species, including but not limited to *Crambe edentatum*, *Pedicularis artemisifolia*, *Roegneria karkaralensis*, *Stroganovia sagittifolia* are entirely new, previously undiscovered, species that are not listed in global taxonomy databases and have no previous mention in scientific literature published in the region up to 1997 (evaluator cannot be certain about more recent regional publications).

115. Elaboration of the Econet map relied upon critical expert consideration of an initial draft based on analysis of satellite imagery aimed at interpreting landscapes and biodiversity in the region. GIS system development ran parallel to this process because of considerable delays in acquisition of information required for analytical interpretation of ecological and biodiversity features. Nevertheless, the GIS team has provided invaluable and regular support for this process, delivering a large number of very impressive maps that have received a highly positive response from the experts. In the second year of the project, presentation materials included detailed maps of PAs, ecosystems and species richness.

116. Generally, outputs of this activity fell short of originally outlined targets and lagged behind the work plan benchmarks since they depended on the outputs of activities 1.1-1.3. Resources allocated to this activity were not optimal. Activity outcomes are moderately satisfactory. Useful outputs were delivered within the timeframe of the project only because of the deep involvement and dedication of the international team of experts managing this activity.

5. Output 2.1:

Planning framework needed for designing a regional Econet agreed (definition of needs and objectives, full stakeholder identification, discussions, activity mapping and scheduling).

117. Implementation of this activity was built on the extensive preparatory work of the WWF that created a solid base for the design of project activities, identified a detailed list and potential roles of stakeholders as well as favourable political situation through preliminary endorsement of ECONET by ISDC and its integration into the REAP in 2002.

118. The ECONET project was led by a core team that included a number of WWF RPO staff (including Project Coordinator and Project Administrator), five national coordinators, National Focal Points (NFPs) representing the national conservation authority of each country and a number of thematic experts on particular components of biodiversity, legal issues, GIS and publications. The Project Coordinator maintained communication with national coordinators, who were responsible for engaging additional local staff and volunteers (almost two hundred in total) and implementing activities in their countries.

119. This hierarchical project management structure and regular meetings, bringing together NFPs (yearly) and national and regional thematic experts, allowed synchronisation of project implementation activities. Leadership provided by an experienced Project Coordinator ensured reasonably coherent functioning of national teams and a timely managerial response to identified problems.

120. A strategic decision to initiate the promotional campaign prior to elaboration of an Econet map was made at an early stage of the project. ECONET undertook considerable efforts to introduce the concept of an ecological network built on a combination of core areas, buffer zones and corridors throughout the region. A participatory approach to the organisation of the consultation process was applied. An exceptionally broad range of stakeholders was involved; highly regarded national scientists and experts provided invaluable professional support and assisted in orienting the ECONET concept to be in-line with national environmental conditions and specific conservation approaches. The project

team also targeted national conservation agencies and members of the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ISDC). This involved regular individual contact with key decision-makers that were gradually strengthened and formalised through official agreements between their agencies and WWF.

121. Scheduling of other activities mainly followed the plan envisaged in the ECONET PD. A number of considerable changes in legislation affecting international cooperation procedures or NGOs operations, reorganisation of governmental structures, revolution in Kyrgyzstan and other political events in the region required additional actions to re-establish relevant contacts and to identify new Focal Points. Policy-oriented elements of the project required adjustments to a calendar of ISDC meetings. Project implementation would not have been possible without constant monitoring of changing situations in all five countries. It also required a high degree of adaptive management both from the Project Coordinator and national coordinators as well as from the Implementing Agency. All emerging complications were identified in time and handled successfully. The Implementing Agency was regularly updated on arising issues. On each occasion the necessary amendments or rescheduling of activities, including a 3-months extension of the project, were handled in-line with project management procedures.

122. There were some weaknesses in project planning that included: insufficient utilization of broader international expertise, underestimation of operational complexities at a multi-national level (in particular with respect to information technology and integration of national thematic studies into a uniform system) and stereotypical replication of solutions without re-evaluation of the suitability of the method at a different scale (e.g. “*Cosmoeconet*” model).

123. The project has under-utilised potential benefits, which the timely establishment of overseeing or consultative bodies could bring (e.g. steering or, considering multidisciplinary character of activities, some scientific advisory committee). It is likely that establishment of the PSC was seen as a simple formality; it was not envisaged or budgeted in initial versions of the PD elaborated within the PDF-A and was included in the final project proposal in response to UNEP Task Manager’s comments on the draft PD. A relevant additional activity was added to the LF (line 1.1.2), with no amendment made for the originally planned budget of the activity 1.1. Multiple drafts of PSC composition appeared at the early stage of project implementation and all of them initially listed project team members.

124. The PSC was eventually established halfway through the project and was composed of representatives from national agencies of all five countries, including all NFPs directly involved in the implementation of project activities. Simultaneously a “Supervisor/Consultants Committee of the UNEP-GEF-WWF Project Steering Committee” was formed from the representatives of ISDC, UNEP and national ministries as well as leaders of ongoing international projects.

125. The establishment of relevant committees that included prominent representatives of both national conservation agencies and international bodies was well received by key national officials. This helped to achieve approval of the preliminary results of the ECONET by ISDC in December 2004 and facilitated the subsequent endorsement by ISDC in February 2006. At the same time, these, to some extent nominal bodies, did not have time (only 2 PSC meetings took place) and capacity to provide advisory or consultative support for planning and implementation of activities other than policy-making and promotion.

126. Achievement of this output is rated moderately satisfactory.

6. Output 2.2:

Regional plan for development of an Econet able to maintain the integrity and functioning of the major ecosystems of the region, capable of conserving the highest feasible level of biological diversity, and sustainable within the practical socio-economical conditions of the region.

127. The relevant activities included elaboration of the Econet scheme, two or three rounds of intensive consultations in each country, analysis and integration of comments, review of relevant national legislation, presentation of publications and dissemination of the final Econet plan.

128. Consultations on details of the Econet draft engaged stakeholders ranging from local communities and NGOs to top-level scientific experts, conservation agencies, industries and intergovernmental bodies. This process involved participants from national and regional events, multiple workshops and special workshops arranged by the ECONET’s regional and national coordinators.

129. Stakeholders with different and often conflicting agendas contributed towards improving the Econet scheme. In particular, extractive industry representatives highlighted a number of areas where economic considerations would certainly dominate any decision-making process. Following this advice, several locations with valuable mineral deposits were excluded from the draft and conservationists came up with alternative suggestions for a final scheme of Econet. The participatory approach has helped to establish positive image of the ECONET in the region and allowed for a reduction in potential complications at the stage of Econet implementation. After a second round of consultations the final scheme of Econet CA was prepared and widely publicized.

130. Conversion of this “final” outline into a properly structured GIS dataset was not completed. Multiple overlaps between Econet elements produced ambiguous statistics, even by the end of the project. Experts and national authorities noticed omissions in final outputs. In particular, the final endorsement letter produced by Kazakh authorities referred to a particular protected area omitted from the map. On this occasion, the protected area (Novinsky Reserve) was registered in GIS but it was concealed by other Econet elements on the printout. Some other PAs registered in GIS were left outside of the Econet scheme due to technical oversights.

131. Technical discrepancies in the GIS scheme of the Econet were to some extent compensated by excellent graphic design of the products that utilised GIS outputs and were incorporated into promotional materials and publications. The composition and design of this material was of exceptionally high quality.

132. The ECONET PD suggested involvement of many relevant international partners into gap analysis work, including the Biodiversity Service, operated by UNEP Regional Office for Europe (UNEP/ROE) as well as the Council of Europe (CoE), World Conservation Union (IUCN) European Office and the European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC), but the project budget did not allocate resources for relevant collaboration and as a result, these potential partners were not involved. Analysis of gaps in PA systems was conducted mainly through consultations with national experts. There were no reports produced to document GIS methods applied in the preparation of materials for consultations. A sketchy outline of the methods used for gap analyses was included into promotion booklets, but the methods were not documented in sufficient detail for scientific verification or replication.

133. A legislation database developed within this activity provides a complete collection of environmental laws for all five CA countries and contains all relevant texts of major international and regional conventions and agreements. The full collection (in Russian) is available at the WWF RPO website:

http://www.wwf.ru/about/where_we_work/asia/projects/econet/legislation/

This website and the ECONET FR indicated another website: <http://www.ca-econet.info/> as an additional source for this information, but at present this second website only has international documents and legislation for Turkmenistan, where the website is maintained. It seems that some duplication of efforts took place and the parallel website/database creation occurred as a result of intentions to demonstrate countries’ ownership of project outputs.

134. The Review of the Legislation relevant to Econet implementation was undertaken and contributed to the delivery of this output (this cross-cutting activity is also referred to in the project LF as part of the output 3.3 deliverable). It provided useful comparative analysis of various PA types existing in the region. Information provided in the review is well structured and undoubtedly will serve as excellent reference material that will be helpful for planning transboundary conservation projects and initiatives.

135. An intermediate version of the Review included a number of useful observations. It concluded, in particular, that “*Central Asian countries legislated the priority of international law over national ones... except in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, where international norms should be used, unless national norms are stricter*” (English version of the Review is cited here). The Review provided an inventory of international conventions and treaties relevant to the protection of biodiversity, which all five countries have joined. It attempted to identify a universal approach for the resolution of legal obstacles that limit efficiency of conservation activities in the region. The approach suggests adaptation of complicated and sometimes contradictory national legislative acts. In-line with international conventions and agreements signed by governments.

136. The UNEP Task Manager provided a substantial contribution to the design of the Review. Following his recommendation, the final version of the Review was expanded to include practical recommendations, which outlined crucial legal aspects that formed the basis for the preparation of the

supplement to the FCEPSD CA protocol on Econet implementation, that was endorsed by ISDC at a later stage.

137. Some suggestions in the Review are not well justified. In particular, the Review has interpreted IUCN management categories as a recommended international standard that should be directly integrated into national legislation. In fact, national and sub-national legal mechanisms that define roles of PAs, their types, management, ownership etc., are usually much more detailed than in any generic scheme. They are developed by national governments in accordance with their needs and legal systems. IUCN categories are not intended as a model for national legislation but to serve only as a simplified classification system to enable comparison between different PA systems adopted in different countries.

138. Additional complementary outputs of this activity addressed the practical needs of conservation project developers and included detailed explanatory notes and collection of fact-sheets providing ready-to-use sources of information identifying priority areas for conservation and justifying new PAs, buffer zones and corridors that Econet aimed to establish.

139. An intensive and efficiently organized promotional campaign was successful and paved the way to a speedy consideration of the Econet plans by officials and intergovernmental bodies.

140. The ISDC decision in June 2005 has endorsed integration of the ECONET concept into the structure of the FCEPSD CA. It has undoubtedly ensured a long-term future of the ECONET impact on development of conservation strategy and policies within the region.

141. Achievement of this output is rated as satisfactory.

7. Output 3.1:

Mechanisms for regional co-operation and integrated actions to conserve biodiversity in place.

142. ECONET identified and applied viable mechanisms to facilitate implementation of ongoing project activities. These included identification of NFPs and engaging them in active consultations and meetings. The establishment of CWGs on a basis of working groups supporting the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) allowed for more efficient resource use through organising joint meetings and better coordination of complementary activities. A number of agreements formalised interactions and information exchange between ECONET and large ongoing UNDP projects.

143. Multiple events, ranging from training sessions and workshops to side events accompanying ISDC meetings, catalysed transboundary interaction between national environmental agencies and NGOs. Scientists from leading institutions involved in development of the Econet scheme attended regional events and had additional opportunities for networking. The ECONET participatory approach involved a variety of stakeholders, including extractive industry representatives from all five countries.

144. It should be noted that the majority of participants of major ECONET workshops interviewed have stressed that they particularly valued the benefit of learning about HOW similar activities can be organised. Although no formalised structures of permanent bodies arose from these activities, it seems that their overall impact was to inspire many among the one thousand or more attendees. This inspiration and relevant knowledge is likely to result in more effective actions of individuals involved with practical conservation initiatives across the region. Outcomes from this project component will undoubtedly have a lasting impact.

145. A solid basis for establishing and developing practical and formalised mechanisms for Econet implementation and consequent stimulation of transboundary cooperation was ensured through incorporation of the Econet concept and strategic directions into the Protocol accompanying the FCEPSD. This Protocol was endorsed by ISDC within the timeframe of the project and signed by all five countries soon after its completion.

146. Prior to completion of the project, an executive agency (WWF RPO) has initiated elaboration of concrete project proposals that would address practical implementation of the Econet. There is no doubt that immediate and unreserved support for these proposals was greatly facilitated by regular communication with national agencies through NFPs. Other agencies implementing conservation projects in CA, e.g. UNDP and their projects executants also benefited from a favourable public image and official support of activities addressing development of ecological networks in the region. The outcome of this activity is rated as highly satisfactory.

8. Output 3.2

Financing strategy for ensuring the long-term financial viability of the Econet plan implementation developed and funding solicited from donors and governments concerned.

147. An initial ECONET work plan envisaged development and implementation of “*viable plans for ensuring the long term financing of entities or initiatives created by the project*”. This was scheduled within the period starting from the 3rd quarter of the second year and ending in the 2nd quarter of the third year. Although a number of discussions relevant to the financing of the Econet plan arose during ECONET project country working groups meetings and regional events involving national stakeholders, there were no specific activities that explicitly addressed the long-term financial sustainability of the programme. Reports on relevant activities implementation often included vague references about ongoing consultations with donors and national/regional stakeholders and referred to outputs of parallel activities; e.g. project progress reports up to 2nd quarter of year 3 listed a *Legislation Database* as the output from this activity, although it was implemented and funded within activity 2.2.

148. As a follow-up to the first PSC Meeting (August 2004 - 2nd quarter of year 2) and with direct input from the UNEP Task Manager, a draft Terms of Reference for the ‘ECONET Implementation Strategy’ was produced. Among other things it included “*a detailed ‘Map’ of the ECONET Plan, ‘Background and Justification’, ‘Compliance with National and International Policies and Conventions’ (- e.g. CBD, GEF supported ECONET, ISDC, Agenda 21, REAP, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, etc); ‘Objectives and ECONET Policies’; ‘Strategies and Action Plans’ (environmental protection, socio-economic aspects, institutions organisation, public consultation, legal, and budget/financial aspects); ‘Phased Plan of Implementation (what, when, who)’*. The draft of the Implementation Strategy was produced shortly before the end of the project. It required urgent revision and expansion to fill in a number of glaring omissions identified by the UNEP Task Manager’s critical review.

149. As a result of considerable delays in implementation of relevant activities and the lack of time and resources for its peer review and validation, the final document did not address many aspects envisaged in the PD and / or recommendations of PSC. It clearly displayed all the signs of a rushed job, i.e. lack of interpretation of the socio-economic specifics of the countries, lack of recommendations about the roles of agencies or institutions in financing or fundraising, undocumented pictures (maps with no legends), etc. As a side effect of this haste, translation costs related to this output became exceedingly high (about twice of the normal theme-specific professional translation).

150. The text of the Strategy contains a rather generic justification of priorities for various elements of the Econet implementation and brief characteristics of economic situation in CA countries. It described types of international financial mechanisms and listed selected donor agencies. The document briefly described typical in-country mechanisms that may provide resources for PA system maintenance, e.g. state budget allocations, various taxation mechanisms targeting industries whose activities directly or indirectly affect biodiversity. This list of potential sources was not accompanied by any analysis of their applicability in the region, there were no concrete fundraising mechanisms identified and there were no roles or potential niches for national conservation agencies, institutions or NGOs indicated in the document. The Strategy is insufficient for shaping programmes at national, regional or individual conservation institution or NGO level. Executants did not identify any potential beneficiaries of the Strategy in order to shape the document according to their potential needs. As a result, this output looks mainly as a formal deliverable produced purely for reporting purposes.

151. The Strategy contains some elements of novelty. In particular, following the direct recommendation of the UNEP Task Manager, it included a preliminary estimate of potential cost of full-scale Econet implementation. It is based on costs accounted in tens of thousands US dollars per abstract site or per ten thousand km² (or per “one PA site” or referring to “*numerous core areas*”), including cost for establishing EE and its subsequent running costs. These estimates were compared with the current levels of governmental funding for existing PA systems. Although there is an indication that an increase would be required, the numbers are very approximate at best (ranging from 2 to 10 times the existing allocations per country). Nevertheless, this assessment of national needs for establishment and maintenance of a viable PA system is the first of its kind and it represents an important step supporting progress towards Econet implementation.

152. Extensive consultations with donors and national/regional stakeholders to identify the most viable options that would ensure sustainable funding were conducted in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The results of the Econet project – national commitments to the future implementation of the Econet – were included in the third national CBD reports for the

countries of the region (Programme of Work on PA system development, including gap analysis). Special information material was prepared for National CBD reports and a side-event on Econet was organized during CoP-8 CBD in Brazil. At this forum, government representatives of all CA countries declared their overall support for Econet implementation, although there were no clear statements made about the amount of financial resources pledged to its support and there is no evidence that additional resources were generated from this commitment.

153. Within the project timeframe WWF initiated fundraising activities ranging from advice provided to national partners to preparation of concrete project proposals. Funding was generated for a number of projects on particular EE implementation within the timeframe of the project or soon after ECONET was finalised. This should be taken as evidence that WWF has successfully utilised both its own expertise and favourable publicity induced by the ECONET in the region. Similarly, some projects that directly referred to Econet were funded in the region and were implemented by other agencies, e.g. MNPT and UNDP project “Improvement of Protected Areas System in Turkmenistan (ECONET)”. Although this is, undoubtedly, an excellent development and it does represent a follow-up of the ECONET, it cannot be considered as a direct output of this particular project activity. It is likely that the resources intended for this activity were mainly utilised for very practical and useful fundraising activities of the executing agency that contributed to immediate implementation of separate EE but not to the establishment of long-lasting mechanisms that would assist national agencies and NGOs in more efficient implementation of Econet at a regional scale.

154. The task 3.2.1d identified by the ECONET PD “*Preparation of a concrete overall or individual financing plan for the co-ordinating mechanisms/structures and implementation of Econet plan, and approval of the initial financial input of the key-donors/government agencies concerned*” was not completed.

155. Overall level of the output delivered is rated as moderately unsatisfactory.

9. Output 3.3:

A legislative basis for regional co-operation and integrated action provided through the development of model legislation within one of the countries of the region.

156. The project team has thoroughly studied actual circumstances and political situations in the region, in particular through implementation of a comparative review of legal systems in all five CA countries (See Output 2.2 discussion). It was found that elaboration of documents suitable for official consideration would require much more time and resources than the ECONET plan envisaged due to complicated legislative frameworks in all five countries, constantly evolving land use regulations and obligatory lengthy procedures for inter-agency consultations on any draft legislative act. The project team concluded that elaboration of a model national conservation legislation suggested by the PD would not be practical. The scope of activities relevant to the output envisaged in the ECONET PD was amended in-line with these findings.

157. A decision to reallocate relevant resources to support the development of “*An Ecological Codex of Kyrgyzstan*” was taken by the Project Coordinator after consultations with the Implementing Agency and subsequent approval by the UNEP Task Manager. It should be noted that the ECK initiative originated from a national Strategy on Poverty Reduction, and a large number of inter-agency working groups and NGOs were involved in its development. National experts involved in planning discussions expressed a number of concerns about the relevance of this development to the project objective and, in particular noted that no country in the region would be prepared to endorse such an overarching act in the foreseeable future.

158. The ECK output is represented in ECONET FD and on a project website by a 12-page summary including annotations, table of content, selected chapters directly relevant to the Econet (2 pages) and extracts from some other chapters referring to cross-cutting issues. A full 105-page version of ECK is available on the Internet for viewing at the website maintained by CAREC (<http://www.caresd.net/site.html?en=0&id=5664>). It is not clear what part of the ECK was prepared using ECONET resources. It is unlikely that a sizeable investment (about \$23,000) into ECK development was a worthwhile use of resources. A large number of other agencies and NGOs were involved in ECK elaboration. Potential duplication of efforts or unintentional subsidising of the ECK components, not entirely relevant to ECONET, cannot be excluded. A year after the project was completed ECK had not received any official status. It is likely that the decision to fund this activity was taken mainly to ensure formal similarity of this “legal-like” project output with initially planned model legislation delivery.

159. The general legislative framework in CA countries is often not accompanied by more detailed legal statutory orders or normative acts usually required for a systematic implementation of relevant directives. ECONET contributed to filling this gap; in particular through elaboration of state acts for land tenure (“Protected Area Passport”) for 3 protected areas in Kyrgyzstan. This important project output could contribute to legislation analyses and could serve as an example for similar activities in the country and in the region. Unfortunately, it was not presented in the Review of the Legislation and was omitted from ECONET FR because tasks leaders were not always aware of progress in parallel but complementary project activities. The absence of the email network envisaged by the PD (activity 3.5.2) has weakened communication between project executants.

160. As was noted earlier in the discussion of Objective 3, consistent work with NFPs and ISDC allowed incorporation of the Econet concept into the national governmental programmes in Kazakhstan on PA development for 2005-2008, the National Programme to Combat Desertification of Uzbekistan, and the Governmental Programme on PAs development of Tajikistan for 2005-2015. As a direct result of the ECONET intervention, relevant national acts were amended accordingly during the implementation period of the project or soon after its completion. These outcomes are consistent with outputs envisaged in ECONET PD (activity 3.3.2a), represent practical results, and actually go much further than was initially suggested - *“dissemination of practical recommendations on national legislation”*.

161. The combination of a rather questionable undertaking with reallocation of resources towards ECK co-financing and the clearly successful intervention that induced important changes in regional policy frameworks and national legislation in three countries leads to the rating of these activities and outputs as moderately satisfactory.

10. Output 3.4:

Increased capacity of relevant institutions and protected area administrations within the region to effectively plan and implement biodiversity conservation activities.

162. ECONET has directly supported strengthening of institutional capacity in centres involved in development of the ECONET GIS (LGIBP in Kazakhstan and GIS Laboratory affiliated with AEPFK, Kyrgyzstan) and organised a number of expertise exchange events, where more experienced project participants introduced basic GIS tools to newly engaged partners.

163. Over a hundred CA specialists, listed in the ECONET FR as contributors to the project, benefited from attending training sessions organised across all CA countries. The “Training of trainers” workshop on human dimension aspects of conservation activities received highly positive feedback from the interviewees. Broad audiences (including a total of over a thousand NGOs and various other stakeholder representatives) attended events that introduced general aspects of biodiversity conservation, CBD principles and Econet planning. ECONET funded training of national coordinators from three countries in ‘sustainable funding of biodiversity conservation’ and, on one occasion, a language course for a national expert.

164. The Project attempted to replicate successful WWF approaches for organising training on the implementation ecological networks, in particular using a computerised simulation game (“Econet ABC”). The most prominent specialist in this area conducted two training sessions intended as ‘training for trainers’. This particular approach allows familiarising stakeholders from different backgrounds (decision-makers, conservationists and industry players) with sustainable development principles and ecological network planning. Unfortunately, only ten copies of the training material sets (brochure and CD-ROM) were requested by and made available to ECONET. This undermined the success of this promising and potentially efficient approach. Apart from a limited number of “Econet ABC” copies and promotion publications, no specific training material supported trainees. This has limited opportunities for further distribution of relevant knowledge or replication of training at sub-national level.

165. The capacity of national institutions and NGOs was reinforced through delivery of additional outputs useful for fundraising and planning of the Econet implementation. The ECONET project team, with direct input from the UNEP Task Manager, identified the need for, and compiled a collection of, *“Fact-Sheets”* for 10 selected ecoregions representing over 60% of the Econet (Annexes 7-11 to ECONET FR). These Fact-Sheets summarized findings derived from highly qualified experts brought together during the ongoing project activities and, to some extent, information accumulated in ECONET GIS. They have already proved to be extremely helpful for making work on development of proposals for practical implementation of the Econet more efficient and were already used by the national teams preparing relevant proposals under WWF guidance. The ability to elaborate these useful additional

outputs within the tight project budget indicates good level of adaptive management by the UNEP Task Manager and coordinators involved.

166. An apparent weakness in capacity building and organisation of training within ECONET was due to: the lack of clear planning for capacity building, lack of a relevant strategy for development of proper training programmes and identification of target audiences. The majority of training sessions were conducted during other meetings and events and involved attendees of these events who were not necessarily the most desirable target for particular types of training. A number of relevant deliverables envisaged by the ECONET PD e.g. *“curricular materials for universities, forestry schools and other relevant training centres, pilot use of new curricular materials at a training institution in the region and facilitate its replication in other training institutions throughout Central Asia”* were not produced and were not referred to in ECONET FR, LF or in the final PIR.

167. A major flaw in the organisation of capacity building and specialised technical (GIS) training was the lack of understanding or knowledge on the availability of: broader international expertise, solutions, tools and standards. As a result, useful information sources were not utilised by the project, extra time was spent on digitisation of information already available from existing databases and valuable materials were developed in formats that require considerable reshaping to make them compatible with other resources available in the region or even internationally.

168. The Project Logframe suggested using outcomes of the Training Impact Study as an indicator for assessing increased capacity of planners and managers at relevant institutions. The study was not conducted and therefore there is no evidence available from project materials that would allow identification of changes in relevant capacity.

169. Indirectly, the ability of project participants and variety of national institutions and NGOs to utilise and promote ECONET approaches was supported by organising highly participatory regional workshops and distribution of well-designed promotional material at multiple events in the region and by a successful public relations campaign.

170. ECONET activities received exceptionally broad media coverage, and were regularly reported in highly regarded national newspapers, on TV and radio. Well-designed and engaging documentary films accompanied project activities throughout the period of its implementation. Multiple references to this project and the Econet concept were common in the media in the region a year after project was completed. A high level of public awareness about the Econet concept created a favourable foundation for practical interaction with national officials and stakeholders, including representatives of industrial sectors engaged in consultations on Econet implementation.

171. The high level of publicity and regular promotion of the Econet approach during multiple regional events was a necessary prerequisite that allowed many bureaucratic barriers to be overcome and considerable changes in the decision-making process, including formal endorsements of the ECONET outputs at regional and national levels, to be achieved. The highly efficient promotional campaign ensured a gradual increase of official support for the ECONET and the transformation of national ministers, ISDC members and many other decision-makers into strong supporters of the Econet concept. To a large extent the project owes this level of impact to the professional expertise of the Project Coordinator, who is a well-known scientist and conservationist with over 30 years experience of work in the region. Both the ecological specifics of CA countries and the peculiarities of cultural traditions were taken into account in every day communications, planning and professional interactions.

172. A combination of poorly implemented training and capacity building activities with well organised participatory regional events and highly successful promotional campaign allows for an overall rating of this component as moderately satisfactory.

11. Output 3.5:

Mechanisms for dissemination of information generated by the GIS in place and awareness of key stakeholders increased.

173. The ECONET project has developed a bi-lingual website that is maintained by the executing agency (WWF RPO). This website provides access to major project documents and includes a map viewer that allows the simplified version of GIS-generated maps to be explored:

http://www.wwf.ru/about/where_we_work/asia/projects/econet/maps/eng/
http://www.wwf.ru/about/where_we_work/asia/projects/econet/maps/

Some project documents and similar map viewer are also available at the website of the REC in Almaty (Kazakhstan):

<http://www.carec.kz/>

Both websites allow all interested parties to download ECONET text documents, familiarise themselves with types of information accumulated in the GIS system and identify contact points responsible for GIS data distribution.

174. The ECONET PD suggested an objectively verifiable indicator for this output delivery – *“Internet access to GIS/database products possible”*. This level of interoperability was not achieved, partly because of concerns about authorship of valuable compilations, and partly due to lack of necessary technical and data management expertise.

175. Minutes of internal project meetings show that GIS database copyright/authorship issues were considered early in the life of the project. Experts suggested an appropriate simple solution – to publish the ECONET GIS database on CD-ROM together with appropriate references. Unfortunately, due to the delays with the GIS database completion noted above, and technical problems with data formats and content, ECONET did not succeed in preparing the data collection in a form ready for publication.

176. The Collection of data compiled by the project (ECONET GIS CD-ROM) is currently available for interested parties upon request to WWF RPO or to national contact points (former ECONET coordinators and LGIBP) *“under the condition of a well-grounded application, subject for approval by national and regional Project Coordinators and followed by the subscription of a contract”*.

177. Copyright of the biodiversity GIS is assigned to GEF-UNEP-WWF – “Econet Central Asia”. The legal status of this ownership is unclear and the ECONET GIS CD-ROM did not include any references/citation indicating authorship of the most advanced datasets, e.g. the newly developed map of CA ecosystems. This is unlikely to lead to any legal claims because it would not conform to the traditions of conservation community in the region, although it is apparent that omission of proper credits to authors of scientific products does not contribute to positive perceptions of the operations of international agencies.

178. Insufficient copies of the ECONET GIS CD-ROM were prepared. Each CD-ROM needs to be created on request from several master copies, master copies are stored at the WWF RPO and national coordinators offices. As there are no procedures for maintaining content or versions of datasets, consistency of GIS data distributed to various users is not guaranteed.

179. The procedure for acquiring the CD-ROM through WWF RPO is in place and over a dozen copies of the CD-ROM have been distributed in CA and outside of the region. Acquiring the dataset through national contact points is more problematic as not all former Project Coordinators possess the necessary expertise for reproduction of the CD-ROM and resources necessary to organise the signing of the standard agreement with former Project Coordinator located outside the region. Some individuals listed on WWF website as ECONET GIS distributors have now left the region.

180. Detailed textual legends for GIS maps were not included on ECONET GIS CD-ROM submitted for evaluation and on versions delivered to at least two users. The CD-ROM did not include references to the availability of relevant files from other sources, in particular WWF RPO website and ECONET “Web for Life” CD-ROM. Not all national contact points identified as ECONET GIS distributors received the “Web for Life” CD-ROM by the time of this evaluation (a year after project was completed).

181. ECONET “Web for Life” CD-ROM was designed and published during the final stages of the project; several copies were distributed during the final project meetings in CA. This publication was in essence a CD-ROM version of the ECONET pages from the WWF RPO website. The CD-ROM was intended to serve as a promotional resource and as a tool for sharing major project documents with stakeholders in CA region. Unfortunately, some of the features required access to the Internet in order to function properly; e.g. it required downloading additional software for viewing map schemes (Macromedia Flash Player), the code had a number of “global” (Internet-based) references instead of links to the files held the CD-ROM. These problems could potentially prevent many users from being able to explore the content, particularly the maps. Other omissions made CD-ROM functionality too sensitive to certain aspects of computer configuration and required the most recent versions of software that were not widely available in the region. As a result, this potentially useful output can hardly serve its purpose of reaching the audience in a region where majority of users have no or limited access to the Internet.

182. As a cost-saving measure, the “Web for Life” CD-ROM was published in Moscow where relevant production costs were somewhat lower than in CA. It turned out that CA countries customs levied high charges for importing multiple copies of CD-ROM-based products. This has jeopardised timely distribution of the CD-ROM in the region. By the end of the project only a few copies of this

product were available in the region. The Project Coordinator demonstrated a high degree of adaptive management by identifying a working solution for resolving this problem and approached the diplomatic missions in Moscow. An informal agreement of transfer of the ECONET CDs through diplomatic posts to five CA countries region was achieved within a year of project completion and it is expected, at the time of writing, that the materials will shortly be transferred to recipient countries.

183. A number of national stakeholders, CAREC and SIC in particular, gained access to the ECONET GIS database and some of the data was used in a number of GEF and UNDP projects. As previously noted, on some occasions ECONET GIS data were used to develop valuable secondary products for practical planning, e.g. PA maps of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. There is no evidence that all national conservation agencies directly benefited from the ECONET GIS resources; it seems that national agencies in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have no technical capacity to utilise GIS data. Recipient departments of national agencies and the type of resources that agencies may benefit from (database, GIS, printed maps etc.) were not identified by ECONET.

184. Low-resolution online versions of ECONET maps are insufficient for practical planning and the utility of this simplified presentation of the database content is limited to promotion purposes. It is apparent that in its current form, outcomes and any potential impact of this output are sub-optimal and further steps should be taken to remove the barrier identified at the PDF-A stage of the project as *“Lack of utilisable data for biodiversity planning and management decision making”*.

185. Another component included in the ECONET PD as an output for the activity 3.5.2 is: *“Develop an Email network (based on the example of the UNEP Bioplan network) to allow dissemination of similar information to those without access to internet”* with a total budget of \$64,000 (including a GEF contribution of \$30,000). No relevant activities were conducted. *“Regular on-going work on project coordination at the regional scale is conducted via e-mail system”*, which the ECONET FR referred to, by no means represents a sufficient substitute for this planned activity and its corresponding output.

186. Communication with groups and individuals was organised mainly through a hierarchy from the Project Coordinator to national coordinators, NFPs and a number of selected experts. Similarly, national coordinators relied upon emails, where possible, or telephone and personal contacts with key experts, who, in turn, involved further project executants/contributors. As a result, many contributors worked on narrowly defined tasks without a clear understanding of how and when their outputs would fit into the project's composition. Many national specialists were involved in multiple events in the region and were introduced to the project concept, but very few of them (with exception of a core team) were informed about further project progress or received an opportunity to provide feedback outside of these short meetings.

187. No simple contact list was created at the end of the project and information about its progress and outputs was not channelled to the majority of project contributors. Only the core team members had the information on the composition of their particular task teams and about the role and expertise of the contributors involved. The sub-task of email network creation was not implemented.

188. Implementation of this component of the project is unsatisfactory.

C. Execution Performance and Relevance:

1. Effectiveness.

189. ECONET implemented broad range of activities addressing the three main objectives of the project and the majority of planned outputs were delivered by the time of project completion. A number of planned outputs were unrealistically ambitious for a 3-year long intervention supported by the GEF MSP.

190. The most effective elements of the intervention included:

- a. A highly participatory and multi-stakeholder approach to drafting the Econet scheme;
- b. Aggregation of considerable information resources into digital formats and its interpretation in support of Econet scheme design;
- c. An intensive and successful promotional campaign of the ECONET concept, targeting intergovernmental bodies, national agencies, NGOs, sub-national level decision-makers and general public;
- d. Engaging prominent scientists able to deliver scientifically rigorous fundamental products for biodiversity analysis and conservation planning, in particular –a uniform ecosystem map of CA.

- e. Excellent promotion materials – leaflets, brochures, mass-media publications and presentations, including on TV;
 - f. Bringing concept of an ecological network into the political agenda of ISDC and its subsequent incorporation into FCEPSD;
 - g. Incorporating the Econet concept and definitions of EEs into the national legislation of three countries.
191. The evaluation also identified a number of shortcomings ranging from particular technical omissions to failure to deliver some outputs planned and budgeted in the ECONET PD, in particular:
- a. Poorly planned and insufficient technical training for executants involved in GIS and database design have lead to delays with GIS implementation and under-utilisation of the technical capacity developed;
 - b. Incomplete and undocumented standards, structure and quality control procedures for the ECONET GIS and total lack of documentation or user manuals for the database;
 - c. Lack of a systematic approach, programmes and materials for training on Econet implementation and over-reliance on occasional presentations by prominent specialists instead of utilising ‘training for trainers’ approaches;
 - d. Delay in establishment of the PSC, insufficient advisory role of the PSC on issues such as resource dispersal to an exceedingly high number (99 in total) of workshops, meetings and short promotion-oriented events;
 - e. Stochastic communication between the core project team members and contributors working in the region and insufficient awareness of contributors on project progress or parallel task deliverables. The planned communication network was not delivered;
 - f. Poor formatting and omissions in documents for particular tasks deliverables that were included in ECONET FR and ECONET website.
192. The project contributed to lowering barriers for achieving environmental and development goals and optimisation and expansion of PA systems as a whole. The GEF Biodiversity Tracking Tool forms are unlikely to be suitable for this type of project analysis because they mainly rely upon disaggregated information, e.g. data on individual PAs or assessments by separate policy sectors. ECONET represented a broad, strategic intervention; formalised quantitative assessment of benefits is extremely challenging and evaluations must necessarily rely on qualitative assessments of its achievements.
193. The project generated considerable impact on public perceptions of the ecological networks concept, initiated important legal and political processes at a national level and regional scales. ECONET allowed a better level of integration of biodiversity information and delivered a number of outputs useful for planning conservation activities in the region, and most importantly - the prospective scheme of the Econet of the Central Asia.
194. ECONET outputs were made available and widely promoted at a national level and informed international initiatives. Preliminary results of the project were highlighted in the CA countries Third National reports on accomplishment of national obligations on CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas and were presented at COP 8.

2. Relevance.

195. The project conforms to the GEF Biodiversity – Operational Programs 1 on arid ecosystems with relevance to Operational Programs 4 on Mountain ecosystems. It included a number of multidisciplinary and complementary activities ranging from information collation and its scientifically rigorous interpretation to promote sustainable use and conservation of biological resources and initiate relevant policy changes.
196. All project objectives correctly identified strategic directions for improving efficiency and coherence of conservation efforts in five CA countries. Project activities and outputs contributed to lowering barriers for efficient planning of conservation activities at national level and helped to optimise planning of a protected areas network with consideration of biodiversity status and conservation needs at regional level.

197. The project was relevant at the national level for the sustainable development and biodiversity protection objectives of each country involved. The concept of ecological networks and EEs was widely promoted in CA and directly incorporated into the legislation of three CA countries.

198. The project was highly relevant in the international context of the global effort to decrease the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Introduction of the Econet concept and practical steps of bringing together dispersed multidisciplinary information and, using this as a basis, designing a scientifically justified scheme of EE in CA allowed the achievement of a new and more strategic consideration of biodiversity aspects by various stakeholders.

199. GEF MSP ECONET intervention initiated transformation of isolated and insufficiently coordinated efforts at inter-agency level into a harmonised approach directly supporting achievement of CBD targets.

3. Efficiency.

200. National agencies, institutions and individual scientists shared with the ECONET data and previously unpublished scientific records accumulated through decades of research work. It is hard to estimate a monetary value for these information resources, as well as the invaluable input of all the experts from leading scientific institutions into consultations, on Econet design. This support was crucial for the ECONET implementation; inputs from national experts were efficiently utilised by the project and the ability of project team to engage this support should be highly appreciated.

201. The project acquired co-financing at the level exceeding that originally planned; in particular WWF cash co-financing reached 230% of the levels originally planned and allowed WWF experts to devote more time to the ECONET implementation. CDE co-financing corresponded to planned levels. Since project inception ECONET has leveraged additional resources. FZS/RSBP contributed additional resources through a joint project with WWF and established Altyn-Dala PA in Kazakhstan (a core area in terms of the Econet scheme); a WWF-Sweden grant that supported the PA system in northern Kazakhstan.

202. A part of these additional resources was used to create a special finance management database. This allowed smooth and sound financial management of the ECONET and automated production of financial documentation in-line with all the diverse and complicated legal requirements for financial transactions in Russia and five CA countries, as well as comprehensive reporting according to UNEP/GEF requirements. Its application reduced the cost of the project administration below the level normally budgeted in projects implemented by WWF and below the level envisaged in the PD.

203. A number of separate activities were not entirely efficient; e.g. “A special education tool – simulation game Econet ABC” was reported as an output but was, in fact, developed independently, only a few copies of the leaflet/CD-ROM were used during training and therefore it would be more appropriate to treat it as an input. Some undertakings discussed above (“*Cosmoeconet*”, ECK, etc) did not represent a necessary or at least reasonably justified investment. Development of parallel websites mainly with identical content, as well as several versions of a legal database lead to duplication of efforts and resource dispersal.

204. Project management was lacking a clear communication strategy; roles and responsibilities of the core team members were not well defined. This led to unnecessary centralization in coordination of project sub-tasks and reliance on many arbitrary decisions of regional coordinators. Regional coordinators possessed an exceptionally high scientific expertise, awareness of regional specifics and policy matters that allowed them to avoid making costly mistakes. Still, some project activities and outputs have suffered, in particular implementation of the ECONET information system, because thematic experts leading substantial high-tech or scientific components of the project had no budgetary control over their blocks of activities and little influence on operational decisions affecting their components implementation.

205. Extension of the project by three months was an appropriate managerial solution in response to actual political circumstances in the region. By itself, this did not have a negative impact on overall project performance. The delivery of particular outputs was later than planned, including the Financial Strategy or the last-minute ‘rush-job’ to compile the ECONET FD and CD-ROM based outputs did limit the opportunity for proper editing or peer review of the outputs, resulted in technical and content omissions, increased publication/translation cost and led to an inability to distribute some of intended outputs within the region by the end of the project.

206. Financial resources available to the project were fully utilised by the end of the project and the majority of planned outputs were delivered in accordance with project objectives. Efficiency of project implementation is evaluated as moderately satisfactory.

D. Assessment of Sustainability of project outcomes:

Socio-political aspects.

207. Positive impact of the ECONET project outcomes became apparent within the year following the project's completion. A number of contributions that the project has provided to regional decision-making practice were utilised within regional and national processes. In particular, a week after ECONET completion, the national Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Specially Protected Areas" № 175-III came into force. This Law incorporated an approach to ecological networks development that was identical to ECONET and afforded legal status to Econet elements (core areas, corridors, buffer zones).

208. Outcomes of ECONET became most visible soon after project completion. In November 2006 when five CA countries signed the history-making sub-regional Convention (FCEPSD) to unite their efforts in saving the environment. The ECONET project and its approaches were included in the Convention as a solution for biodiversity loss prevention by means of a special Protocol elaborated within the project. Although ratification of the FCEPSD will take some time due to diversity of national legal systems and social factors as noted above, it undoubtedly brings integration of regional efforts in conservation and sustainable development to a new level. ECONET was an important part of this development. Within the following year WWF finalised an agreement, developed by ECONET, between WWF and ISDC on Econet implementation. The 16th November 2007 ISDC decision No 3 (See Annex VII) approved this "*Agreement on intention between Intergovernmental Commission of Sustainable Development ("ISDC") and WWF Central Asian Programme on ECONET implementation in the Region*".

209. Both changes in national legislation and incorporation of the Econet concept into ISDC and FCEPSD created a momentum for practical implementation of Econet in CA. A number of projects supported by international agencies were initiated in the region, notably the MNPT/UNDP project "Improvement of Protected Areas System in Turkmenistan (ECONET)" was implemented in a country with a unique combination of legal issues that complicated EE designation.

210. National policies of CA countries, REAP and FCEPSD, set up a reliable framework for sustainable development, that considers environmental and conservation issues. Still, development of a comprehensive legislative framework and new land management approaches in countries with economies in transition is an ongoing, unpredictable and highly competitive process influenced by many stakeholders. Windows of opportunity established by ECONET will not remain open for too long. The speed of designation of EEs and an increase in the total area of formally established EEs should be considered as an overarching indicator of the sustainability of ECONET outcomes. The Econet scheme elaborated by the project represents a target generally agreed to by all CA countries and it is far more ambitious than the CBD protected areas coverage target. Progress in Econet implementation will depend on the ability of national agencies to monitor progress towards this target and use these beneficial political arguments to justify official designation of new EEs.

Financial Resources.

211. Current positive trends in economy of CA countries are likely to allow continuous and expanding support to PA systems managed by national conservation agencies. At the same time, high levels of inflation and outstrip rises in the cost of professional services are likely to neutralize the monetary value increases of budget allocations to conservation and maintenance of PA systems. Assuming that a positive trend in economies will continue in the next few years it would be reasonable to expect that national agencies will cope with maintenance of existing network of national PAs and may justify sufficient increase of their budgets for management or land use regimes monitoring in new PAs and other EEs.

212. The ECONET FR has indicated the level of initial investment in EE land use planning, new management regimes and legalising plans exceeds its yearly maintenance cost by 5-10 times. Full implementation of the Econet within a reasonable for planning period, e.g. within a decade, would require a funding increase of several times compared to the budgets currently allocated to conservation agencies, mainly because of the cost of initial investments into EE. It would be unrealistic to expect national conservation agencies to bear the full cost of Econet implementation in nearest future. GEF assistance will be essential.

213. It is obvious that additional resources are required to maintain the momentum created by the ECONET and to ensure a speedy implementation of the scheme developed. In recent years, many proactive international agencies, including UNEP and UNDP, as well as GEF and a number of developed countries' agencies supported improvement of PA systems in CA. Still, PA coverage in CA is far from being comparable with extent of the Econet as it was identified by the project. Progress in Econet implementation in CA will depend greatly on the countries' ability to access additional resources through international financial mechanisms, in particular GEF, and from other donors, including WWF.

Institutional framework and governance.

214. Practical implementation of ecological network involves interactions among many stakeholders at local and national level and requires coordination of efforts in setting up transboundary EEs. These activities may benefit greatly from expertise acquired by the ECONET project team and WWF RPO experts in particular. It should be noted that methods developed and applied by the ECONET were not always captured in the project outputs in sufficient detail to allow these approaches to be replicated or applied in more detail at smaller scales by a third party or experts previously not involved in the project.

215. Currently a possibility to recall relevant collective knowledge and information resources depends greatly on the availability and good will of regional coordinators and several key experts, both from CA countries and WWF RPO. It is apparent that the reliance upon individual recall and informal networks is not an optimal way for ensuring continuity of a substantial process. The extent to which ECONET know-how will be owned by the countries and applied nationally or locally will depend on the timing of actions addressing aforementioned problems. Availability of individual experts is not a critical issue as yet in respect to experts of WWF RPO, who continue to work on CA project portfolio development, but is already becoming a problem in CA countries inasmuch experts change their positions or move on. There is a danger that in a few years time a great part of the collective ECONET executive expertise and information resources will be dispersed and lost before they are captured in sufficiently detailed publications and documents.

216. Since project completion, the host institution responsible for scientific support and development of ECONET GIS in a region (LGIBP) has not received adequate support for maintenance or expansion of the information database developed or for sharing its resources and expertise with Scientific Informational Centre of ISDC (SIC) or other national institutions and environmental centres. Similarly, the capacity of many national scientific institutions dealing with biodiversity and conservation has deteriorated considerably in recent years due to insufficient funding and the predominantly market-oriented restructuring of national institutional frameworks in the transition economy countries of CA. ECONET has clearly demonstrated and to some extent addressed the need for comprehensive and multi-disciplinary scientific support of planning and implementation of ecological networks. Maintenance of a sufficiently advanced level of fundamental and applied environmental research and monitoring of the Econet implementation in transition economy countries is largely dependent of external, international support.

217. Social and economic development of CA countries will result in land use change, adaptation of legislation to developing industries needs and land privatisation that would affect biodiversity and options for its preservation. The currently identified scheme of Econet and collated information resources should be regularly updated and scaled down to the level of details required for practical planning and designation of particular EEs at national or sub-national level. Both sustainability of the ECONET information system and its usefulness for monitoring Econet implementation is an issue of major concern. Because of the omissions in the information component implementation noted above, as well as the lack of continuation of ECONET GIS update within the final year of the project implementation and after its completion.

218. A number of **environmental risks** historically present in the region may influence separate EEs at all levels. Including a major process of Aral Sea drying, potential increase in desertification, climate change and human-induced impacts. Econet represents a plan for a region-wide coordinated response to a whole complex of potentially damaging impacts on biodiversity. Neither localised nor broader environmental risks can represent a threat to implementation of the Econet as a whole, unless changes in climate escalate to catastrophic level.

219. In short, positive changes in the political environment, including de-facto new environmental targets on setting up the Econet and public support of ecological networks are among the sustainable long-lasting outcomes of the project. External funding will be necessary for Econet implementation through formal designation of new EEs and assignment of responsibility for their management to corresponding national agencies. Project methods and approaches, as well as efficient utilisation of

ECONET information resources will largely depend on additional and speedy measures, including publication of the most prominent scientific outputs generated by the project and securing long-term funding for ECONET GIS maintenance.

E. Catalytic Role and Opportunities for Replication.

220. ECONET had a direct impact on the political environment in CA countries, including developments that took place within a year of the project's completion.

221. Scaling up (*“lessons and experiences are replicated within the same geographic area but funded by other sources”* as it was defined in the Evaluation Terms of Reference) in the case of ECONET may be rather re-interpreted as ‘scaling down’ – i.e. applying ECONET methods and concepts to develop more detailed ecological network and EE plans in separate CA countries. ECONET has stimulated the process of elaboration of detailed plans of EEs, which, for example are ongoing in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and in a separate parts of Kazakhstan. These processes received support from national agencies, multi-lateral donors and WWF.

222. Proper replication of the ECONET concept, approaches and particular methodologies is feasible for other geographical areas with similar prerequisites, in particular – where a similar combination of barriers preventing efficient incorporation of biodiversity conservation considerations into sustainable development planning and sufficient background scientific information exist. These preconditions are present in a number of NIS countries and larger transboundary regions, in particular Belarus, Caucasus/Iran and Russia/China transboundary regions and Mongolia. Availability of relevant scientific resources that need further integration and constraints of transition economy are commonly found in many of the regions mentioned.

223. Most importantly, introduction of the ecological network concept and EEs definitions into FCEPSD and overarching national laws have catalysed development of corresponding normative acts regulating land use in at least three countries.

F. Assessment of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Systems.

1. Monitoring and Evaluation Design.

224. ECONET PD incorporated a generic reference to M&E: *“Standard UNEP and WWF reporting procedures will apply. These include: quarterly technical and financial report; and a terminal report. In addition, each sub-contract and grant will include obligations to evaluate and report on performance of services and their impact. Finally, during the final stages of the project an external technical evaluation mission will be overseen by UNEP.”* Corresponding formats for quarterly and financial reports were included in PD and its section 5: *“Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation”* included a timetable for financial and technical reports submission and copyright arrangements for project outputs.

225. The project and LF did include indicators for some outputs/activities and the majority of its subcomponents. The evaluation analysed a set of ECONET PD drafts and their evolution. In general, the PD maintained the logic and main directions of the intervention derived from findings of a comprehensive WWF regional study. Multiple amendments were made to the original document, often following direct advice from UNEP staff. Many amendments improved quality and the details of activities considerably; other edits were likely made just to satisfy as many GEF eligibility criteria as possible. In some cases it led to gradual change of practical and achievable objectives towards over-ambitious formulas. As an example, the final formulation of the objective 3 *“To establish necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities...”* was too ambitious. This objective was not entirely achievable in framework of an MSP, considering the large size of the region and unsettled socio-economical background in targeted countries. On separate occasions, references to activities that were neither included in LF nor budgeted for, e.g. international institutions organisations involvement, expensive IMS technology applying.

226. Many indicators, as well as means of verification suggested were not sufficiently detailed to perform as SMART indicators and did not satisfy GEF Minimum Requirements for M&E. Requirements for M&E and SMART Indicators were not introduced to the project executants and project coordinator. Executants basically relied upon their common sense when reporting on project progress and completing LF reports. Reporting forms provided by UNEP at the beginning of the project were not optimal; in particular they required a listing of activities/outputs but did not specify any particular format. A number of reports within the first year were prepared and submitted to UNEP in WWF internal formats. The LF has been the most structured document that allowed some consistency in monitoring of project progress through its lifetime.

227. Well-structured formats for reporting and ongoing M&E of project activities, progress and risk assessment was introduced by UNEP about half-way through project implementation. This allowed a more logical link between the new reporting format (PIR) and the project LF structure making easier to monitor progress in the reports. Apparently, it could not change the situation with insufficiently SMART high-level indicators of an ongoing project because GEF projects cannot change the LF at the objective level. The project adapted its performance indicators in respect to a number of new sub-activities or made some tasks more distinct against the original LF (see Annex I, lines commented as “was not in PD LF”). Corresponding changes in reporting structure were made in line with clearly documented and agreed with the implementing agency decisions of the project team and the PSC. Some elements of new reporting forms were not designed in an optimal way e.g. the renumbering of activities in PIR section 3.2 “*Project implementation progress*” complicates its linking with section 3.1 “*Progress towards achieving the project objective*”.

228. It should be noted that interpretation of the PD contents depends on executants’ familiarity with specific GEF terminology and assumptions used for project Logframe design, an Incremental Cost matrix, Monitoring and Evaluation approach, etc. Translation to other languages makes understanding of the document structure and logic even more complicated. The GEF-defined term “baseline” means a scenario of potential development in the absence of GEF intervention. It often leads to an alternating use of these two meanings of “baseline”. Similarly, the terms *Outputs* and *Outcomes* (both normally translated to Russian like “results”) are well defined in many GEF documents. Still they often substitute each other, including documents written in English. E.g. there was no consistency in naming activity results in this particular Project Document, Project Implementation Reviews and ToRs for this evaluation. These seemingly insignificant, but multiple, logical and linguistic uncertainties complicate communication between project executants as well as communication between the executing and implementing agencies. As a result, the executing agency had to rely upon various internal formats and procedures for operational M&E. Re-interpretation of this reporting into formats applied by UNEP and GEF was quite time-consuming and burdensome.

229. In spite of a number of improvements the LF Tracking Form and PIR formats that are currently applied are still too bulky. It is hardly possible to observe these 20+-page long tables and crosscheck it with differently numbered activities list (PIR 3.2 section), especially when LF changes and includes additional activities over the project cycle. Proper analysis of information and assignment of ratings on the basis of telegraphic-style notes in these tables is quite a tricky task. As a result, task managers or evaluators are unlikely to be able to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of initial and consequent forms and come up with an objectively justified conclusions in a time normally allocated for this task.

230. These complications are likely to result in more weight given to the most successful outputs. Overall ranking intended to assess concrete outputs or outcomes may also be influenced by personal bias of the executants contacted. Any individual dealing with the lengthily reporting forms would have been tempted to form his judgement on the basis of personal communications, presentations or selection of easy accessible materials. It is understandable that some inconsistency appears in PIR forms and UNEP Task Manager’s overall ranking for this particular project was higher than given by the Evaluation, which attempted to analyse project deliverables in a more formal way and looked through details of plans, interim products, reports and final deliverables. In fact, this in-depth evaluation took much longer than was initially envisaged and it is unlikely that UNEP Task Managers may have a comparable time for conducting sufficiently detailed monitoring of ongoing projects using the formats that are currently in place.

231. The logic of assigning ratings in the final PIR provided for evaluation is unclear, e.g. outputs 1, 1.4 and 3.5 were rated as highly satisfactory (HS) although all of their components had lower rating; output 3.2. – Moderately satisfactory (MS) although all subcomponents were rated higher, etc. (see Annex I). There are also minor inconsistencies in descriptions of the rating applied in various M&E documents (MS in PIR was interpreted as “marginally satisfactory” and in this evaluation TORs like “moderately satisfactory”). It is apparent that structure, rules and formats of M&E tools require further refinement.

232. Requirements, format and timeframe for quarterly and final financial reports were clearly specified in the PD and provided a comprehensive framework for both organisation of financial management and budget monitoring through the project cycle. The timetable for the financial reporting was properly followed; some delays with the presentation of FR occurred because of a delay in the delivery of the external international audit.

233. Apart from procedures for regular reporting, there was no sound M&E plan elaborated, no mid-project evaluation envisaged and, generally speaking, there were no adequate monitoring systems to

ensure that management was adaptive and effective. As a result, the project progress monitoring, management efficiency and level of compliance with various reporting requirement depended mainly of motivation, devotion, expertise of key project personnel and support provided by the UNEP Task Manager.

2. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan Implementation.

234. Inasmuch as there were no explicitly defined and budgeted M&E system included in the project plan, there was no relevant training organised. A common perception of indicators, means of verification, ratings and other relevant to M&E elements of the project LF and PIRs was to regard them as compliance requirements imposed by a funding entity. Many interviewed experts, task leaders and contributors did not acknowledge the importance of these formalised criteria in organising continuous monitoring for improving project performance by informing management decisions. Project executants did strive to comply with UNEP/GEF reporting formats, while the majority of operational decisions relied upon extensive expertise of an executing agency in operation in the CA and were made on an ad hoc basis. They were rarely presented in quarterly reports in details sufficient for analysing and demonstrating their efficiency. More strategic decisions, like extension of the project implementation period or funds reallocation were made after consultations with the implementing agency. They normally adopted the project coordinator's interpretation of changing circumstance, often quite an appropriate intuitive one but rarely based on a systematic applying of M&E approach and relevant performance indicators.

235. Changes in implementing agency staffing affected oversight of ECONET within the first year of project implementation and the project coordinator faced the situation when important decisions on issues communicated to implementing agency had to be taken prior to receiving a corresponding response. Examination of the project correspondence allows the conclusion that during the second and third years of project implementation, the new UNEP Task Manager and project coordinator maintained frequent communication, were dedicated to assessing project progress in context of broader processes in the region and analysed problem areas as soon as they were identified. The same applies to the involvement of and communication between the project coordinator and national coordinators during the whole period of project implementation.

236. Quarterly and annual reports were submitted in-line with UNEP procedures and had all sections completed with the exception of the first year when WWF forms were applied. Some reporting requirements were not clearly communicated to executants; in particular, many quarterly reports included statements on achievements gained 1-2 years prior to project initiation. It seems that UNEP Task Manager undertook considerable efforts to improve monitoring of project progress and to ensure compliance of reporting materials with changed reporting formats. He has provided the project coordinator with comprehensive and detailed advice on how to improve the quality of reporting and did utilise information available for progress assessment, optimisation of project activities and adaptation of plans with consideration of changing political circumstances, in line with general objectives set by the PD. As an example, coordination of project with high-profile intergovernmental body and processes (ISDC and REAP) was identified as issues of a special importance. Within the second half of ECONET implementation period relevant sub-activities were incorporated into PIR, what allowed for more effective coordination and monitoring of their progress (see Annex I, lines 3.1.3 and 3.1.4). A number of similar amendments did enhance communication between the implementing and executing and agencies.

237. The executing agency applied strict procedures for performance evaluation of activities and, where relevant, the quality and performance of project interventions. In particular, all grants letters and sub-contracts included obligations to provide a detailed report on deliverables and content of work implemented. This information (in Russian language) was present in all coordinators' yearly reports, reports on particular tasks' implementation and individual grant reports randomly selected for evaluation.

238. Documentation of challenges, achievements and solutions in quarterly reports was not entirely comprehensive, in particular because the form of individual reports on sub-contracts/grants was not standardised and there was an unavoidable loss of detail in summaries or extracts for reporting in tabular forms translated into English. As a result, some useful and suitable for replication examples of operational solutions and adaptive management decisions remained unrecorded.

239. Telegraphic style and logical imperfections in many indicators listed in the LF did allow for inconclusive statements and provoked a number of questionable records in quarterly reports on particular outputs delivery, e.g. "*all activities implemented*". Proper assessment of progress and delivery of some outputs required specialised expertise or access to materials not available in English. Indicators

in the original LF included multiple references to “*project independent evaluation reports*”; relevant evaluations were not budgeted and were not conducted. As a result some omissions in outputs or undelivered tangible outputs identified by this Evaluation were not noticed during the implementation period. This is the main source of differences for ratings given in the PIR and ratings given in this report (Annex I).

240. Some quantitative indicators characterising achievement of the general project goal (ECONET FR, Annex 1: LF) were not presented in the FR in a form compatible with PD indicators. In particular, percentage of particular ecosystem protection in the region at the beginning of the project compared with percentage of country territory included in Econet scheme; number of transboundary PAs (mistakenly stated as zero) compared with the number of all PA in each country, etc. Indicators related to an increase of number/percentage of key species protected within existing PA versus key species to be protected within planned PA was ignored, although suitable information was available from ECONET GIS at the later stages of the project.

241. Omission of a plan and budget for mid-term independent evaluation(s) mentioned in the project LF did not allow timely identification of a number of problems that still remain unresolved and may affect the sustainability of project outcomes.

3. Budgeting and Funding for Monitoring and Evaluation activities.

242. Evaluation addressed only budgeting of M&E tasks specified by ECONET PD; provision for UNEP M&E activities is outside the scope of this Evaluation.

243. The only budget lines relevant to M&E chapter of the PD allocated resources to terminal report translation and to a final international audit, therefore there were no sufficient resources allocated within the project budget specifically to monitor its performance. Because of that and because of noted above generally sceptic perception of a formalised M&E system the project team assumed that the responsibility for M&E rested entirely with UNEP and external evaluators. The project team did not see M&E as an activity that might require any specific planning, budget or actions beyond provision of the information in accordance with the specified reporting forms and arranging an international audit.

244. The cost of actual M&E activities that range from interim outputs and changing political circumstance analysis to completion of corresponding reporting forms and their amendment following the advice of the UNEP Task Manager was assimilated by the budget for project coordination and administration. This evaluation identified quite a number of relevant emails and electronic documents that had versions produced late at night or early morning time. Presuming that the computer’s clocks were correctly set, it seems that considerable unpaid overtime of the Project Coordinator and a number of WWF RPO staff was involved. Similarly, considerable time that the project coordinator, project administrator and regional experts dedicated to material retrieval, interviews, technical facilities and information system demonstration within this evaluation was not covered by the project budget.

245. In general, there were no adequate monitoring system established to support regular analysis of project performance and informing management decisions. Available resources were hardly sufficient for compiling reporting documents in formats intended for continuous monitoring and evaluation of project’s progress and impact. Relevant materials were produced regularly but used for decision-making purpose on rare occasions and mainly at the level of interactions between the implementing and the executing agencies. The proper implementation of M&E would require an additional relevant budget and time explicitly allocated for relevant activities.

246. Budget provisions for M&E were not adequate to ensure compliance with GEF Minimum Requirements for M&E during project implementation.

4. Long-term Monitoring.

247. Long-term monitoring was not envisaged as an outcome of the project.

248. ECONET GIS was intended as a tool for continuous monitoring and lack of follow-up plans is an apparent omission in project design.

G. Assessment of processes that affected attainment of project results:

1. Preparation and readiness.

249. The main objectives were clear, based on a detailed analysis of policies, socio-economic conditions and scientific resources relevant to biodiversity conservation. Formulation of project goals and objectives benefited from the regional WWF report “*Biodiversity Conservation in Central Asia. An*

Analysis of Biodiversity and Current Threats and Initial Investment Portfolio” that identified main priorities for all States and for the region as a whole and was approved by the national authorities of all five states in 1998. Within the PDF-A phase, WWF RPO together with national experts thoroughly reviewed and analysed more recent changes in the status of biodiversity, conservation and relevant socio-economy background in the region.

250. The ECONET PD design satisfied GEF requirements, included comprehensive analysis of initial conditions, assessed the baseline for Incremental Cost (IC) estimate and presented a Logical Framework linking objectives, activities, outputs, outcomes, relevant indicators and means of verification of project achievements. The Evaluation identified only minor omissions in baseline (initial conditions) characteristics. Those were not crucial for project concept design and planning of the main activities, e.g. project materials declared absence of transboundary protected areas in the region in 2002, although internationally adjoined PAs (complying with IUCN definition of transboundary PA) existed at the time. In particular Sandalash zakaznik established in 1975 in Kyrgyzstan and the Ugam Chatkal national park in Uzbekistan established in 1990.

251. The capacities of the executing agency were adequate for implementation of project activities. Counterpart resources (funding, staff, and facilities) were made available by WWF RPO at project inception and adequate project management procedures were continuously followed from the very beginning of the project. The core project team did utilise lessons and applied approaches elaborated within a number earlier projects on ecological networks development, the effectively utilised the existing WWF network and demonstrated a good ability for adaptive management in response to changing legal and political circumstances in the region and took into consideration cultural traditions existing in the region.

252. This project engaged a dedicated core team of experts with an extensive scientific and practical background in ecology, cartography and conservation practices. The choice of key executants in the region was well-justified, national coordinators and lead experts for major tasks were selected on the basis of tenders. The execution of a limited number of highly specialised task, e.g. on ecological map compilation and GIS-based analyses were allocated to entities with unique expertise and historically established “natural monopolists” in relevant fields, that were identified in ECONET PD. In particular, project has undoubtedly benefited from scientific and networking expertise of the host institution (LGIBP).

253. The establishment of a PSC was delayed until the second year of the project. The PSC directly supported a number of policy-oriented activities, ECONET promotion and consultation processes in particular. However, the PSC’s role in oversight of the implementation of technical (information system) and scientific elements of the project was minimal. Neither the PSC (which included many project executants) nor supervisory or consultation committees included specialists with sufficient expertise for advising and coordinating activity attempting to develop large biodiversity GIS. It seems that the composition of the PSC was not entirely optimal. An opportunity to reinforce project’s strategic planning and progress through a short-term engaging of thoroughly selected experts with specific expertise into the PSC was not utilised sufficiently well.

254. As a result, the sub-optimal degree of utilisation of highly qualified intellectual resources and advanced technology is evident from the ECONET FR and project publications. It includes, in particular, a rather schematic outline of the Econet in the region that was frequently brought to the project’s attention by several national experts and stakeholders.

255. Partnership arrangements with national conservation agencies of all five CA countries were properly identified prior to implementation and were well realised through project activities. However, the coordination of efforts and collaboration with international partners in gap analyses, as specified in the ECONET PD were not budgeted and not implemented.

256. It seems that the technical capacity present in some countries was lower than envisaged at the project design stage and the cost of professional support was higher than expected, due to unpredictable changes in socio-economic situation that affected the quality of outputs related to Objective 1.

257. The Project Coordinator and UNEP Task Manager were very experienced and able to work in constantly changing circumstances that are typical for transition economy countries. Some common and generally just assumptions applied in many GEF projects design, for example an important role that many national NGOs play in conservation projects implementation, were not entirely relevant to operations in some CA countries. The formal engagement of NGOs or national institutions through subcontracts that was initially envisaged was either prohibited or would incur considerable financial losses. Within the project timeframe many NGOs (e.g. in Turkmenistan) were *de-facto* eliminated and other constrains complicated majority of NGOs operations across the region. The executing agency has

identified other mechanisms to engage national partners and adequate mechanisms for financial interactions in the region.

2. Country ownership/driveness.

258. The project was designed in line with the national conservation priorities, REAP and obligations of countries under CBD.

259. The project intended to, and succeeded in, bringing consideration of biodiversity concerns into agenda of ISDC and FCEPSD.

260. The NFPs - representatives from national governments ensured two-way communication between official agencies, the project team and a wide spectrum of national stakeholders; they also assisted with the incorporation of the ecological network concept into national legislation in three countries.

261. National coordinators in all five countries ensured realisation of the project objective with consideration of national priorities and engaged very prominent national experts in the elaboration of the Econet scheme, integration of previously dispersed information resources, consultations and promotional activities.

262. Governments of all CA countries thoroughly analysed, commented on and officially endorsed the main output of the project – the scheme of Econet - by special official acts or letters and through ISDC decisions and reports to CBD, in particular at COP 8.

263. Project was effective in catalysing a number of national developments and projects directly referring to the ECONET concept. In particular, the national legislation of three countries incorporated definitions of ecological network components. Projects aiming to implement separate elements of the Econet CA were initiated (notably the UNDP project already completed in Turkmenistan) and resulted in gradual expansion of PA systems in all CA countries.

264. Information resources accumulated through ECONET have been utilised by a number of projects and institutions within the region, although accessibility of the ECONET information package, its format and countries' capacity for biodiversity information management, require further improvement. In particular, a unique ECONET information system hosted by LGIBP did not receive any affiliation or official status from national or regional bodies. As a result, no country or regional body acquired ownership and responsibility for the maintenance of newly-build facilities an ECONET information resource. Although it is apparent that the MSP resources did not allow for resolving all potential administrative and political issues related to setting up some long-term arrangements for the information system maintenance, the situation with this project output sustainability is worrying. In the current circumstances further utilisation of ECONET GIS capacity is dependant on the ability of a small team to identify and secure external support from non-governmental sources.

3. Stakeholder involvement.

265. ECONET PD incorporated a plan for engaging multiple national stakeholders and identified a preliminary list of stakeholders targeted. Majority of identified stakeholders became involved in consultation process and contributed to a number of project activities. Suitable adaptations of approaches to particular stakeholders' involvement were applied in response to socio-political circumstances, in respect to NGOs in particular.

266. Due to the broad scope of the project, involvement of local communities was limited to a few locations where national teams were most active or involved in complementary projects supporting particular PAs development.

267. There is no evidence of project interaction with the private sector; it seems that at the current stage of economic transformation in CA countries, there were insufficient incentives for private sector involvement in a broad-scale project. Potential involvement of private sector with maintenance of Econet elements was indicated within the ECONET Strategy document. It seems that project executants undervalued the strategic importance of interaction with private sector as well as its potential role in funding conservation actions. The executing agency has likely under-utilised its expertise in operations in Russia, where economic transformation was at a more advanced stage and practical examples of arrangements with private entities were available. As a result, ECONET Strategy did not incorporate even a preliminary list of engagement activities relevant to the private sector.

268. Bringing together a multi-national team was an extremely complicated task. ECONET benefited from having an executing agency and project coordinator who enjoyed a great degree of independence

from frequent political and legal changes in the region and who were in a position to avoid any pressures and to elaborate relevant managerial decisions solely on the basis of project objectives and immediate needs.

269. The unanimous opinion of national coordinators and experts interviewed was that the selection of the project staff and collaborators was based solely on their merit and was not influenced by nationality, origin or affiliation to other groups. It should be noted, that women represented more than 50% of the national experts involved in the project. Considering the predominantly Muslim character of countries involved, this is undoubtedly a positive indication of adequate arrangements for engaging experts and a noticeable contribution to promotion of the UNEP and UN gender equity operational principle and policies.

270. The coordination of the work of thematic groups comprised of national team members, external (international) experts and voluntary contributors was a tricky task. Experts interviewed indicated that parallel chains of command were sometimes created, although the majority of interactions finally converged on the regional coordinator's desk. As a result, the regional coordinator was often overwhelmed with the additional burden of replying to stochastic requests and was required to take not only strategic, but also numerous minor decisions ranging from verification of scientific consistency of interim deliverables to policy-oriented and financial issues. This situation should be considered a weakness in project organisation. Only strong support provided by experts of WWF RPO and the exceptional personal abilities of the project coordinator allowed him to manage projects team well in the absence of sufficiently structured personal/institutional responsibilities and the lack of the communication network envisaged as a support tool for ECONET implementation.

271. Many contributors did not receive sufficient information about the project's composition and procedures and had limited options for feedback through the "next in line of command" executants. During evaluation interviews some experts came up with creative and likely cost-efficient suggestions for organising the tasks to which they have contributed. They have also indicated that this level of input was not requested from them when their engagement was discussed and tasks were allocated.

272. Some project contributors assumed that a command-style assignment of particular tasks was predefined by GEF operational rules. This impression originated mainly from a lack of information on what exactly the GEF and insufficient informing on its procedures and requirements.

273. ECONET FR enlisted a broad range of stakeholders and five prominent NGOs that contributed to the project during consultation processes and benefited from sharing expertise and learning specific to the planning and maintenance of ecological networks at multiple workshops and promotional events in the region. The statements made in the FR were supported by all experts interviewed and findings of evaluation based on notes from relevant meetings and events. Considering the many complications that operations in transition economy countries involve, both the range and level of national stakeholder involvement achieved by the project should be highly regarded.

274. Project coordination relied upon and benefited from a pre-existing informal network of experts, specialists and conservation enthusiasts. This informal community unites a variety of individuals ranging from technical staff of protected areas or institutions, conservation practitioners, NGOs members, governmental officials to highly specialised scientists, academicians and thematic experts. The traditional links of the project executants with this community allowed temporary national and regional teams for solving complicated multi-disciplinary tasks to be organised. At the same time, the informal and poorly documented involvement of individual specialists in project activities often limited opportunities for follow-up or replication of practical solutions and hinders re-establishment of groups in the future. In some cases collaborators jointly implementing a particular project task knew each other by first name and telephone number only. The Final Report did not describe adaptive management solutions in a sufficiently transparent manner and maintained references on "numerous" and "various" NGOs and "NGOs members" without further particulars. As a result, an external reader unfamiliar with socio-economic specific of the region would not notice the useful examples of practical solutions applied by the project team for operations in sometimes complicated socio-economy circumstance, e.g. where NGOs operations were prohibited.

275. The project received an exceptional level of support from the environmental research community; over a hundred specialists from a variety of academic or applied ecology institutions contributed to biodiversity information retrieval, additional data collection and analyses were conducted on voluntary basis.

276. The project collaborated closely with environmental agencies in all CA countries. The NFPs provided permanent and direct communication channels for interaction with high-level officials when needed. In particular, NFPs assisted in lobbying for the introduction of conceptual elements of

ecological networks into national legislation and ensured regular communication of project objectives to ISDC members and incorporation of concrete ECONET proposals into ISDC agendas.

277. An intensive and highly efficient promotional campaign ensured a steady increase of official support for the ECONET and helped transform national ministers, ISDC members and many other decision-makers into strong supporters of the Econet concept.

278. National commitments to the future implementation of the Econet were incorporated into the third national CBD reports for the countries of the region announced at CoP-8 in Brazil. This represented the culmination of a process resulting in official recognition of the project outcomes by all five CA countries.

279. As it was noted above, a participatory multi-stakeholder approach, including governmental bodies' involvement and the intensive promotional campaign reaching virtually all sectors of society were the most successful components of the project.

4. Financial planning.

280. The total planned ECONET budget (US\$) was \$2,172,000 (incorrectly stated in ToRs for this evaluation as \$2,360,000) with \$750,000 funded by the GEF Trust Fund and co-funding from: WWF \$130,000, CDE \$60,000 and participating countries \$1,195,000; plus PDF-A funds totalling \$37,000 of which \$25,000 was funded by the GEF Trust Fund, WWF \$10,000 and participating governments US\$2,000. GEF Trust Funds resources were fully utilised by the project. CDE Co-financing materialised fully materialised, WWF - exceeded planned budget and reached \$300,000. The project leveraged additional funding from FZS and RSPB that amounted to \$50,000. Details of governmental co-financing are analysed in section G.4 of this Evaluation.

281. All financial controls, including clearly designed procedures, timely reports and contextual communication were in place and allowed project management to make informed decisions regarding the budget. In spite of many restrictions imposed by national legal and banking systems, a proper and timely flow of funds and payment to subcontractors upon the delivery of satisfactory outputs throughout the project's lifetime was maintained.

282. The project received an unqualified audit opinion from the PricewaterhouseCoopers Audit. An audit of the final Statement of Income and Expenditure of the WWF RPO project 9E0715.01 was conducted in accordance with the International Standards on Auditing (ISA). In the opinion of the Audit the Statement has been properly prepared, in all material respects, to give the information required to be shown in accordance with WWF accounting policies. Expenditures which were selected for the detailed testing were supported by vouchers and adequate documentation. No expenditures were identified that have not been incurred in accordance with the objectives outlined in the project documentation.

283. The Project Coordinator was fully in charge of operational decision-making, directed the work of national coordinators and thematic groups and, working closely with the project administrator, oversaw the financial arrangements with project executants at all levels. Centralization of financial management allowed national partners to concentrate on activities directly relevant to project objectives; it was an entirely justified arrangement that clearly strengthened the performance of national teams and of the project as a whole.

284. All financial transactions and substantial documentation (grant letters, task ToRs, grantees data, delivery notes) were recorded in a financial database. This evaluation reviewed a random selection of database records, including 12% of all individual grants, crosschecked payments, purchase orders and ToRs with individual deliverables and reports of selected executants. No discrepancies were identified in expenditure reporting against financial records or the content of actual activities.

285. Most of the time the financial reports were received by UNEP on time. All budget changes involving resource reallocation between major accountancy components (e.g. personnel, sub-contracts) were confirmed with UNEP before incurring the expenditures. The summary of financial management provided by UNEP for the evaluation correctly indicated that reallocation between major accountancy components did not exceed 2% and was approved by the implementing agency.

286. At the same time, considerable resources (\$91,132 or 24% of sub-contracts planned, budget lines 2201-2219) were moved from activities planned for Objective 1 (Biodiversity database/GIS), mainly to cater for multiple additional meetings, promotional events and ECK, that are referred to in a final budget as line 3300 (Meetings/conferences) and new budget lines 2224-2230. Other activities not initially budgeted (e.g. "*Cosmoeconet*") have also consumed a part of the budget for Objective 1 and resulted in an actual reduction of GEF-funded support to planned activities 1.1-1.4 by about \$117,000 or 30% of the originally planned budget. This substantial reallocation of resources was initiated by the

project coordinator without a proper analysis of the status of GIS-relevant deliverables and seems, rather, to reflect personal favouritism towards particular types of activities.

287. The most noticeable element of budget reallocation is highlighted in a table “Disbursements during the life of project” (Annex II), where actual expenditure supplied by DGEF is cross-checked against the originally planned.

288. Other minor changes in the budget were applied to extend the duration of the project for three months and to cater for implementation delays due to the political situation in the countries. These changes were well justified and approved by UNEP in-line with the standard project management procedures.

5. UNEP Supervision and backstopping.

289. UNEP, as the implementing agency, was responsible for overseeing the project. UNEP provided support through the PDF-A stage and facilitated preparation of the PD in-line with specific GEF requirements such as incremental cost analysis and co-financing.

290. Implementation of the project basically followed the plan outlined in the Section 2 of the ECONET PD. WWF-RPO was responsible for the implementation of the project in accordance with the objectives and activities planned. UNEP, as the GEF Implementing Agency, ensured consistency with GEF and UNEP policies and procedures. The UNEP DGEF co-ordinated clearance and ensured timely reporting to the GEF. The UNEP Task Manager regularly reviewed technical reports in accordance with the schedule of work, and provided substantial advice for improving the content and formulation of reports submitted for approval.

291. UNEP staff, including the UNEP Task Manager and DGEF Fund Management Officer were responsive and supportive through the entire project cycle; they provided timely response and clarification to all executive agency enquiries on procedures and reporting details.

292. According to the core project team members, UNEP staff did provide sufficient and quality support and advice to the project, specifically through substantial comments on the content of tangible outputs (e.g. Socio-economic analysis, Legislative Review). More practical recommendations appeared in the final version of these deliverables as a direct result of intervention by the UNEP Task Manager.

293. The evaluation identified a number of areas where UNEP personnel could not ensure optimal supervision and backstopping. This relates mainly to highly specialised activities and cross-disciplinary scientific analysis (biodiversity GIS, consideration of specific national land use issues in conservation planning), mainly because this would require access to the data and GIS systems during the development of ECONET (which came only available at the end of the project) as well as capacity in Russian language. The UNEP Task Manager did advise the project team on improvements in GIS analysis and data sources towards the ECONET plan, as well as indicated the very restricted scope of the land-use data sources used. More detailed review and contributions to the ECONET GIS system design would however require a level of micro-management not appropriate for a GEF implementing agency.

294. Comprehensive financial reporting formats allowed proper financial monitoring for the project as a whole but were not sufficient for timely identification of uneven utilisation of funds among various project tasks and activities. This resulted in reduced completeness and quality of outputs relevant to Objective 1 and insufficiently justified redistribution of resources to other activities closer to project completion.

295. The problems highlighted above could have been minimised if a mid-term evaluation been implemented with the involvement of relevant thematic experts. The lack of mid-term evaluation is an apparent omission in the implementation of the project. UNEP expertise in project management and monitoring could, potentially, have helped to improve the project design and project work plan early in the process, as well as avoid the delay with shaping project consultative bodies and the creation of the PSC. This type of support was interrupted due to staff changes in UNEP/DGEF within the first year of the project. The new UNEP Task Manager did request and assist with the formation of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency fora in each country towards finalisation and endorsement of the national ECONET plans. This was part of the Terms of Reference developed for the Strategy for ECONET Implementation, which was an additional project output not originally included in the project document.

296. UNEP staff directly contributed to the assessment of interim project outputs through participation in regional workshops and in PSC sessions. Indirectly UNEP assisted with promotion of project activities inasmuch as its prominent status helped raise the status of ECONET events attended by the

UNEP representatives. The project team considered the frequency and continuity of the UNEP staff field visits as optimal.

297. UNEP collected quarterly progress reports from the executive agency. Annual Project Implementation Reports were provided to the GEF and met all requirements in terms of financial standards.

6. Co-financing and Project Outcomes & Sustainability.

298. Provided for Evaluation table (Evaluation ToRs: Annex C “Co-financing and Leveraged Resources”) reflects actual amounts reported in ECONET FR. This table interpreted the total number of governmental funds (\$6,400,000) as co-funding. According to the FR this amount included both co-funding (\$1,950,000) and associated funding (\$4,450,000 for PAs development).

299. Governmental funding that supported maintenance and development of national PA systems was reported correctly, reflected the allocation of the national state budgets and was confirmed in official letters issued by relevant national agencies to the executive agency. A priori ratio (30%) of these governmental budgets were stated as a contribution towards ECONET.

300. The FR provided no justification for considering exactly 30% of governmental funding for PA systems as a co-finance to ECONET. Reasons for further splits of budget into co-funding and associated funding are also unclear. It is apparent that in less favourable economic circumstances applying other than 30% split to possibly lower governmental budget could deliver similar numbers for reporting on co-financing.

301. Nevertheless, national contributions satisfied GEF definition of co-financing for a project aiming to improve or expand national PA systems. In accordance with the GEF document COFINANCING: GEF/C.20/6/Rev.1; April 7, 2003 – paragraph 14a: *“finance for baseline activities is included in the definition only when such activities are essential for achieving the GEF objectives”*. There is no doubt that funding of national PAs was essential to meet ECONET objectives. The delivery of co-finance reported did satisfy the formal criteria and should be accepted.

302. The ECONET is an example of the project addressing a huge territory (4,000,000 km²) and aiming to support co-ordination and collaboration to conserve and sustainably utilize biodiversity through applying a specific approach – creation of an ecological network. The GEF approach for IC identification assumes that *“Action to achieve sustainable development at the national level, although clearly necessary and directly in the country's own interests, is insufficient to maintain sustainability at a global level because many activities have detrimental global environmental effects”* (“Incremental Cost”, GEF/C.7/Inf.5, 1996). Many of interviewed national experts considered this concept as not applicable for biodiversity conservation issues and as a largely artificial one. Regional experts suggested that the largest country involved (Kazakhstan) and to some extent the region as a whole may be considered as a self-sufficient actor, which possesses a unique biodiversity and contributes to achieving CBD targets directly, through its own progress in conservation and sustainable development entirely coherent with national needs. Neither the ECONET PD nor experts consulted indicated a possibility of a contradiction between national and global interests in respect to preserving and sustainable use of biodiversity. The evaluator tends to agree with national experts’ opinion that the approach to IC identification may possibly be reasonable for planning of localised interventions, e.g. protection of sites important for some migratory species and creation of particular PAs, but unlikely being suitable for justifying and prioritising of large-scale project interventions.

303. Indeed, various government paid staff contributed to the project e.g. on facilitating and discussing the draft ECONET plans, attending meetings and making revisions, although substantial editing done in their personal time and some of the travel cost were covered by the project through personal grants. The help of governmental staff and NFPs was crucial for the project progress and its overall success.

304. It is apparent, that the GEF MSP intervention provided support for a number of important activities relevant to the CBD targets and addressed a number of bottlenecks in the development of national and regional conservation policies. A long-term impact of the project is basically guaranteed wherever these policies incorporated the concept of ecological network. At the same time, involvement of governmental bodies in other than policy-oriented activities of the ECONET was largely limited to consultations and endorsement of particular project outputs. Allowing reporting on co-financing in a rather formal (still inline with IC requirements), instead of possibly much lower but real cash support to particular project activities did affect perception of ownership of some outputs, e.g. the ECONET information system capacity. It is likely to reduce sustainability of this capacity created by the ECONET (see paragraph 264).

305. The evaluation found no evidence that governmental co-financing resulted in any noticeable cash contributions to project activities, e.g. it is highly unlikely that investment in GIS capacity and biodiversity database could be anywhere near to about \$710,000 dollars indicated by Annex 19d of the ECONET FR. It is likely that the executing agency has interpreted the supply of data and other invaluable scientific material as cash co-finance instead of recording this as in-kind contribution. If this is the case, it is understandable that the executing agency had problems with accounting of intellectual and information resource costs and why it has applied a little bit artificial but acceptable in accordance with GEF criteria (see paragraph 301) way for planning of and reporting on countries' co-financing through encountering ongoing funding of PAs maintenance and similar baseline activities funded by national conservation agencies.

306. GEF definition of the "baseline", requirements to calculate the IC and to declare co-financing within project proposals at the time of project design were overcomplicated, inflexible and did not allow pragmatic adjustment accordingly specific or scale of particular projects. The efforts of the project team on the elaboration of reporting materials for co-financing did not add much value to project outcomes. In the absence of relevant planning, accounting and audit for co-financing, the requirement for budget-like reporting seems to result in an unjustified extra burden on the project team and managers. Reporting on the baseline type of co-financing activities may be simplified, in particular for large-scale and multinational projects (See Recommendations).

7. Delays and Project Outcomes & Sustainability.

307. The project implementation began in April 2003 with the 3-months delay due to time spent establishing a multi-national and multi-disciplinary team and elaboration of financial interactions suitable for the national legal and banking systems. An additional 3-month period was added, extending implementation period to 39 months, to adjust planned activities to correspond with the ISDC meeting timetable. The project was finalised on 30th of June 2006; the extension was approved by UNEP in January 2006.

308. There were a few insignificant delays in the delivery of some outputs, mainly because of political stresses in the region and reallocation of some tasks between the executants responsible due to changes in personal circumstances.

309. A six-month delay with database delivery occurred as a result of underestimation of the task complexity and insufficient funding. The distribution of promotional material on CDs was not completed by the end of the project because of a number of technical problems (completed by the executing agency within a following year). This delay by itself did not affect the sustainability of project outcomes.

IV Conclusions and Rating.

A. Conclusions

Conclusions refer to six main questions identified by the Evaluation ToRs:

310. *Has the ECONET project assembled all spatial and attribute data on biodiversity, land use, socio-economic and other key baseline information such as political data on boundaries and infrastructure from the project selected region, in a GIS? Is the data easily accessible to all stakeholders within the region?*

ECONET GIS assembled a unique collection of data about biodiversity, protected areas, wetlands of conservation importance, key base maps data and highly advanced new scientific product – a digital map of CA ecosystems. The content of this database is much broader than the electronic resources on CA available internationally prior to the project intervention. Not all initially planned data was compiled, limited land use data are available, hunting management and forest cover data are incomplete. Data are not accessible via Internet and not published, but available to stakeholders in the region upon a satisfactory justification of the request to executing agency or former national coordinators of the project.

311. *Has the Econet scheme been developed? If so, is it effective and is it likely to be sustained?*

The Econet scheme for the whole CA was developed. It represents an effective tool for promotion of the ecological network approach and provides an indicative outline of: EEs - potential new Econet core areas (PAs), buffer zones, corridors and transboundary conservation areas. Sustainable development of the Econet in-line with the scheme developed by the project requires resources far exceeding those

available in the region in the foreseeable future. Consistent implementation of the Econet will depend on the inflow of external resources.

312. *What is the extent of the applicability and relevance of the information gathered in assisting participating governments and stakeholders to recognize the need for national Econet Plan? To what extent have the specific needs of the target groups of stakeholders been considered in the design process and the recommendations?*

Information gathered was already utilised by the project team to convince national governments and various stakeholders about suitability of the Econet approach for planning of national PA systems. Econet is endorsed by ISDC as a component of FCEPSD and national parts of the Econet presented at COP-8 as part of the governmental plans for work coherent with CBD goals. The Econet scheme went through multiple rounds of consultations. The regional scheme incorporated comments and accounted for needs of a broad range of national agencies and stakeholders, including industries.

313. *To what extent has the project directly or indirectly affected the participating countries to include Econet development activities in national systems of Protected Areas and its supportive legislation? Include an assessment of capacity built in this regard and present evidence to support judgements and conclusions.*

The project initiated direct changes in legislation of three CA countries and influenced all countries through ISDC decisions. The UNDP project in Turkmenistan, which helped to elaborate more detailed national plan of Econet, is a good example of follow up catalysed by ECONET implementation. Capacity for planning of ecological networks was increased in three countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) where most advanced GIS capacity is now in place. The uncertain economic situation and the lack of core funding to scientific or information management institutions in these countries leave the question about sustainability of this developments open.

314. *How have participating countries in the Central Asian Regional Environment Action Plan (REAP) benefited as a direct/indirect result of this project?*

All five CA countries participating in REAP directly benefited from the MSP intervention due to change in political orientation on isolated PAs creation towards strategy of building the interlinked ecological network based on the outputs of scientific analysis. Additional products developed by the ECONET (Ecoregions *Fact-Sheets*) made baseline information easily available for drafting new national and transboundary conservation projects proposals.

315. *To what extent has the project assisted in the establishment of the necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region to allow the effective joint implementation of the Econet plan?*

The positive impact of ECONET was apparent in the changed framework legislation in 3 countries, ECONET delivered a good reference legislation database and enhanced against its initial level technical capacity for biodiversity information management in a host institution. The project supported and/or initiated additional separate projects and fundraising activities coherent with the Econet concept and aimed at implementation of separate EE or transboundary PAs. The objective of establishing a concrete financial capacity or mechanisms allowing systematic and sustainable implementation of Econet on a huge territory was too ambitious for this MSP and was not achieved.

B. Overall Ratings Table

| Criterion | Evaluator's Summary Comments | Evaluator's Rating |
|--|---|--------------------|
| Attainment of project objectives and results (overall rating) Sub criteria (below) | | MS |
| Effectiveness | The project combined both considerable strengths and weaknesses; these originate both from over ambitious objectives and some managerial decisions. Project impact is impressive but sub-optimal. | MS |
| Relevance | Relevant to GEF OP1, OP4, REAP, promoted long-term approach for biodiversity consideration in sustainable development | HS |

| Criterion | Evaluator's Summary Comments | Evaluator's Rating |
|--|--|--------------------|
| | planning, enhanced regional cooperation framework in line with CBD, initiated harmonisation of national policies and set up the direction for the establishment of ecological network. | |
| Efficiency | Excellent scientific outputs, strong political and promotion impact combined with fundamental omissions in technical implementation; some planned outputs were not delivered. | MS |
| Sustainability of Project outcomes (overall rating) Sub criteria (below) | | MU |
| Financial | No financial mechanisms put in place which anyhow was too ambitiously set in project design; useful supporting information and legal database/review made available; valuable additional product (ecoregions fact sheets) delivered and could provide source material for new project proposals. | MU |
| Socio Political | Econet is endorsed at regional level and supported by governments. Positive legal changes initiated. Econet is flagged as a direction for actions supporting obligations under CBD. Transition economy processes assume some level of uncertainty. | ML |
| Institutional framework and governance | General support from national agencies achieved. Insufficient status and unclear ownership of capacity build; national institutions and NGOs affected by socio-economical instability in the region. | ML |
| Ecological | No insurmountable threats that may affect Econet implementation in nearest decade. | L |
| Achievement of outputs and activities | See Annex I - tables 1, 2, 3 | MS |
| Monitoring and Evaluation (overall rating) Sub criteria (below) | | MS |
| M&E Design | Good financial control tools, poorly planned advisory and PSC support; lack of mid-term evaluation, many non-SMART indicators in PD. | MU |
| M&E Plan Implementation (use for adaptive management) | Highly adaptive management; M&E followed procedures planned; good general support from UNEP; some omissions in following high-tech tasks. | S |
| Budgeting and Funding for M&E activities | No budget for M&E in a project budget except ISA Audit. | MU |
| Catalytic Role | Concrete follow up within the implementation period and after (ISDC, legal changes, relevant new projects) | HS |
| Preparation and readiness | Excellent background WWF study; scientific and regional expertise of the team leaders, ready links with officials, stakeholders, NGOs and informal networks. | HS |
| Country ownership / drivenness | Involvement of national officials, experts, stakeholders, NGOs; insufficient formal engagement of national institutions. | S |
| Stakeholders involvement | Exceptionally broad consultations, | S |

| Criterion | Evaluator's Summary Comments | Evaluator's Rating |
|--|---|--------------------|
| | participatory approach; insufficient documenting for replication or follow-up. | |
| Financial planning | Reasonable plans; comprehensive basis and procedures for reporting; sub-optimal redistribution of resources between tasks. | MS |
| UNEP Supervision and backstopping | Invaluable support with setting the project in line with GEF requirements, constant professional advisory support; insufficient capacity in supervising high-tech tasks implementation and assessing justifications on relevant funds redistribution. | MS |
| Overall Rating | | MS |

V Lessons to be learned.

1. Resource Mobilisation: Operation Area Scale and Incremental Cost Approach Impact.

316. An Incremental Cost approach assumes that transformation of a project with national benefits into the one with global environmental benefits must be associated with additional costs. It did not work well enough to justify and prioritise this large-scale intervention targeting the whole Central Asia region, because at this scale regional and global priorities tend to coincide. Planning national contributions towards project objectives in line with existing GEF recommendations resulted in a paradox. Almost entire multi-million governmental co-financing *de facto* represented a baseline activity funding (“*what would happen anyway*”, following the GEF definition). This co-funding (part of national PA systems financing) still satisfies the GEF definition of co-financing in accordance with the GEF document COFINANCING: GEF/C.20/6/Rev.1; April 7, 2003 – paragraph 14a: “*finance for baseline activities is included in the definition only when such activities are essential for achieving the GEF objectives*”. In reality, GEF funds and limited co-funding provided by foreign institutions was a sole source of financial support for dealing with a number of bottlenecks that were correctly identified by the ECONET Project Document as the obstacles preventing efficient biodiversity conservation in the region. An Incremental Cost and Baseline matrix compilation, complicated reporting tables, extraction of corresponding official letters on co-financing from national governments required considerable effort and time from UNEP personnel and project team at all stages of the project cycle. It does not seem like a worthwhile use of resources. **The lesson here is that the planning of strategic interventions supported by GEF will benefit from replacement of the justification for funding on the basis of an Incremental Cost analysis with a “bottleneck resolving” justification, at least for interventions targeting large and continuous geographical regions.** This type of justification should be allowed by GEF project selection procedures as a separate eligibility or value ranking criteria for a project seeking support from the GEF Trust Fund.

2. Project Design: Consideration of Socio-economic Specific in Project Design.

317. Some elements of the Project document reflected typical and generally valid assumptions common to many GEF project designs, for example the important role that many national NGOs play in implementation of conservation projects. But they were not entirely relevant to countries where NGO operation is prohibited or limited. Highly adaptive management, in particular the engagement of traditional informal experts’ network allowed this problem to be overcome and ensured that the most well-qualified personnel were involved in the project. However, the Final Report did not describe this approach in a sufficiently transparent manner and details of effective operational solutions remained buried under the generic references on “numerous” and “various” NGOs and “NGOs’ members”. It seems that the proposal developers attempted to cover all the possible directions potentially attractive for GEF and in the end the project team struggled to report on sub-activities or goals that were unrealistic. **The lesson drawn from this experience would be that the project developers fear to disregard the real or anticipated funding criteria used by GEF leads to “a shotgun effect” through incorporating all the possible targets and approaches copied from successful funding applications in a single proposal. Project developers, especially operating in transition economy countries, shall be encouraged to thoroughly analyse the socio-economy of their region and to expose openly any peculiarities of particular operational conditions. The GEF may facilitate this by amending its proposal and reporting formats, standards and relevant guidelines. In particular, they should**

explicitly allow and must stimulate project developers to focus the project's objectives and tasks on a limited and well-justified subset of directions covered by various eligibility or selection criteria.

3. Project Design, Monitoring and Evaluation: Terminology Communication.

318. The ECONET Project Document and Logframe as well as the Project Implementation Review format were generally logical and well-structured, they included all sections in accordance with GEF requirements, served reasonably well to communication between the implementing and executing agencies and supported relevant high-level elements of the Monitoring and Evaluation process. At the same time, the Executive Agency could not rely entirely upon these reporting formats in its day-to-day communication with the project team and by necessity adopted various additional internal reporting formats and procedures for monitoring and evaluation. Because assumptions used for designing the project Logframe, an Incremental Cost matrix, Monitoring and Evaluation approach were not always transparent for the project team members and additional uncertainty arose from translation of the GEF terminology, e.g. its specific interpretation of the "baseline", which is normally perceived and translated as "initial conditions", lack of clarity in separating inputs, outputs, outcomes, etc. These seemingly insignificant but multiple logical and linguistic uncertainties required considerable efforts from an executive agency to interpret these internal reports and reshape reporting documents in line with the GEF requirements. It is apparent that there is a space for improvement in guidance and clarity of recommendations for project design, monitoring and reporting procedures from the GEF (and possibly from UNEP). **This lesson suggests that the international actors, including GEF and UNEP, should critically review the communication aspect of their operations with consideration of the diversity of multi-national audiences that they address, consider the need for simplification of terminology as well as making the corresponding conceptual documentation and guidelines available in main UN languages.**

4. Project Design: Project Objectives and Indicators.

319. The Project Document maintained the logic and main strategic directions derived from findings of a comprehensive WWF regional study and incorporated a number of improvements introduced by UNEP Task Managers. But some targets were not critically analysed and amended accordingly to the scale of the intervention planned, e.g. an objective *"To establish necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities..."* was not entirely achievable in framework of an MSP. Inevitably, overambitious objective was not accompanied by reasonable and measurable indicators. The SMART indicators approach was not applied at the project design phase, although it could have helped to identify the ambiguity in the formulation of some objectives. The quality of formulated objectives is of major practical importance for gaining the support for GEF interventions. Cases where objectives appear to be unreasonable to national officials or experts may result in a sceptical perception of GEF and other international operations. As a result, such projects or their particular activities may be perceived as mainly bureaucratic exercise and receive a correspondingly declarative support that does not go any further than minimal actions or statements ensuring continuing inflow of external financial support. ECONET could not entirely avoid these problems and, despite the political support acquired through well-designed promotional campaign, there was little governmental funding made available to assist in its implementation. **The SMART indicators approach needs to be reinforced by the GEF and implementing agencies, including UNEP, through better communication of the approach to project developers and possibly by assigning more weight to the quality of indicators, among other criteria applied for selection of projects for funding. Project proposal developers are encouraged to pay more attention to the clarity of indicators and to apply SMART indicators not only for monitoring and reporting purposes, but also at the proposal design stage - as a tool for testing the quality of the objectives design and the feasibility of project goals.**

5. Dissemination Strategy: Informational Outputs Documenting and Dissemination.

320. The ECONET represented a rather typical example of a conservation project, in which a broad range of scientific and information components were perceived as support activities of secondary importance, although the Project Document correctly identified the lack of utilisable data for planning and management decision-making as one of the major barriers preventing incorporation of biodiversity conservation considerations into policies. Some potentially long-lasting and reusable outputs of the project did not receive the attention they deserved; leaders of highly specialised scientific and information activities had limited means to influence the planning process and no budgetary control over their components. Funding provided for the information system, its dissemination and documentation was redirected to other activities. A number of information outputs initially intended for open access and wide dissemination in the region were developed to the extent sufficient for serving as

support material, tools or input to other important objectives of this particular project or for partial recycling by a limited number of external users, who were allowed to receive data “as it is” “*under the condition of a well-grounded application*”. As a result, an idea to break through the “information deficiency” barrier got lost and the potentially achievable long-term impact of the project in this direction was undermined. To avoid similar shortcomings in future projects, the leaders of sizeable scientific or high-tech blocks of activities should have sufficient managerial responsibility, including budgetary control over their project components. The comprehensive documentation and publication (both in traditional and electronic forms) should be treated as an obligatory requirement for scientific and information outputs in order to ensure their long-lasting impact. Elaboration of the technical and scientific requirements for the output format should be explicitly specified in the project Logframe and this is an area that requires special attention of project proposal developers as well as of the UNEP task managers and supervisory bodies, e.g. project steering or scientific committees. **This lesson suggests that wherever the specialised high-tech or scientific resources are expected to appear as a defined final or interim project output, the likelihood of their long-lasting impact should be thoroughly analysed at the development stage. Structuring, documenting and dissemination of relevant informational material should be treated (planned and budgeted) with consideration of their value, potentially going beyond their application to or relevance for a particular project.**

6. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms.

321. Formalisation of the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and standardisation of relevant reporting formats for the large variety of projects implemented by UNEP across many regions and diverse thematic directions is not a trivial task. Reporting formats applied by UNEP underwent some restructuring within the 3-years of project implementation period. It seems that the new and improved LF Tracking forms and PIR forms applied for M&E at the final stage of the ECONET are still too bulky and assist M&E only at the level of interactions between the implementing and executing agencies. Reviewing long tables and crosschecking their content with differently numbered activities list (PIR 3.2 section) is quite burdensome, especially when the LF is amended within the project implementation period. Assigning ratings on the basis of the telegraphic-style notes in these tables leads to inconsistency in project progress assessment. Although project executants invested considerable effort into populating all the necessary reporting forms, the report content was sometimes insufficient for retrieval of information important for management and evaluation, e.g. for assessment of needs and justifications for decisions by the implementing agency. It seems that some of these imperfections in formats would be resolved if the structure of reporting documents was better suited for use in electronic form. For example, a consistent numbering for activities should be maintained through the life of the project and, perhaps fixed size one-page tables or worksheets allocated to each task and every sub-task. Reports organised in this way may be updated electronically by addition of relevant new information to each worksheet in line with the progress of the project. Similar amendments would make communication between implementing, executing agencies and activity leaders more efficient and will allow optimisation of project management, monitoring and evaluation process intended to improve project performance by informing management decisions. **The lesson indicates that the further refinement of UNEP reporting formats is needed in order to make them suitable not only for M&E at the level of implementing/executing agencies communication but also for a better structured day-to-day monitoring of project progress that would help improve project performance by better informing management decisions.**

7. Sustainability (UNEP/ISDC/national agencies).

322. The ECONET has succeeded in setting-up a favourable political background for practical implementation of the ecological networks (Econet) in a huge region. The scheme of Econet elaborated by the project was approved by an intergovernmental body (ISDC) and agreed by all five countries of the region. This outcome *de-facto* sets up new region-wide targets for conserving biodiversity in Central Asia. These targets are measurable, complementary to CBD goals and even exceed the current CBD benchmarks. However, there is no system established to inform governments, ISDC and international processes about the Econet development. Monitoring of the progress towards Econet targets is an apparent area for joint follow-up of the CA countries and agencies that endorsed the Econet scheme. The combination of the capacity established by the ECONET in a host institution and information resources accumulated within its information system represents a ready set of tools to organise monitoring and deliver progress indicators towards Econet implementation as well as establishment of a stable source of information support required for implementation of individual conservation projects. National experts indicated that relevant recommendation or facilitation from UNEP would catalyse the process of setting-up the region-wide system for monitoring and reporting on Econet progress and will support its implementation. Currently there is no process established within UNEP that will allow

identification of potential opportunities to catalyse relevant post-project development through low-cost advisory, facilitation or analytical support based on the broad-range international expertise that UNEP possesses. **This lesson would suggest that UNEP and its regional offices can increase sustainability of project outcomes if some type of end- or post-project analysis of opportunities for a follow up was incorporated into project management procedures and conducted with participation of UNEP Task Managers and other international experts upon the completion of the intervention.**

323. It should be noted that examples of ECONET PD design used in this section to illustrate a set of general problems and the lessons drawn above do not imply that ECONET design or implementation was affected by the above noted problems more than any other typical Medium-Size Project.

VI Recommendations.

1. Recommendations for the GEF Secretariat.

324. *Recommendation 1.* Strategic interventions supported by GEF would benefit from replacement of the Incremental Cost analysis with a “bottleneck resolving” justification, at least for large-scale projects. This type of justification should be allowed as a separate eligibility or selection criteria for a project seeking support from the GEF Trust Fund. Application of this alternative criterion may be combined with the requirement for more explicitly described in-kind or cash co-funding or other types of support that governments may provide, in particular for ensuring the long-term sustainability of project outcomes (e.g. overheads compensation for partner institutions, incorporation of newly developed or supported capacity into the structure of existing agencies or institutions). It is recommended to abandon the practice of putting down “baseline” activities as co-funding.

325. *Recommendation 2.* Formats, standards and GEF recommendations for project design should explicitly allow and stimulate proposal focusing on a limited and well-justified subset of directions covered by various eligibility or selection criteria. It will encourage design of proposals to be in accordance with real needs and will help to avoid a “shotgun effect” leading to incorporation of all possible “fundable” targets in a single proposal. Procedures for selection of funded proposals should be organised in a way that would not place the applicant from the country with particular socio-economy conditions (e.g. where NGOs operations prohibited) into the less beneficial position. Indeed, this recommendation requires more detailed elaboration with consideration of current practice and procedures.

326. *Recommendation 3.* It is recommended to elaborate, publish and periodically update the guideline on the main GEF principles, terminology and recommendations for project proposal compilation in the main UN languages. It is also recommended that uncertainties in terminology used be eliminated, in particular with regards to interpretation of common usage terms or words (e.g. “baseline”) in a very specific way that may be lost in translation and could make it more difficult to communicate project procedures and reporting requirements.

2. Recommendations for UNEP-GEF.

327. *Recommendation 4.* It is recommended to reinforce the requirement for ‘SMART’ indicators in project proposals, in particular through promotion of the ‘SMART’ approach not only as an instrument to facilitate monitoring and evaluation, but also as a tool suitable for testing quality of project objectives design and the feasibility of project goals at the stage of proposal development. It will help the proposal developer to resist the temptation for drawing overambitious objectives and will assist him in making the “feasibility of objectives” a predominant criterion for proposal quality assessment. Short guidelines on the practical application of SMART indicators in project design, project performance monitoring and evaluation may help to achieve this. The guidelines should be made available for national governments, conservation institutions and NGOs.

328. *Recommendation 5.* The structure of future projects has to be analysed at the development stage in order to identify sizeable high-tech or specialised scientific components and evaluate a potential value and long-lasting impact of their expected outputs. Finalising and dissemination of the relevant scientific and information deliverables should be treated (planned and budgeted) with consideration of their re-usability in support of broader range of conservation actions. Coordinators of substantial highly specialised project components should assume responsibility for technical or scientific operational decisions and also be given sufficient managerial responsibility, including budgetary control for their components. It is recommended to incorporate into implementing agency procedures the screening of project proposal with the purpose of early identification of the substantial scientific, technical or

informational deliverables and ensuring that project plans incorporate sufficient means for proper structuring, documenting, dissemination or publication of those outputs.

329. *Recommendation 6.* It is recommended to amend the structure of UNEP formats for project reporting, management and evaluation. In particular, to enforce consistency in numbering of activities in LF and PIR forms. It is suggested to replace lengthy Logframe tables with a set of individual sub-activity “worksheets”, that will be updated quarterly by adding (instead of editing) information on activity status, funds spent, outputs delivered and leave the space for ranking each activity implementation. A single overview table should be used for formalised summary ranking only, ideally using a predefined set of rules organised similarly to those that are applied for evaluation reports ranking (Annex IX: ToRs “Annex 3”). The listing of all the relevant targets, indicators, outputs and deliverables will make much more sense when linked to a particular task and may be followed through in a single worksheet. It will help to make both monitoring and evaluation analysis more structured, objective and efficient.

3. Recommendations to UNEP, WWF, national partners and ISDC regarding follow-up.

330. *Recommendation 7.* It is recommended that UNEP and WWF, through consultation and joint actions with ISDC encourage national governments to identify financial and organisational solution for utilising the capacity created by the ECONET at the host institution (LGIBP) for the purpose of continuous monitoring of Econet implementation. As a suggestion, LGIBP team may be included in the structure of, or become in some way affiliated with, the SIC of ISDC. It is recommended to promote the ECONET GIS as a unique information resource that can assist in monitoring achievement of targets set up by ISDC through Econet endorsement and MDGs and CBD targets. It is recommended that UNEP-DGEF as well as the executing agency encourage post-project follow-up aiming at transformation of ECONET GIS into a tool for continuous collation of biodiversity, land use and conservation information and its dissemination in CA to support sustainable development of the region.

331. *Recommendation 8.* It is recommended that WWF and national governments work together to identify means to support ECONET outputs update and publication in order to ensure project’s long-lasting impact and follow up:

- a. “Central Asia Ecosystems” – A Map, Methodology and explanatory notes and a digital map on a CD-ROM (estimated cost \$60,000-\$70,000);
- b. ECONET GIS (version 2006) – A documented collection of baseline information on a DVD-ROM and printed “Guidelines for Biodiversity Information Application in Biodiversity Conservation Planning in Central Asia” (estimated cost \$90,000-\$110,000)).

It is recommended that UNEP/DGEF supports these activities even if it is unable to provide funding directly.

332. *Recommendation 9.* Considering that sustainable implementation of the Econet requires resources far exceeding those available from the national governments in a foreseeable future, it is recommended to UNEP and national governments support a WWF initiative endorsed by ISDC for the development of a proposal for a full-sized project for Econet implementation. UNEP’s attention to elaboration of a relevant proposal and its submission to the GEF may be of crucial importance for the future of Econet CA.

Annex I. Rating of Achievement of Outputs and Activities by the Final PIR and the Terminal Evaluation.

Annex I Content:

Table 1. Achievement of Outputs and Activities Relevant to Objective 1.

Table 2. Achievement of Outputs and Activities Relevant to Objective 2.

Table 3. Achievement of Outputs and Activities Relevant to Objective 3.

Table 1. Achievement of Outputs and Activities Relevant to Objective 1.

| Output | Component | Indicator <i>as per:</i> | | Rating | | | | Comments |
|--------|-----------|--|---|---------------------|----|---------------------|----|---|
| | | Project Document | Final PIR (VI-2006) | Final PIR (VI-2006) | | Terminal evaluation | | |
| | 1.1.1 | Documented List of GIS components | GIS needs identified | S | - | MS | - | No documented plan produced; correctly identified need for ecosystem mapping, reports include items relevant to 1.4.3; |
| | 1.1.2 | PSC established, national partners identified (changed to 2.1.2 in FR) | GIS established | S | - | S | - | Strong and dedicated team in host institution, sub-optimal selection of software/IT support, uneven capacity in countries, |
| | 1.1.3 | (was not in PD LF) | Country staff trained in metadata formats, use and maintenance of ECONET GIS system | S | - | U | - | Team was not trained in metadata, standards were not developed or followed, training replaced with self-learning at sporadic meetings and overview lectures on satellite imagery |
| | 1.1.4 | (was not in PD LF) | Ecosystem maps and satellite imagery interpretation complete | S | - | MU | - | PIR referred to outputs relevant to 1.4; " <i>Cosmoeconet</i> " consumed GIS resources and was not optimal substitute for biodiversity analysis, it did not contribute to capacity increase |
| 1.1 | All | Setting up GIS in LGBP | Countries agreed on format, metadata and GIS procedures for GIS establishment | - | S | - | MS | Co-funding did not support capacity building, no documented standards and procedures accompanied GIS system created |
| | 1.2.1 | Data available in GIS/database | Base data uploaded | S | - | S | - | Sufficient collection of digital base maps acquired, base maps and species lists shared with national teams, spatial mismatch between sources was not addressed. |
| | 1.2.2 | (was not in PD LF) | Species mapped | S | - | S | - | Most extensive collection of species maps produced; lack of standards affected consistency of database/GIS content |
| | 1.2.3 | (was not in PD LF) | Socio-economy database | MU | - | MU | - | Useful collection and maps were produced/analysed; multiple omissions in maps left unnoticed; report left in a draft form |
| | 1.2.4 | (was not in PD LF) | PAs mapped | S | - | MS | - | Country maps; no joined layer produced, various data quality |
| 1.2 | All | Existing and new data uploaded to GIS | Biodiversity database & GIS operational | - | S | - | MS | GIS became operational, some planned layers not delivered |
| | 1.3.1 | Guidelines developed and approved | Operational Guidelines prepared, agreed | S | - | U | - | Output was not produced, substituted with agreement template |
| | 1.3.2 | Technical capacity developed | GIS management -training | S | - | MU | - | Training planned poorly, no tr.materials, affected GIS outputs |
| 1.3 | All | Operational guidelines document and capacity developed | Operational Guidelines (OG) on data compilation and update | - | S | - | U | Capacity increased in host institution, poor in some countries, standards poorly implemented, major output (OG) is absent |
| | 1.4.1 | GIS problem-free and deliver products | Habitat/species analysis - hotspots | S | - | S | - | Excellent deliverable – ecosystems CA map produced; GIS supported experts work, limited utilisation of GIS power |
| | 1.4.2 | Computer maps available | Forestry, game mgmt., watershed mgmt., and BD preservation | S | - | MS | - | Game management, forestry and watershed mgmt layers were not delivered |
| | 1.4.3 | GIS data shared with collaborating institutions | Satellite - potential hotspots/corridors | S | - | MU | - | GIS data shared without sufficient documentation/formatting; “ <i>Cosmoeconet</i> ” layers have limited application in countries |
| | 1.4.4 | (was not in PD LF) | Map socio-economy impacts/constrains | MS | - | MS | - | Duplicates 1.2.3; no high-resolution map saved for download |
| 1.4 | All | GIS outputs used in planning PAs in the region | Data gaps identified, GIS content grows annually | - | HS | - | MS | Data shared with other projects, no funding for update, some project data still not incorporated into GIS |
| 1. | Over all | Regional GIS developed and mechanisms for its maintenance approved. | - | - | HS | - | MS | Little co-funding and moving about \$100,000 from Objective 1 to (mainly) 2.3 prevented delivery of many planned outputs |

Table 2. Achievement of Outputs and Activities Relevant to Objective 2.

| Output | Component | Indicator (in brief) <i>as per:</i> | | Rating | | | | Comments |
|--------|-----------|--|---|---------------------|----|---------------------|----|---|
| | | Project Document | Final PIR (VI-2006) | Final PIR (VI-2006) | | Terminal evaluation | | |
| | 2.1.1 | Document elaborating planning framework agreed | Project working group established; objectives and criteria for ECONET development established and approved SC by 4q Yr.1 | S | - | S | - | Suitable team was established, working criteria agreed, work plan approved by PSC <i>post factum</i> , multiple working papers were not brought together to form a documented planning framework. |
| | 2.1.2 | (was 1.1.2 in PD) PSC established, national partners identified | SC with CA Focal Points established and meeting > 1 annually | HS | - | MU | - | NFPs were identified and active, PSC established half-way through project; insufficient PSC capacity in other than policy issues; only 2 meetings conducted |
| | 2.1.3 | (was not in PD LF) | Project working through ICSD | HS | - | HS | - | Intensive and efficient work with ICSD |
| 2.1 | All | (changed to 2.2 in PIR) Document detailing Econet design framework | CA Econet Plan approved by the ICSD and key national and resource planning bodies | - | HS | - | MS | ICSD approval gradually achieved, Econet plan endorsed by conservation agencies; plan/scheme is not detailed enough for land use planning bodies' consideration. |
| | 2.2.1 | Technical plan available by 4q.yr2 | Draft ECONET Plan with types and area of proposed PAs, and most suitable land and resource use and corridors/ buffer zones -based on multi-criteria analysis and peer review of data layers | HS | - | S | - | Draft Econet scheme was elaborated with participation of multiple stakeholders. Because of delay in GIS creation no peer review of data layers was conducted, data less detailed than needed for applying the scheme for planning at national level, some discrepancies in a scheme remain. |
| | 2.2.2 | Report identifying national and regional supporting reforms/actions required for the technical plan to be viable | Legislative review for national and regional ECONET implementation | MS | - | MS | - | Comprehensive Legislative Review prepared; recommendations are sketchy and declarative; sub-optimal acting (duplication of efforts) in online database creation |
| | 2.2.3 | Final plan document by 1q.yr3 | Final ECONET Plan reviewed and approved SC | HS | - | MS | - | The final Econet plan did not fix a number of technical glitches and did not address some justified official agencies' comments. |
| | 2.2.4 | Project Steering committee and ICSD written approval (in consultation with land- and resource-use bodies) | Econet plan approved by ICSD | S | - | HS | - | Preliminary endorsement of ICSD received in November 2004, June 2005, February 2006; highly efficient handling of political, cultural and promotion aspects. |
| 2.2 | All | Draft plan available within the second year, Final Econet plan agreed | All inclusive data analysis and PA gap analysis clearly reported in Econet Plan, with emphasis on feasibility review of ECONET within socio-economic development context | - | S | - | S | Econet scheme was developed and received preliminary endorsement at regional level; additional useful product (ecoregion site-sheets) was delivered; less successful in finding options for financial sustainability; documentation limited to the one found in promotional material. |
| 2.3 | - | (was not in PD LF) | National and relevant transboundary aspects of the ECONET CA Plan included in national development plans of CA countries | - | S | - | MS | Official letters supporting ECONET plan issued by all 5 countries; exceedingly high number of workshops and promotion events consumed resources (about \$100,000 against plan) initially allocated for comprehensive GIS creation |
| 2 | Overall | Financial mechanisms identified, legal instruments and capacity in place | - | - | HS | - | MS | Strong political support received at regional and national level; capacity increase is limited, financial mechanisms not in place. |

Table 3. Achievement of Outputs and Activities Relevant to Objective 3.

| Output | Component | Indicator (in brief) <i>as per:</i> | | Rating | | | | Comments |
|--------|-----------|--|--|---------------------|----|---------------------|----|--|
| | | Project Document | Final PIR (VI-2006) | Final PIR (VI-2006) | | Terminal evaluation | | |
| | 3.1.1 | Documented evidences of regional structure and mechanisms | National Focal Points involved in project coordination nationally and regionally | HS | - | HS | - | NFPs ensured communication with agencies and contributed to process of Econet presenting to ICSD |
| | 3.1.2 | (was not in PD LF) | Project leads others | S | - | HS | - | Methods/data used in other projects, e.g. IPAST |
| | 3.1.3 | (was not in PD LF) | Project coordinates through ICSD | HS | - | HS | - | ISDC political support assisted ECONET progress in CA |
| | 3.1.4 | (was not in PD LF) | Econet integrated into REAP | HS | - | S | - | Integrated into REAP prior to project; consistent follow up |
| 3.1 | All | Self-sustaining coordination mechanisms; transboundary efforts increase by 25% | ‘Interregional Implementation Convention’ drafted for ICSD adoption. | - | HS | - | HS | Preliminary endorsement achieved within project timeframe; officially endorsed soon after project completion |
| | 3.2.1 | Planning documents for selected financial options | Financing strategy and budget drafted and endorsed by governments and ICSD | MS | - | MU | - | Strategy did not specify plan, budget or benchmarks. Cost estimates incomplete. Insufficient to direct practical acts. |
| | 2.2.2 | (was not in PD LF) | Initial funding secured for new PA and corridors in each country | MS | - | MS | - | Increase in gvmts funding of PA is a result of economic growth, external support sometimes linked to project concept |
| 3.2 | All | Strategy for sustainable financing of Econet approved by gvmts; pilot initiatives testing. | Committed government funding for (part of) Econet implementation | - | MU | - | MU | The Strategy did not acquire official status, little practical impact; reporting included developments not linked to output. |
| | 3.3.1 | Enacted legislation available | Recommendations on Legal reforms through ICSD | S | - | MS | - | Recommendations communicated to ISDC; regional framework documents approval is expected (occurred later) |
| | 3.3.2 | Number of individuals/institutions who received information | Model legislation presented to gvmts | HS | - | MU | - | EE concept introduced into legal acts of 3 countries. “Model legislation” activity replaced with costly support to ECK. |
| | 3.3.3 | (was not in PD LF) | Strategy and regional plan adoption by ICSD | HS | - | HS | - | ISDC endorsement of Agreement on Econet implementation (soon after project completion) is clearly outcome of ECONET |
| 3.3 | All | Model legislation on inter-regional cooperation developed and enacted | Financing mechanism developed for Econet CA by the 3 rd year | - | MS | - | MS | In final PIR indicators for 3.2 & 3.3 mixed; logic of rating is unclear |

Continued on the next page.

Table 3 (continued). Achievement of Outputs and Activities Relevant to Objective 3.

| Output | Component | Indicator (in brief) <i>as per:</i> | | Rating | | | | Comments |
|--------|-----------|--|--|---------------------|----|---------------------|----|---|
| | | Project Document; Project Objective and Activities (POA) | Final PIR (VI-2006) | Final PIR (VI-2006) | | Terminal evaluation | | |
| | 3.4.1 | Six Econet training workshops undertaken | Regional workshops conducted on Econet implementation | S | - | S | - | Regional workshops conducted; outcomes of majority of workshops were insufficiently documented. |
| | 3.4.2 | (was not in PD LF) was in POA: Assist 5 NGOs in developing curricular material for different layers of society available and distributed to key NGOs | Regional workshops conducted on biodiversity conservation/planning | MS | - | S | - | Multiple national workshops conducted; variety of stakeholders incl. NGOs involved, outcomes of workshops insufficiently documented. |
| | 3.4.3 | (was not in PD LF) | Training impact study findings | U | - | U | - | No impact study; poor documentation of target groups and outcomes, limited number of “Econet ABC” tutorial copies |
| | 3.4.4 | (was 3.4.2.a in PD LF) Curricular materials distributed to key NGOs | Involvement of 5 NGOs in Econet development | MU | - | MU | - | Curricular materials replaced with promotional publications; PIR shifted PD indicator 3.4.2 to 3.4.4 |
| | 3.4.5 | (was not in PD LF) | Dissemination training /education materials | HS | - | S | - | Excellent promotional publications and mass media events/deliverables; lack of proper training manuals. |
| 3.4 | All | (incorrectly numbered 3.5 in PD LF) was in POA: Effectiveness of relevant institutions planning and management reinforced by special training of the staff and distribution of methodological material | Increase of at least 25% in collaborative transboundary efforts | - | HS | - | MS | PIR shifted PD indicator 3.1 to 3.4; there is no measurement scale/basis for indicator (25%) and its relevance to 3.4 is not clear. Training process was poorly planned although promotional events were efficient and included some training. |
| | 3.5.1 | (Not specified in PD LF) was in POA: Website for biodiversity information sharing | Internet access to GIS/database | S | - | U | - | Web page created does not allow GIS data download; illustrations missed legends and metadata; two parallel websites with similar content created. |
| | 3.5.2 | (Not specified in PD LF) was in POA: Email network established | Email network created | U | - | U | - | No email network created; insufficient information exchange on project tasks and progress; output not delivered |
| 3.5 | All | (incorrectly numbered 3.6 in PD LF) Internet access to GIS products and database possible, email network created | Representatives of key government planning bodies and PA management institutes trained in Econet | - | HS | - | U | PIR and ECONET FR introduced an indicator for output 3.5 which is irrelevant to activities 3.5.x content. PIR indicator relates to 3.1.1 and 3.4.1. Evaluation rating here is based on 3.5.1 and 3.5.2 outputs rating. |
| 3.6 | All | (was not in PD LF) was 3.5.1 in POA | Regional Econet GIS accessible and usable for all states in CA | - | S | - | - | PIR indicator 3.6 duplicates 3.5.1. Incomplete formatting and documenting of GIS copy distributed to REC, NECs in CA does not allow to rate access to GIS as satisfactory |
| 3. | Overall | Econet included into national plans under the governments funding, funds committed to its key transboundary elements | - | - | S | - | MS | ECONET concept was incorporated into national legislation of 3 countries and endorsed by ISDC. Mechanisms for stable financing of Econet implementation require further development. Some increase in capacity of national institutions and NGOs was achieved through involvement of many specialists in promotional and training events. |

Annex II. Co-financing and Leveraged Resources.

| Co financing (Type/Source) | IA own Financing (US\$) | | Government (US\$) | | Other* (US\$) | | Total (US\$) | | Total Disbursement (US\$) | |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-------------|------------------|----------|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual |
| – Grants | \$130 000 | \$300 000 | | | \$25 000 | \$25 000 | \$155 000 | \$325 000 | \$155 000 | \$325 000 |
| – Loans/Concessional (compared to market rate) | | | | | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| – Credits | | | | | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| – Equity investments | | | | | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| – In-kind support | | | \$1 195 000 | \$6 400 000 | \$35 000 | \$35 000 | \$1 230 000 | \$6 435 000 | \$1 230 000 | \$6 435 000 |
| - Other (*) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Totals | \$130 000 | \$300 000 | \$1 195 000 | \$6 400 000 | \$60 000 | \$60 000 | \$1 385 000 | \$6 760 000 | \$1 385 000 | \$6 760 000 |

* Other is referred to contributions mobilized for the project from other multilateral agencies, bilateral development cooperation agencies, NGOs, the private sector and beneficiaries.

Annex III. Disbursements during the life of project (actuals, US dollars)

Highlighted lines 2201-2219 and 2224-2230 indicate budget redistribution; see "Financial Planning" paragraph 285

| | | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | Total | Original Budget | Variance (Original - Actual) |
|-------------|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| 10 | PROJECT PERSONNEL COMPONENT | | | | | | | |
| | 1100 Project Personn w/m | | | | | | | |
| 1101 | Regional Project Manager (600 x 36 month) | 5,100 | 9,280 | 4,935 | 2,637 | 21,952 | 21,600 | -352 |
| 1102 | Regional Legal Expert (800x4m) | - | 1,599 | 2,278 | 3,309 | 7,186 | 3,200 | -3986 |
| 1103 | Regional Biodiversity Expert (800x4m) | 1,100 | 1,381 | 589 | 106 | 3,176 | 3,200 | 24 |
| 1104 | Regional Agricultural / Econ. Expert (1000x3) | 300 | 1,205 | 100 | 408 | 2,013 | 3,000 | 987 |
| 1105 | Regional PA Expert (800x4m) | - | 1,805 | 1,295 | - | 3,100 | 3,200 | 100 |
| 1106 | Regional GIS Expert (700x5,5m) | 303 | 3,006 | 4,462 | 1,487 | 9,258 | 3,800 | -5458 |
| 1107 | Regional Administrator of the project (500 x36) | 4,458 | 7,595 | 4,786 | 1,203 | 18,042 | 18,000 | -42 |
| 1199 | Sub-Total | 11,261 | 25,871 | 18,445 | 9,150 | 64,727 | 56,000 | -8727 |
| 1200 | Consultants w/m | | | | | | | |
| 1201 | National Expert Kazakhstan (600x 25) | 3,000 | 5,414 | 6,589 | 1,012 | 16,015 | 15,000 | -1015 |
| 1202 | National Expert Kirgizstan (600x 25) | 3,633 | 4,600 | 3,404 | 5,398 | 17,035 | 15,000 | -2035 |
| 1203 | National Expert Tajikistan (600x 25) | 1,500 | 8,500 | 4,473 | 539 | 15,012 | 15,000 | -12 |
| 1204 | National Expert Turkmenistan (600x 25) | 3,633 | 5,867 | 4,010 | 3,072 | 16,582 | 15,000 | -1582 |
| 1205 | National Expert Uzbekistan (600x 25) | 1,500 | 7,528 | 2,999 | 4,697 | 16,724 | 15,000 | -1724 |
| 1206 | National and Technical experts' Travel | 426 | 13,268 | 8,588 | 2,872 | 25,154 | 27,000 | 1846 |
| 1299 | Sub-Total | 13,692 | 45,177 | 30,063 | 17,590 | 106,522 | 102,000 | -4522 |
| 1300 | Administrative support w/m | | | | | | | |
| 1301 | Adm.support in Kazakhstan (200 x 20) | 202 | 1,798 | 1,682 | 449 | 4,131 | 4,000 | -131 |
| 1302 | Adm.support in Kirgizstan (200 x 20) | 242 | 1,738 | 1,000 | 1,053 | 4,033 | 4,000 | -33 |
| 1303 | Adm.support in Tajikistan (200 x 20) | - | 2,600 | 1,301 | 100 | 4,001 | 4,000 | -1 |
| 1304 | Adm.support in Turkmenistan (200 x 20) | - | 800 | 2,153 | 1,077 | 4,030 | 4,000 | -30 |
| 1305 | Adm.support in Uzbekistan (200 x 20) | - | - | 1,999 | 1,866 | 3,865 | 4,000 | 135 |
| 1399 | Sub-Total | 444 | 6,936 | 8,135 | 4,545 | 20,060 | 20,000 | -60 |
| 0 | Travel on official business | | | | | | | |
| 1601 | Regional Manager | 1,398 | 2,605 | 1,704 | 2,531 | 8,238 | 6,000 | -2238 |
| 1602 | Regional Experts | 2,776 | 1,920 | 3,618 | 1,485 | 9,799 | 7,500 | -2299 |
| 1603 | Administrative staff | - | 3,957 | 988 | - | 4,945 | 6,000 | 1055 |
| 1699 | Sub-Total | 4,174 | 8,482 | 6,310 | 4,016 | 22,982 | 19,500 | -3482 |
| 1999 | Component Total | 29,571 | 86,466 | 62,953 | 35,301 | 214,291 | 197,500 | -16,791 |

| | | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | Total | Original Budget | Variance (Original - Actual) |
|-------------|---|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 20 | SUB-CONTRACT COMPONENT | | | | | | | |
| 2200 | Sub-contracts¹ | | | | | | | |
| 2201 | GIS design and database setting up | 21,015 | 2,985 | 5,270 | 5,611 | 34,881 | 25,000 | -9881 |
| 2202 | Biodiversity database Kazakhstan | 10,061 | 9,746 | - | - | 19,807 | 20,000 | 193 |
| 2203 | Biodiversity database Kirgizstan | 9,310 | 3,800 | - | - | 13,110 | 20,000 | 6890 |
| 2204 | Biodiversity database Tajikistan | 7,332 | 9,890 | - | - | 17,222 | 20,000 | 2778 |
| 2205 | Biodiversity database Turkmenistan | 5,150 | 6,423 | - | - | 11,573 | 20,000 | 8427 |
| 2206 | Biodiversity database Uzbekistan | 5,000 | 14,615 | - | - | 19,615 | 20,000 | 385 |
| 2207 | Socio-economy database Kazakhstan | - | 2,872 | - | - | 2,872 | 10,000 | 7128 |
| 2208 | Socio-economy database Kirgizstan | - | 8,036 | - | - | 8,036 | 10,000 | 1964 |
| 2209 | Socio-economy database Tajikistan | - | 4,009 | - | - | 4,009 | 10,000 | 5991 |
| 2210 | Socio-economy database Turkmenistan | - | 5,906 | - | - | 5,906 | 10,000 | 4094 |
| 2211 | Socio-economy database Uzbekistan | - | 7,654 | - | - | 7,654 | 10,000 | 2346 |
| 2212 | Map of Steppe Zone of the region | - | 12,199 | - | - | 12,199 | 20,000 | 7801 |
| 2213 | Series of maps of key species | - | 3,126 | 7,660 | 3,652 | 14,438 | 20,000 | 5562 |
| 2214 | General map of forestry | - | - | 3,278 | 191 | 3,469 | 13,500 | 10031 |
| 2215 | General map of game management | - | - | 886 | 2,143 | 3,029 | 13,000 | 9971 |
| 2216 | General map of PA | - | 6,547 | 7,443 | 2,207 | 16,197 | 15,000 | -1197 |
| 2217 | General maps of socio-economical development | - | 7,294 | 5,759 | - | 13,053 | 27,500 | 14447 |
| 2218 | General map of hydrology | - | - | 7,978 | 167 | 8,145 | 15,000 | 6855 |
| 2219 | Regional typological map of ecosystems and econet project | - | 13,064 | 16,908 | 2,681 | 32,653 | 40,000 | 7347 |
| 2220 | Development of education materials on econet concept | - | - | 9,342 | 3,088 | 12,430 | 10,500 | -1930 |
| 2221 | Guidelines and protocol of econet plan implementation | - | - | 831 | 6,487 | 7,318 | 7,000 | -318 |
| 2222 | Regional legislation analysis (Catena) | - | - | 5,582 | 1,381 | 6,963 | 7,000 | 37 |
| 2223 | Website for Econet development and maintenance | - | - | 3,260 | 8,811 | 12,071 | 9,000 | -3071 |
| 2224 | Regional agreement on co-operation for Econet | | | - | 9,098 | 9,098 | 0 | -9098 |
| 2225 | Ecological codex Kyrgystan | | | 17,036 | 5,893 | 22,929 | 0 | -22929 |
| 2226 | Econet evaluation and implementation - Kz | | | 5,330 | 3,028 | 8,358 | 0 | -8358 |
| 2227 | Econet evaluation and implementation - Ky | | | 7,312 | 4,129 | 11,441 | 0 | -11441 |
| 2228 | Econet evaluation and implementation - Tj | | | 3,920 | 7,419 | 11,339 | 0 | -11339 |
| 2229 | Econet evaluation and implementation - Tu | | | 4,788 | 6,265 | 11,053 | 0 | -11053 |
| 2230 | Econet evaluation and implementation - Uz | | | 1,018 | 3,194 | 4,212 | 0 | -4212 |
| 2299 | Sub-Total | 57,868 | 118,166 | 113,601 | 75,445 | 365,080 | 372,500 | 7420 |
| 2999 | Component Total | 57,868 | 118,166 | 113,601 | 75,445 | 365,080 | 372,500 | 7,420 |

2. _____

¹ Highlighted lines 2201-2219 and 2224-2230 indicate budget redistribution; see "Financial Planning" paragraph 286.

| | | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | Total | Original Budget | Variance (Original - Actual) |
|-----------|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| 30 | TRAINING COMPONENT | | | | | | | |
| | 3100 Fellowships | | | | | | | |
| | 3101 GIS procedure/maintainance | - | 1,303 | - | 3,706 | 5,009 | 5,000 | -9 |
| | 3102 Econet managment | - | | 3,384 | 1,607 | 4,991 | 5,000 | 9 |
| | 3199 Sub-Total | - | 1,303 | 3,384 | 5,313 | 10,000 | 10,000 | 0 |
| | 3200 Group training | | | | | | | |
| | 3201 Database creation, econet development | - | 7,087 | 5,004 | - | 12,091 | 8,000 | -4091 |
| | 3202 Econet managment/integration in economy | - | | 7,838 | 1,994 | 9,832 | 10,000 | 168 |
| | 3203 Econet concept in ecological education | - | | 1,980 | 9,445 | 11,425 | 10,000 | -1425 |
| | 3204 Subregional TransboundaryPA/econet development (1) | - | 3,089 | - | - | 3,089 | 6,000 | 2911 |
| | 3205 Subregional TransboundaryPA/econet development (2) | - | 850 | - | - | 850 | 6,000 | 5150 |
| | 3206 GIS maintainance/Internet | - | - | 866 | 8,950 | 9,816 | 10,000 | 184 |
| | 3299 Sub-Total | - | 11,026 | 15,688 | 20,389 | 47,103 | 50,000 | 2897 |
| | 3300 Meetings/conferences | | | | | | | |
| | 3301 Steering Com/ISCD meeting (partly supported)-EP approval | - | 4,036 | - | - | 4,036 | 5,000 | 964 |
| | 3302 Steering Com/ISCD meeting (p.s.)-reg.coop. in EP development | - | 1,370 | 1,850 | 6,166 | 9,386 | 5,000 | -4386 |
| | 3303 St. Com/ISCD m. (p.s.)appr. of financial mechan.of econet development | - | | 6,999 | 7,975 | 14,974 | 10,000 | -4974 |
| | 3399 Sub-Total | - | 5,406 | 8,849 | 14,141 | 28,396 | 20,000 | -8396 |
| | 3999 Component Total | - | 17,735 | 27,921 | 39,843 | 85,499 | 80,000 | -5,499 |
| 40 | EQUIPMENT & PREMISES COMPONENT | | | | | | | |
| | 4100 Expendable Equipment | | | | | | | |
| | 4101 Office supplies | 1,505 | 1,526 | 469 | 1,704 | 5,204 | 7,500 | 2296 |
| | 4102 Library acquisitions | 1,970 | - | - | - | 1,970 | 3,500 | 1530 |
| | 4103 Computer Software | 1,089 | 155 | - | - | 1,244 | 9,000 | 7756 |
| | 4104 Space photographs | 1,013 | - | - | - | 1,013 | 5,000 | 3987 |
| | 4199 Sub-Total | 5,577 | 1,681 | 469 | 1,704 | 9,431 | 25,000 | 15569 |
| | 4200 Non-expendable equipment | | | | | | | |
| | 4201 Computer -new GIS station | 7,233 | | - | | 7,233 | 5,000 | -2233 |
| | 4202 Computers (1500 x 5) | - | 6,615 | 1,942 | - | 8,557 | 7,500 | -1057 |
| | 4203 Internet-access supporting equipment | - | - | - | - | - | 2,500 | 2500 |
| | 4299 Sub-Total | 7,233 | 6,615 | 1,942 | - | 15,790 | 15,000 | -790 |
| | 4999 Component Total | 12,810 | 8,296 | 2,411 | 1,704 | 25,221 | 40,000 | 14,779 |
| 50 | MISCELLANEOUS COMPONENT | | | | | | | |
| | 5100 Operation and maintenance of equip. | | | | | | | |
| | 5101 Rental & maint. of computer equip. | 985 | 1,522 | 345 | - | 2,852 | 3,000 | 148 |
| | 5102 Rental & maint. of copiers | - | 653 | 666 | 415 | 1,734 | 200 | -1534 |
| | 5103 Repair & maint. of vehicles & insurance | 103 | 868 | 1,051 | 938 | 2,960 | 1,000 | -1960 |
| | 5104 Rental & maint. of other office equip | 20 | 1,824 | 70 | 862 | 2,776 | 3,300 | 524 |

| | | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | Total | Original Budget | Variance (Original - Actual) |
|-------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| 5105 | Rental of meeting rooms & equip. | - | - | 41 | 397 | 438 | 2,500 | 2062 |
| 5199 | Sub-Total | 1,109 | 4,867 | 2,173 | 2,612 | 10,761 | 10,000 | -761 |
| 5200 | Reporting costs | | | | | | | |
| 5201 | Translation/copying/distribution draft econet plan | 573 | 1,506 | - | - | 2,079 | 2,000 | -79 |
| 5202 | Translation/copying/distribution econet plan (paper/computer vers.) | - | 379 | 3,752 | - | 4,131 | 4,500 | 369 |
| 5203 | Translation/copying/distribution regional decisions | - | - | 53 | - | 53 | 500 | 447 |
| 5204 | Translation/copying/distribution pilot prop.for financing | - | - | - | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 0 |
| 5205 | Translation/copying/distribution model legislation | - | - | - | 1,907 | 1,907 | 2,000 | 93 |
| 5206 | Translation/copying/distribution final reports/decisions/GIS | - | - | - | 6,772 | 6,772 | 5,000 | -1772 |
| 5299 | Sub-Total | 573 | 1,885 | 3,805 | 9,679 | 15,942 | 15,000 | -942 |
| 5300 | Sundry | | | | | | | |
| 5301 | Communication project (fax/e-mail/tel) | 1,108 | 3,950 | 1,276 | 2,347 | 8,681 | 8,700 | 19 |
| 5302 | Communication Kazakhstan | 737 | 924 | 573 | 86 | 2,320 | 2,260 | -60 |
| 5303 | Communication Kirgizstan | - | 772 | 821 | 69 | 1,662 | 2,260 | 598 |
| 5304 | Communication Tajikistan | - | 1,184 | 897 | 197.00 | 2,278 | 2,260 | -18 |
| 5305 | Communication Turkmenistan | - | 1,340 | 984 | - | 2,324 | 2,260 | -64 |
| 5306 | Communication Uzbekistan | - | 267 | 539 | 483 | 1,289 | 2,260 | 971 |
| 5307 | Final international audit | - | - | 0 | 10,050 | 10,050 | 10,000 | -50 |
| 5399 | Sub-Total | 1,845 | 8,437 | 5,090 | 13,232 | 28,604 | 30,000 | 1,396 |
| 5400 | Hospitality and entertainment | | | | | | | |
| 5401 | Meetings with potential donors | - | 930 | 1,013 | 0 | 1,943 | 2,000 | 57 |
| 5402 | Meetings with NGOs | 120 | 676 | 0 | 1,863 | 2,659 | 3,000 | 341 |
| 5499 | Sub-Total | 120 | 1,606 | 1,013 | 1,863 | 4,602 | 5,000 | 398 |
| 5999 | Component Total | 3,647 | 16,795 | 12,081 | 27,386 | 59,909 | 60,000 | 91 |
| 99 | GRAND TOTAL | 103,896 | 247,458 | 218,967 | 179,679 | 750,000 | 750,000 | 0.00 |

Annex IV. List of persons interviewed/contacted.






| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Christopher Briggs | Team Leader Operations, Policies & Finance Global Environment Facility; CBriggs@theGEF.org |
| Dmitry Kavtaradze | Regional expert (Environmental Education); Kavtaradze@spa.msu.ru |
| Ekaterina Rachkovskaja | Regional expert (Flora, Biogeography, Cartography); evra@nets.kz |
| Elena Kuraeva | Project Administrator; ekuraeva@wwf.ru |
| Farida Balbakova | National Coordinator (Kyrgyz Republic); f_balbakova@mail.ru |
| Irina Onufrenya | Regional expert (GIS); ionufrenya@wwf.ru |
| Mark Zimsky | Acting Team Leader, Biodiversity, GEF Secretariat; mzimsky@thegef.org |
| Max Zieren | Regional Programme Coordinator Asia Pacific, UNEP Regional Office Asia Pacific, UNEP/DGEF; zieren@un.org |
| Neimatullo Safarov | National Coordinator (Republic of Tajikistan), ECONET International Steering Committee member; NSafarov@biodiv.tojikiston.com |
| Nikolai Sobolev | Head of Ecological Networks Programme, Biodiversity Conservation Center, (UNDP project “Improvement of Protected Areas System in Turkmenistan. (ECONET)”); laecol@online.ru |
| Olga Pereladova | Project Director; opereladova@wwf.ru |
| Ravil Sadvokasov | Regional expert (GIS); sadvokasov@nursat.kz |
| Sandeep Bhambra | The Fund Management Officer, Division of GEF Coordination, UNEP; Sandeep.Bhambra@unep.org |
| Alexander Solokha | Central Asian Flyway Officer, Wetlands International; ASolokha@wwf.ru |
| Sergey Sklyarenko | National Coordinator (Important Bird Areas, Kazakhstan); Sergey.Sklyarenko@acbk.kz |
| Talgat Kerteshev | Project Manager (UNDP/GEF Kazakhstan Wetlands Project), ECONET International Supervisory Committee member; talgat.kerteshev@undp.org |
| Timur Berkeliev | National Coordinator (Turkmenistan), ECONET International Supervisory Committee member; mirboa@list.ru |
| Valery Khrokov | Chairman, Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan; acbk.remez@nursat.kz |
| Vitaly Gromov | Regional expert (Environmental Legislation), IUCN, Association for Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan,); ECONET International Supervisory Committee; vgrom@mail.ru |
| Vladimir Krever | Regional expert (Protected Areas); vkrever@wwf.ru |
| Yuriy Puzachenko | Regional expert (Landscape Geography, GIS, Satellite Imagery); Puzak@orc.ru |
| Yury Chikin | National Coordinator (Republic of Uzbekistan); chikinwwf@gmail.com |

Annex V. List of documents reviewed.



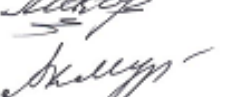


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4. Decision № 3. Interstate Sustainable Development Commission. 16 November 2007. Bishkek
5. Decision № 7. Interstate Sustainable Development Commission. Purpose 4 of the Concept of REAP implementation: “Resources mobilization and REAP implementation” ECONET Project. 23 November 2006 Ashgabad, Turkmenistan.
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7. Development of the Econet for Long-Term Conservation of Biodiversity in the Central Asia Ecoregions. Terminal Report. UNEP/GEF. GF/2711-03-4609; GF/2010-03-03. 2006.
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http://www.expertise.caresd.net/eko_kod.htm
10. Ecological Networks in Russia: An Ecoregional Approach, WWF Russia, Moscow, 2003. 32 pp.
11. Econet Central Asia: Web for Life. GEF/UNEP/WWF, Moscow, 2006. 48 pp.
12. ECONET GIS: CD-ROM. WWF Russia, Moscow, 2007.
13. ECONET “web for life” Central Asia: CD-ROM. GEF/UNEP/WWF, Moscow, 2006.
14. WWF в России. [WWF in Russia] WWF России, Moscow, 2004.
15. Five Countries – One Web Of Life: Ecological Network of Central Asia-Integrated Method, Regional GAP Analysis, Commitments of the Countries to the PoW CBD: GEF-UNEP-WWF Project “ECONET CA”. In: Compendium of Side Events held during the eighth ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Curitiba, Brazil, 13 - 31 March 2006
16. Improvement of Protected Areas System in Turkmenistan (ECONET). Project Brief. UNDP 00015015 July 2003 – December 2006.
17. Закон Кыргызской Республики “Об особо охраняемых природных территориях”. ПРОЕКТ. По состоянию на 1.06.04 г. [*Law on Specially Protected Natural Territories of Kyrgyz Republic; project, 2004.*]
18. Закон Республики Казахстан “Об особо охраняемых природных территориях” ([21.07.2006] с изменениями от 09.01.2007 г.). [*Law on Specially Protected Natural Territories of Republic of Kazakhstan, 2007.*]
19. Закон Республики Казахстан от 15 июля 1997 года N 162-1 “Об особо охраняемых природных территориях” (с изменениями, внесенными в соответствии с Законами РК от 11.05.99 г. N 381-1; от 23.01.01 г. N 151-II; от 24.12.01 г. N 276-II; от 25.05.04 г. N 553-II; от 20.12.04 г. N 13-III) г.Бишкек от 28 мая 1994 года N 1561-XII. [*Law on Specially Protected Natural Territories of Republic of Kazakhstan, 1997.*]

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21. Закон Республики Узбекистан “Об Охраняемых Природных Территориях” гор.Ташкент, 3 декабря 2004 г. [*Law on Specially Protected Natural Territories of Republic of Uzbekistan, 2004.*]
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23. “ЭКОНЕТ-АВС”. Имитационная управленческая игра по созданию сети особо охраняемых природных территорий. Д.Кавтарадзе, Е.Букварева, В. Сидоренко. Москва, ЧеРо, 2005. [*ECONET ABC – An Imitation Game. Moscow, 2005.*]
24. ЭКОНЕТ сеть жизни: Центральная Азия. Всемирный фонд дикой природы (WWF), Россия, Москва. 2006. 57 стр. [*Econet Central Asia: Web for Life. GEF/UNEP/WWF, Moscow, 2006.*]

Annex VI. ISDC Decision No 7 of 23.11.2006

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|--|---|---|------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|---|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---|------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;">РЕШЕНИЕ № 7 Межгосударственной Комиссии по устойчивому развитию</p> <p style="text-align: center;">«О Цели 4 Концепции внедрения РПДООС: Мобилизация ресурсов и реализация РПДООС» Проект ЭКОНЕТ</p> <p>23 ноября 2006 годаг. Ашхабад</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">Одобрить и рекомендовать итоговую схему ЭКОНЕТ странам Центральной Азии для использования в качестве основы для развития системы охраняемых природных территорий (ОПТ), особо охраняемых природных территорий (ООПТ) и системы землепользования.Одобрить список основных региональных и национальных организаций по передаче ГИС для поддержки системы принятия решений и развития деятельности по охране окружающей среды (прилагается).РКДЛ совместно с представителями проекта ЭКОНЕТ доработать Соглашение о трансграничной реализации ЭКОНЕТ (прилагается). <p>От Республики Казахстан </p> <p>От Кыргызской Республики </p> <p>От Республики Таджикистан </p> <p>От Туркменистана </p> <p>От Республики Узбекистан </p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Decision № 7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">INTERSTATE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION Purpose 4 of the Concept of REAP implementation: “Resources mobilization and REAP implementation”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ECONET Project</p> <p>23 November 2006Ashgabad, Turkmenistan</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">To approve the final ECONET scheme and to recommend its use as the major base for the development of the system of specially protected areas (SSPA) and system of protected areas (SPA) and for the development of land-use system in the Region.To approve the list of major regional and national agencies for GIS transfer in order to support the decision-making system in the countries of the region and for the development of activities on environment conservation (the list attached).Regional Committee of Focal Points – together with Econet project leaders – to finalize preparation of Agreement on transboundary Econet implementation (attached). <table><tr><td>On behalf of the Republic of Kazakhstan</td><td><i>Signature</i></td></tr><tr><td>On behalf of the Kyrgyz Republic</td><td><i>Signature</i></td></tr><tr><td>On behalf of the Republic of Tajikistan</td><td><i>Signature</i></td></tr><tr><td>On behalf of Turkmenistan</td><td><i>Signature</i></td></tr><tr><td>On behalf of the Republic of Uzbekistan</td><td><i>Signature</i></td></tr></table> | On behalf of the Republic of Kazakhstan | <i>Signature</i> | On behalf of the Kyrgyz Republic | <i>Signature</i> | On behalf of the Republic of Tajikistan | <i>Signature</i> | On behalf of Turkmenistan | <i>Signature</i> | On behalf of the Republic of Uzbekistan | <i>Signature</i> |
| On behalf of the Republic of Kazakhstan | <i>Signature</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| On behalf of the Kyrgyz Republic | <i>Signature</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| On behalf of the Republic of Tajikistan | <i>Signature</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| On behalf of Turkmenistan | <i>Signature</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| On behalf of the Republic of Uzbekistan | <i>Signature</i> | | | | | | | | | | |

Annex VII. ISDC Decision No 3 of 16.11.2006

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| <p style="text-align: center;">РЕШЕНИЕ № 3 Межгосударственной Комиссии по устойчивому развитию</p> <p>16 ноября 2007 года г. Бишкек</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Одобрить Соглашение о намерениях между МКУР и Центрально-Азиатской программой WWF по реализации «Эконет» в регионе. Принять к сведению информацию о проектах «КАПАКТ Нарастивание потенциала для управления качеством воздуха и применение чистых технологий сгорания угля в ЦА» и «Нарастивание потенциала для управления качеством водных ресурсов в странах ЦА». ОДЛ по РПДОС от Республики Узбекистан создать рабочую группу экспертов, номинированных странами Центральной Азии для реализации проекта КАПАКТ и обеспечить организацию проведения регионального семинара. Принять к сведению информации Казахстанско-Японской Ассоциации делового и гуманитарного сотрудничества и Корейской компании KOSEP по применению новых технологий в области охраны окружающей среды. Принять к сведению опыт по разработке Национального атласа Республики Казахстан для использования в разработке национальных и регионального Атласов Центральной Азии. <div style="margin-top: 20px;"> <p>От Республики Казахстан </p> <p>От Кыргызской Республики </p> <p>От Республики Таджикистан </p> <p>От Туркменистана </p> <p>От Республики Узбекистан </p> </div> | <p style="text-align: center;">Decision № 3 INTERSTATE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION</p> <p>16 November 2007 Bishkek</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> To approve Agreement on intention between Intergovernmental committee of sustainable development (“ISDC”) and WWF Central Asian Programme on ECONET implementation in the Region To take into consideration information about projects “KAPAKT – capacity building for air quality management and implementation of “clean” technologies of burning coal in Central Asia” and “Capacity building for water quality management in the countries of Central Asia”. Focal point of REAP from the republic of Uzbekistan – to create a working group of experts, appointed by the countries of Central Asia, for the KAPAKT project implementation, and to organize a regional workshop on the project. To take into consideration information of Kazakhstan-Japanese Association of business and humanitarian cooperation and Korean company KOSEP on application of new technologies in the field of environment conservation. To take into consideration the experience of the development of a National Atlas of the Republic of Kazakhstan for it to be used in the development of national and Regional Atlas’ of Central Asia. <div style="margin-top: 20px;"> <p>On behalf of the Republic of Kazakhstan Signature</p> <p>On behalf of the Kyrgyz Republic Signature</p> <p>On behalf of the Republic of Tajikistan Signature</p> <p>On behalf of Turkmenistan Signature</p> <p>On behalf of the Republic of Uzbekistan Signature</p> </div> |
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Annex VIII. Summary of the expertise of the evaluator.

Name: Dr Igor Lysenko
Present occupation: Conservation Analyst
Address: 219 Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL, UK
Tel.: +44 1223 277314
Fax: +44 1223 277136
Email: igor.lysenko@unep-wcmc.org

PROFESSIONAL SPECIALISATION

Environmental management and policy analysis; environmental monitoring and impact assessment; protected areas and internationally designated sites management; biodiversity indicators; protected areas gap analysis; ecological networks planning; ecological mapping, wildlife populations census; environmental information systems; habitats fragmentation analysis; indicators for assessing progress towards CBD and MDG targets. A strong scientific and technical background; expert-level knowledge of many environmental GIS and database tools. Managerial, research, teaching and evaluation expertise.

EDUCATION

1993-2002 Multiple courses on Database Management, Remote Sensing and Environmental GIS (Moscow, Minsk, Ottawa, Bonn, Cambridge).
1992-1994 Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Bonn (Landscape Ecology).
1992 Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Science (Environmental Impact Assessment post-doctoral training for State Experts).
1990 Moscow Institute of Electronic and Automatic Technology (Computing).
1987 Information and Statistic Centre of the Russian State Committee for Environment Protection (Post-doctoral course on computing and statistical analysis).
M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University:
1985 Ph.D., (Ecology)
1979-1982 M.Sc. (Ecology and Biogeography) - post graduated studentship
1973-1975 M.Sc. (Biology)
1970-1972 B.Sc. (Zoology)

AWARDS AND HONORARY APPOINTMENTS

2007 Special Achievement in GIS Award, ESRI, San-Diego, California.
1999 Recognised Teacher of the University of Hull, UK.
1994 Soros Fund Stipend Award: Diploma in area "Biodiversity".

LANGUAGES

Russian (native speaker); English (fluent); Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Bulgarian (basic).

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1997-2006 Conservation Analyst - World Conservation Monitoring Centre (*WCMC; WCMC 2000 as from 2000*), Cambridge, UK.
1992-1997 Head, Biotopes Cartography – Federal Research Institute for Nature Protection of the Ministry for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Russian Federation; Scientific Secretary - the International Institute of Biosphere Informatics, Moscow; Consultant – WWF, GEF/World Bank.
1990-1992 Lead Expert - Main Department of Nature Reserves Management of the USSR Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, Moscow, Russia;
Lead expert - Ministerial State Ecological Expertise Commission, Moscow, Russia;
1975-1989 Researcher, *later* - Lead Researcher - Central Game Management & Natural Reserves Laboratory of the Russian Federation, (*State Wildlife Management Service*), Moscow.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 1998-2006 Training workshops: Ecological data analysis, information management and GIS (for placement students at WCMC and within specialised programs in Chile, China, Russia, Slovenia);
- 2004 Training programme: World Heritage Sites Information Management in Arab countries (UNESCO);
- 1992-1994 Training programme: GIS for wildlife populations assessment (Ministry of Agriculture, Moscow);
- 1991 Training programme and *Practicum*: Computing: Environmental Statistic and Mapping (for protected areas staff and ministerial personnel. Management and Environmental Legislation training for the directors of Federal nature reserves and Regional Environmental Committees personnel);
- 1990-1991 Training Program and lectures: Nature Reserves Management and Environmental Legislation (for Federal nature reserves and Regional Environmental Committees personnel);
- 1987 Training courses: Wildlife Populations: Field Census and Management (for Russian State Hunting Service staff);
- 1981-1982 Zoological *Practicum*: Comparative Anatomy (the Moscow State University).

EVALUATION and ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCE

- 2006 Review of the World Database on Protected Areas. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK.
- 2005 GIS Assessment of the Status of Protected Areas in East Asia. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK.
- 2003 A Protected Areas Gap Analysis for Region XI Chile. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK.
- 2001 Water Birds on the Edge: The First Circumpolar Assessment of Climate Change Impact on Arctic Breeding Water Birds. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK
- 2000 Assessment Forest Integrity and Naturalness in Relation to Biodiversity / On behalf of FAO as part of the Global Forest Resource Assessment 2000. UNEP-WCMC.
- 1999 Environmental Impact Indicators: Developing a logic framework of Spatial Impact Indicators as an Element of Executive Support System (ESS) for European Policy Makers. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK.
- 1999 Assessment of information required for the implementation of the Pan-European Ecological Network UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK.
- 1997 Environmental Impact Assessment of KATEK (Kazakhstan -- Black Sea) Pipeline Project. Moscow-Arhhangelsk, 1997.
- 1993 Ecological Disaster Prevention in the Russian Federation: Environmental Indicators and Criteria for Identification of Ecological Disaster Zones. Moscow.
- 1990-1992 State Ecological Expertise Commission on Industrial Projects Environmental Impact Assessment. (Lead Ministerial Expert and co-Chair)

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

- S. Chape, J. Harrison, M. Spalding and I. Lysenko (2005). **Measuring the extent and effectiveness of protected areas as an indicator for meeting global biodiversity targets**. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B. 360, 443–455
- Blyth, S., Groombridge, B., Lysenko, I., Miles, L., Newton, A. **2003 Global analysis of values and pressures in mountain ecosystems**. In: Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Status and trends of, and threats to mountain biodiversity and marine, coastal and inland water ecosystems. *CBD Technical Series* No 8. p32-33.
- Lysenko I., Henry D. 2000. **Gap Analysis in Support of CPAN: The Russian Arctic** / CAFF Habitat Conservation Report No. 9., CAFF International Secretariat, 58 pp.
- Lysenko, I.G, Carey-Noble, C, Green, M.J.B, Luxmoore, R.A, and Kaitla, S. (1996). **Feasibility Study: Gap Analysis of Forest Protected Areas in Europe** / Compiled by World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, 36pp./6 maps.
- Lysenko I., Harrison J. (1998). **Developing an Information Strategy for the Pan-European Ecological Networks**. - in: The Green Backbone of Central and Eastern Europe, Conference Proceedings, Krakow, 25-27 February 1998.
- Lysenko I. et al. (1995). **GAP-Analysis**. Biodiversity Conservation Program for the Russian Federation, Global Environment Facility. Project preparation component 4, lead expert Lysenko I., Moscow, April 1995. 127 pp.

Annex IX. Terms of Reference for the Evaluation.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP GEF project “Development of the Econet for Long-term Conservation of Biodiversity in the Central Asia Ecoregions” GF/2010-03-03

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Project rationale

The basis for biodiversity conservation in various types of ecosystems has been the system of protected territories of different ranks which would provide, to a certain degree, preservation of natural complexes in general, and rare species in particular. The existing protected areas of Central Asia had, historically, been created one by one, according to various necessities and realities, and the system, lacked the representation of areas of special importance. But the regime of protection of *zapovedniks* (i.e. strictly protected areas) excluded the areas from any type of economic development. On the other hand, it is obvious, that the needs of economic development of the states did not allow for an increase in the area of strictly protected territories to the extent of guaranteeing self-sustainable conservation of biodiversity including the majority of rare species. An approach was suggested for the region, which included creation of ecological corridors between the protected areas, as well as recommendations on specific, ecologically friendly economic development of some intermediate key areas. To identify these areas, a complex analysis had to be carried out, which would combine data, which hitherto had not been brought together and analysed, including: regional scale (data for the whole region); landscape analysis; data on biodiversity (flora and fauna – both potential and existing variability); economic development of the regions (traditional, recent, planned, and potential); the existing system of Protected Area (PA); plans towards expansion on the PA system (including regional priorities, which should be agreed between the Central Asian States).

The overall goal of the project was *‘The creation and integration into the regional and national plans of sustainable development a joint scheme of “Econet” development in the Central Asian Region and the development and implementation of viable mechanisms for long term inter-state co-ordination and collaboration to conserve and sustainably utilise biodiversity’*.

The expected outcomes from this project included:

1. The elaboration of the of the Econet development scheme, based on a regionally unified and integrated information management system (GIS), that combines the existing data on biodiversity and natural resource (at the regional scale), the existing system of protected areas, the economic development (traditional, recent, planned and probable alternatives), together with newly obtained data through limited targeted research to fill key gaps.
2. The elaboration and achievement of an agreement for a regional “Econet” development plan implementation.
3. The establishment of the necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region to allow the effective joint implementation of the Econet plan.

Relevance to GEF Programmes

The project conforms to the GEF Biodiversity – Operational Programs 1 on arid ecosystems with relevance to OP4 on Mountain ecosystems.

Executing Arrangements

The project was executed in accordance with UNEP procedures by WWF normal execution modality. Important implementers included the Regional Environmental Centre and the Laboratory of Geobotany in Almaty. A project steering committee was established which included representatives of UNEP, WWF, Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD) and representatives from the project countries, to ensure each country's full participation and involvement in the project's execution. Additional efforts were made through consultative workshops etc. to ensure the full spectrum of stakeholders had the opportunity to have direct inputs to the projects implementation.

A full time regional project manager and regional experts were employed and were directly responsible for the achievement of project activities. They were supported by a number of consultants and project support staff. Furthermore, the majority of specific activities, particularly in regard to data collection, maps creation, etc., were carried out by relevant experts-grantees with preference being given to NGO's (particularly local NGO's if sufficient capacity could be demonstrated).

Project Activities

The initial project duration was 36 months starting April 2003, which was later revised and extended by three months and was completed in June 2006, bringing total project duration to 39 months.

The project had a number of components²:/ key activities:

1. Development and use of GIS application with existing data that is relevant for development of land use management strategies, combining economic development and biodiversity conservation - data management, analysis and dissemination;
2. Agreement of a framework for the planning of a regional Econet and elaboration of a technical plan based on scientific analysis and criteria and identification of the important national and regional legal, institutional and financial changes and inter-regional level harmonisation required;
3. Development of model legislation in one country (Kazakhstan) within the region as a basis for replication in other countries and thereby allow eventual regional harmonisation;
4. Dissemination of information on the model legislation developed providing practical advice, facilitation, assistance to other countries in the region so to replicate;
5. Regional and national training workshops on national/regional biodiversity conservation planning and management, and on the Econet components design and management;
6. Assistance to at least five NGOs of the region involved in nature conservation education to improve quality of training materials with special explanation of the Econet concept and possibilities for integration of biodiversity conservation in the

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² Please see the Logframe Tracking Form for a more systematic presentation of the project (Annex III)

economy development of the region through alternative development and sustainable use of nature resources.

7. Development of an appropriate website and email list network for the sharing of data produced by the project: the dissemination of biodiversity information generally, and the Econet plan in particular, among all stakeholders

Budget

The total budget was US\$ 2,360,000, with US\$ 750,000 funded by the GEF Trust Fund and co-funding from; WWF US\$ 130,000, CDE US\$ 60,000 and participating countries US\$ 1,195,000, plus PDF-A funds totalling US\$37,000 of which US\$25,000 was funded by the GEF Trust Fund, WWF US\$ 10,000 and participating governments US\$2,000.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE EVALUATION

1. Objective and Scope of the Evaluation

The objective of this terminal evaluation is to determine the extent to which the project objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, and assess if the project has led to any other positive or negative consequences. If possible the extent and magnitude of any project impacts to date will be documented and the likelihood of future impacts will be determined. The evaluation will also assess project performance and the implementation of planned project activities and planned outputs against actual results. The evaluation will focus on the following main questions:

- Has the Econet project assembled all spatial and attribute data on biodiversity, land use, socioeconomic and other key baseline information such as political data on boundaries and infrastructure from the project selected region, in a GIS? Is the data easily accessible to all stakeholders within the region?
- Has the Econet scheme been developed? If so, is it likely to be implemented?
- What is the extent of the applicability and relevance of the information gathered in assisting participating governments and stakeholders to recognize the need for national Econet Plan? To what extent have the specific needs of the target groups of stakeholders been considered in the design process and the recommendations?
- To what extent has the project directly or indirectly affected the participating countries to include Econet development activities in national systems of Protected Areas and its supportive legislation? Include an assessment of capacity built in this regard and present evidence to support judgements and conclusions.
- How have participating countries in the Central Asian Regional Environment Action Plan (REAP) benefited as a direct/indirect result of this project? Present evidence to support judgements and conclusions.
- To what extent has the project assisted in the establishment of the necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region to allow the effective joint implementation of the Econet plan? Present evidence to support judgements and conclusions.

2. Methods

This terminal evaluation will be conducted as an in-depth evaluation using a participatory approach whereby the UNEP/DGEF Task Manager, key representatives of the executing agencies and other relevant staff are kept informed and regularly consulted throughout the evaluation. The consultant will liaise with the UNEP/EOU and the UNEP/DGEF Task Manager on any logistic and/or methodological issues to properly conduct the review in as independent a way as possible, given the circumstances and resources offered. UNEP/EOU is responsible for contracting and logistic matters. The draft report will be circulated to UNEP/DGEF Task Manager, key representatives of the executing agencies and the UNEP/EOU. Any comments or responses to the draft report will be sent to UNEP / EOU for collation and the consultant will be advised of any necessary revisions.

The findings of the evaluation will be based on the following:

1. A desk review of project documents including, but not limited to:
 - a) The project documents, outputs, monitoring reports (such as progress and financial reports to UNEP and GEF annual Project Implementation Review reports) and relevant correspondence.
 - b) Review of specific products and reports including: ECONET Plan, ECONET GIS system, REAP/ISDC decisions on ECONET; ECONET Implementation Strategy, ECONET GIS operational guidelines, country endorsement letters on ECONET plan, technical report(s) on legislative review, model legislation adopted by CA countries, Codex and awareness materials.
 - c) Notes from the Steering Committee Group meetings.
 - d) Relevant material published on web-sites maintained by WWF, ENVIRC and REC.
2. Interviews with project management (such as the Project Director – Olga Pereladova (WWF Moscow), and Regional Coordinator – Tatyana Bragina, Regional Project Manager (Kazakhstan). Telephonic interviews with a selection of 5 representatives of involved CA countries members of the International Steering Committee. See list provided with project materials or contact Olga Pereladova for assistance.
3. Interviews and Telephone interviews with intended users for the project outputs, to each country participating in the project, which were involved with this project. As appropriate, these interviews could be combined with an email questionnaire. It is recommended that Olga Pereladova (WWF Moscow), be contacted for a list of names and contact details.
4. The Consultant shall determine whether to seek additional information and opinions from representatives of donor agencies and other organisations (e.g. WWF and ISDC) by e-mail or through telephone communication.
5. Interviews with the UNEP/DGEF project task manager and Fund Management Officer, and other relevant staff in UNEP dealing with Biodiversity related activities as necessary. The Consultant shall also gain broader perspectives from discussions with relevant GEF Secretariat staff.

Key Evaluation principles.

In attempting to evaluate any outcomes and impacts that the project may have achieved, evaluators should remember that the project's performance should be assessed by considering the difference between the answers to two simple questions "*what happened?*" and "*what would have happened anyway?*". These questions imply that there should be consideration of the baseline conditions and trends in relation to the intended project outcomes and impacts. In addition it implies that there should be plausible evidence to attribute such outcomes and impacts to the actions of the project.

Sometimes, adequate information on baseline conditions and trends is lacking. In such cases this should be clearly highlighted by the evaluator, along with any simplifying assumptions that were taken to enable the evaluator to make informed judgements about project performance.

3. Project Evaluation Parameters

A. Attainment of objectives and planned results:

The assessment of project results seeks to determine the extent to which the project objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, and assess if the project has led to any other positive or negative consequences. While assessing a project's outcomes the evaluation will seek to determine the extent of achievement and shortcomings in reaching the project's objectives as stated in the project document and also indicate if there were any changes and whether those changes were approved. If the project did not establish a baseline (initial conditions), the evaluator should seek to estimate the baseline condition so that achievements and results can be properly established (or simplifying assumptions used). Since most GEF projects can be expected to achieve the anticipated outcomes by project closing, assessment of project outcomes should be a priority. Outcomes are the likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs. Examples of outcomes could include but are not restricted to stronger institutional capacities, higher public awareness (when leading to changes of behaviour), and transformed policy frameworks or markets. The evaluation should assess the extent to which the project's major relevant objectives were effectively and efficiently achieved or are expected to be achieved and their relevance.

- **Effectiveness:** Evaluate how, and to what extent, the stated project objectives have been met, taking into account the “achievement indicators” specified in the project document and logical framework³ together with any additional monitoring tools including the GEF Biodiversity Tracking Tools⁴. In particular, the analysis of outcomes achieved should include, *inter alia*, an assessment of whether and to what extent the results of this project have informed national, regional or international processes.
- **Relevance:** In retrospect, were the project's outcomes consistent with the focal areas/operational program strategies and country priorities? The evaluation should also assess whether outcomes specified in the project document and or logical framework are actually outcomes and not outputs or inputs. Ascertain the nature and significance of the contribution of the project outcomes to the wider portfolio of GEF Biodiversity Operational Programmes 1 on arid ecosystems with relevance to OP4 on Mountain ecosystems.
- **Efficiency:** Cost-effectiveness assesses the achievement of the environmental and developmental objectives as well as the project's outputs in relation to the inputs, costs, and implementing time. Include an assessment of outcomes in relation to inputs, costs, and implementation times based on the following questions: Was the project cost-effective? Was the project the least cost option? Was the project implementation delayed and if it was then did that affect cost-effectiveness? The evaluation should assess the contribution of cash and in-kind co-financing to project implementation and to what extent the project leveraged additional resources.

Specifically the evaluation shall:

2. _____

³ In case in the original or modified expected outcomes are merely outputs/inputs then the evaluators should assess if there were any real outcomes of the project and if yes then whether these are commensurate with the realistic expectations from such projects.

⁴ http://gefweb.org/projects/Focal_Areas/bio/bio_tracking_tools.html. The evaluator should comment on the relevance of these tracking tools to the overall approach adopted by the project.

Evaluate the outcomes of the project with respect to the intended goal of creation and integration into the regional and national plans of sustainable development a joint scheme of “Econet” development in the Central Asian Region and the development and implementation of viable mechanisms for long term inter-state co-ordination and collaboration to conserve and sustainably utilise.

B. Assessment of Sustainability of project outcomes:

Sustainability is understood as the probability of continued long-term project-derived outcomes and impacts after the GEF project funding ends. The evaluation will identify and assess the key conditions or factors that are likely to contribute or undermine the persistence of benefits after the project ends. Some of these factors might be outcomes of the project, e.g. stronger institutional capacities or better informed decision-making. Other factors will include contextual circumstances or developments that are not outcomes of the project but that are relevant to the sustainability of outcomes. The evaluation should ascertain to what extent follow-up work has been initiated and how project outcomes will be sustained and enhanced over time.

Four aspects of sustainability should be addressed: financial, socio-political, institutional frameworks and governance, and ecological (if applicable). The following questions provide guidance on the assessment of these aspects:

- *Financial resources.* To what extent are the outcomes of the project dependent on continued financial support? What is the likelihood that any required financial and economic resources will be available to sustain the project outcomes/benefits will be sustained once the GEF assistance ends (resources can be from multiple sources, such as the public and private sectors, income generating activities, and market trends that support the project’s objectives)? Was the project successful in identifying and leveraging co-financing?
- *Socio-political:* To what extent are the outcomes of the project dependent on socio-political factors? What is the likelihood that the level of stakeholder ownership will allow for the project outcomes/benefits to be sustained? Is there sufficient public/stakeholder awareness in support of the term objectives of the project?
- *Institutional framework and governance:* To what extent are the outcomes of the project dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance? What is the likelihood that institutional and technical achievements, legal frameworks, policies and governance structures and processes will allow for, the project outcomes/benefits to be sustained? While responding to these questions consider if the required systems for accountability and transparency and the required technical know-how are in place.
- *Environmental:* Are there any environmental risks that can undermine the future flow of the project’s environmental benefits? Are there any risks to the ecological sustainability of this project? The Terminal Evaluation should assess whether certain activities in the project area will pose a threat to the sustainability of the project outcomes. For example, construction of dam in a protected area could inundate a sizable area and thereby negatively impact the biodiversity related gains made by the project or, a newly established pulp mill might jeopardise the viability of nearby protected forest areas by increasing logging pressures.

As far as possible, also assess the potential longer-term impacts considering that the evaluation is taking place upon completion of the project and that longer term impact is expected to be seen in a few years time. Frame any recommendations to enhance future project impact in this context. Which will be the major 'channels' for longer term impact from the project at the national and international scales? The evaluation should formulate recommendations that outline possible approaches and necessary actions to facilitate an impact assessment study in a few years time.

C. Catalytic role

The terminal evaluation will also describe any catalytic or replication effect of the project. What examples are there of replication and catalytic outcomes that suggest increased likelihood of sustainability? Replication approach, in the context of GEF projects, is defined as lessons and experiences coming out of the project that are replicated or scaled up in the design and implementation of other projects. Replication can have two aspects, replication proper (lessons and experiences are replicated in different geographic area) or scaling up (lessons and experiences are replicated within the same geographic area but funded by other sources). If no effects are identified, the evaluation will describe the catalytic or replication actions that the project carried out. No ratings are requested for the catalytic role.

D. Achievement of outputs and activities:

Assess the soundness and effectiveness of the methodologies used for developing regional Econet development plan

Assess the establishment of the necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region which should have allowed the effective joint implementation of the Econet plan.

Assess to what extent the project outputs produced have the weight of scientific authority / credibility, necessary to influence policy and decision-makers, particularly at the national or regional levels.

Delivered outputs: Assessment of the project's success in producing each of the programmed outputs, both in quantity and quality as well as usefulness and timeliness:

- Output 1.1: The design and setting-up of a Geographical Information System (GIS) capable of incorporation n standardised formats all relevant spatial and attribute data on biodiversity, land use and other key baseline information
- Output 1.2: Existing and newly gathered data computerised and accessible to all stakeholders for analytical purposes and dissemination
- Output 1.3: Institutional responsibilities and roles in the development and maintenance of the GIS agreed and adequate technical capacity in these institutions to fulfil responsibilities/roles present
- Output 1.4: GIS providing concrete analytical and modelling outputs necessary for developing a scientifically and socio-economically sound plan for regional Econet development
- Output 2.1: Planning framework needed for designing a regional Econet agreed (definition of needs and objectives, full stakeholder identification, discussions, activity mapping and scheduling)

- Output 2.2: Regional plan for developments of an Econet able to maintain the integrity and functioning of the major ecosystems of the region, capable of conserving the highest feasible level of biological diversity, and sustainable within the practical socio-economical conditions of the region.
- Output 3.1: Mechanisms for regional co-operation and integrated actions to conserve biodiversity in place
- Output 3.2: Financing strategy for ensuring the long term financial viability of the Econet plan implementation developed and funding solicited from donors and governments concerned
- Output 3.3: A legislative basis for regional co-operation and integrated action provided through the development of model legislation within one of the countries of the region
- Output 3.4: Increased capacity of relevant institutions and protected area administrations within the region to effectively plan and implement biodiversity conservation activities.
- Output 3.5: Mechanisms for dissemination of information generated by the GIS in place and awareness of key stakeholders increased.

E. Assessment of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:

- **M&E design.** Did the project have a sound M&E plan to monitor results and track progress towards achieving project objectives? The Terminal Evaluation will assess whether the project met the minimum requirements for project design of M&E and the application of the Project M&E plan (Minimum requirements are specified in Annex 4). The evaluation shall include an assessment of the quality, application and effectiveness of project monitoring and evaluation plans and tools, including an assessment of risk management based on the assumptions and risks identified in the project document. The M&E plan should include a baseline (including data, methodology, etc.), SMART (see Annex 4) indicators and data analysis systems, and evaluation studies at specific times to assess results. The time frame for various M&E activities and standards for outputs should have been specified.
- **M&E plan implementation.** Was an M&E system in place and did it facilitate tracking of results and progress towards projects objectives throughout the project implementation period. Were Annual project reports complete, accurate and with well justified ratings? Was the information provided by the M&E system used during the project to improve project performance and to adapt to changing needs? Did the Projects have an M&E system in place with proper training for parties responsible for M&E activities to ensure data will continue to be collected and used after project closure? Has the project completed the GEF Biodiversity Tracking Tools in accordance with requirements? (i.e. (i) at project inception, (ii) at mid term and (iii) before closure).
- **Budgeting and Funding for M&E activities.** Were adequate budget provisions made for M&E made and were such resources made available in a timely fashion during implementation?
- **Long-term Monitoring.** Is long-term monitoring envisaged as an outcome of the project? If so, comment specifically on the relevance of such monitoring systems to sustaining project outcomes and how the monitoring effort will be sustained.

F. Assessment of processes that affected attainment of project results.

The evaluation will consider, but need not be limited to, consideration of the following issues that may have affected project implementation and attainment of project results:

- i. **Preparation and readiness.** Were the project's objectives and components clear, practicable and feasible within its timeframe? Were capacities of the executing institutions and counterparts properly considered when the project was designed? Were lessons from other relevant projects properly incorporated in design? Were the partnership arrangements properly identified and the roles and responsibilities negotiated prior to implementation? Was availability of counterpart resources (funding, staff, and facilities), passage of enabling legislation, and adequate project management arrangements in place at project entry?
 - Ascertain to what extent the project implementation mechanisms outlined in the project document have been closely followed. In particular, assess the role of the various committees established and whether the project document was clear and realistic to enable effective and efficient implementation, whether the project was executed according to the plan and how well the management was able to adapt to changes during the life of the project to enable the implementation of the project.
 - Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency and adaptability of project management and the supervision of project activities / project execution arrangements at all levels (1) policy decisions: Steering Group; (2) day to day project management; (3) GEF guidance: UNEP DGEF
- ii. **Country ownership/Driveness.** This is the relevance of the project to national development and environmental agendas, recipient country commitment, and regional and international agreements. Examples of possible evaluative questions include: Was the project design in-line with the national sectoral and development priorities and plans? Are project outcomes contributing to national development priorities and plans? Were the relevant country representatives, from government and civil society, involved in the project? Did the recipient governments maintain its financial commitment to the project? Have the governments approved policies or regulatory frameworks been in-line with the project's objectives? Specifically the evaluation will:
 - Assess the level of country ownership. Specifically, the evaluator should assess whether the project was effective in catalyzing
- iii. **Stakeholder involvement.** Did the project involve the relevant stakeholders through information sharing, consultation and by seeking their participation in project's design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation? For example, did the project implement appropriate outreach and public awareness campaigns? Did the project consult and make use of the skills, experience and knowledge of the appropriate government entities, NGOs, community groups, private sector, local governments and academic institutions in the design, implementation and evaluation of project activities? Were perspectives of those that would be affected by decisions, those that could affect the outcomes and those that could contribute information or other resources to the process taken into account while taking decisions? Were the relevant vulnerable groups and the powerful, the supporters and the opponents, of the processes properly involved? Specifically the evaluation will:
 - Assess the mechanisms put in place by the project for identification and engagement of stakeholders in each participating country and establish, in consultation with the stakeholders, whether this mechanism was successful, and identify its strengths and weaknesses. Particular attention should be given to the

level of participation by government line agencies in the drafting and review of the ECONET Plan, ECONET as part of the Framework Convention of REAP, and the ECONET Implementation Strategy.

- Assess the degree and effectiveness of collaboration/interactions between the various project partners and institutions during the course of implementation of the project.
 - Assess the degree and effectiveness of any various public awareness activities that were undertaken during the course of implementation of the project both within the countries as well as in the international context such as the CBD CoP in Brazil early 2006.
- iv. **Financial planning.** Did the project have the appropriate financial controls, including reporting and planning, that allowed management to make informed decisions regarding the budget and allowed for timely flow of funds? Specifically, the evaluation should:
- a. Assess the strength and utility of financial controls, including reporting, and planning to allow the project management to make informed decisions regarding the budget and allow for a proper and timely flow of funds for the payment of satisfactory project deliverables throughout the project's lifetime.
 - b. Present the major findings from the financial audit if one has been conducted.
 - c. Did promised co-financing materialize? Identify and verify the sources of co-financing as well as leveraged and associated financing (in co-operation with the IA and EA).
 - d. Assess whether the project has applied appropriate standards of due diligence in the management of funds and financial audits.
 - e. The evaluation should also include a breakdown of final actual project costs by activities compared to budget (variances), financial management (including disbursement issues), and co-financing. This information will be prepared by the relevant DGEF Fund Management Officer of the project for scrutiny by the evaluator (table attached in Annex 1 Co-financing and leveraged resources).
- v. **UNEP Supervision and backstopping.** Did UNEP Agency staff identify problems in a timely fashion and accurately estimate its seriousness? Did UNEP staff provide quality support and advice to the project, approved modifications in time and restructure the project when needed? Did UNEP and Executing Agencies provide the right staffing levels, continuity, skill mix, frequency of field visits?
- vi. **Co-financing and Project Outcomes & Sustainability.** If there was a difference in the level of expected co-financing and actual co-financing, then what were the reasons for this? Did the extent of materialization of co-financing affect the project's outcomes and/or sustainability, and if it did affect outcomes and sustainability then in what ways and through what causal linkages?
- vii. **Delays and Project Outcomes & Sustainability.** If there were delays in project implementation and completion, the evaluation will summarise the reasons for them. Did delays affect the project's outcomes and/or sustainability, and if so in what ways and through what causal linkages?

The *ratings will be presented in the form of a table* with each of the categories rated separately and with **brief justifications for the rating** based on the findings of the main analysis. An overall rating for the project should also be given. The rating system to be applied is specified in Annex 1.

4. Evaluation Report Format and Review Procedures

The report should be brief, to the point and easy to understand. It must explain; the purpose of the evaluation, exactly what was evaluated and the methods used. The report must highlight any methodological limitations, identify key concerns and present evidence-based findings, consequent conclusions, recommendations and lessons. The report should provide information on when the evaluation took place, the places visited, who was involved and be presented in a way that makes the information accessible and comprehensible. The report should include an executive summary that encapsulates the essence of the information contained in the report to facilitate dissemination and distillation of lessons.

Evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations should be presented in a complete and balanced manner. The evaluation report shall be written in English, be of no more than 50 pages (excluding annexes), use numbered paragraphs and include:

- i.) An **executive summary** (no more than 3 pages) providing a brief overview of the main conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation;
- ii.) **Introduction and background** giving a brief overview of the evaluated project, for example, the objective and status of activities;
- iii.) **Scope, objective and methods** presenting the evaluation's purpose, the evaluation criteria used and questions to be addressed;
- iv.) **Project Performance and Impact** providing factual evidence relevant to the questions asked by the evaluator and interpretations of such evidence. This is the main substantive section of the report and should provide a commentary on all evaluation aspects (A – F above).
- v.) **Conclusions and rating** of project implementation success giving the evaluator's concluding assessments and ratings of the project against given evaluation criteria and standards of performance. The conclusions should provide answers to questions about whether the project is considered good or bad, and whether the results are considered positive or negative;
- vi.) **Lessons learned** presenting general conclusions from the standpoint of the design and implementation of the project, based on good practices and successes or problems and mistakes. Lessons should have the potential for wider application and use. All lessons should 'stand alone and should:
 - Specify the context from which they are derived
 - State or imply some prescriptive action;
 - Specify the contexts in which they may be applied (if possible who when and where)
- vii.) **Recommendations** suggesting *actionable* proposals regarding improvements of the current project. They may cover, for example, resource allocation, financing, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Recommendations should always be specific in terms of who would do what, provide a timeframe, and a measurable performance target. In general, Terminal Evaluations are likely to have very few (only two or three) actionable recommendations;
- viii.) **Annexes** include Terms of Reference, list of interviewees, documents reviewed, brief summary of the expertise of the evaluator / evaluation team, a summary of co-finance information etc.. Dissident views or management responses to the evaluation findings may later be appended in an annex.

Examples of UNEP GEF Terminal Evaluation Reports are available at www.unep.org/eou

Review of the Draft Evaluation Report

Draft reports submitted to UNEP EOU are shared with the corresponding Programme or Project Officer and his or her supervisor for initial review and consultation. The DGEF staff and senior Executing Agency staff are allowed to comment on the draft evaluation report. They may provide feedback on any errors of fact and may highlight the significance of such errors in any conclusions. The consultation also seeks agreement on the findings and recommendations. UNEP EOU collates the review comments and provides them to the evaluators for their consideration in preparing the final version of the report.

All UNEP GEF Evaluation Reports are subject to quality assessments by UNEP EOU. These incorporate GEF Office of Evaluation quality assessment criteria and are used as a tool for providing structured feedback to the evaluator (see Annex 3).

5. Submission of Final Terminal Evaluation Reports.

The final report shall be submitted in electronic form in MS Word format and should be sent to the following persons:

Segbedzi Norgbey, Chief, Evaluation and Oversight Unit
UNEP, P.O. Box 30552
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel.: (254-20) 624181
Fax: (254-20) 623158
Email: segbedzi.norgbey@unep.org

With a copy to:

Olivier Deleuze, Officer-in-Charge
UNEP/Division of GEF Coordination
P.O. Box 30552
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: + 254-20-7624686
Fax: + 254-20-624041/4042
Email: olivier.deleuze@unep.org

Max Zieren
UNEP/GEF Task Manager
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
Division of GEF Coordination (DGEF)
PO Box 30552
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: 254 20 7624795
Fax: 254 20 7624041/2
Email: max.zieren@unep.org

Anna Tengberg
Acting - UNEP/GEF SPO Biodiversity
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
Division of GEF Coordination (DGEF)
PO Box 30552
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: 254 20 7624147
Email: anna.tengberg@unep.org

The final evaluation report will be printed in hard copy and published on the Evaluation and Oversight Unit's web-site www.unep.org/eou. Subsequently, the report will be sent to the GEF Office of Evaluation for their review, appraisal and inclusion on the GEF website. In addition the final Evaluation report will be disseminated to: The relevant GEF Focal points, Relevant Government representatives, UNEP DGEF Professional Staff, The project's Executing Agency and Technical Staff. The full list of intended recipients is attached in Annex 5.

Resources and schedule of the evaluation

This terminal evaluation will be undertaken by an international evaluator contracted by the Evaluation and Oversight Unit, UNEP. The contract for the evaluator will begin on August 1st, 2007 and end on October 3rd, 2007 (25 days) spread over 9 weeks (8 days of travel, to Moscow and Alaty-Kazakhstan and 12 days desk study). The evaluator will submit a draft report on October 18th, 2007 to UNEP/EOU, the UNEP/DGEF Task Manager, and key representatives of the executing agencies. Any comments or responses to the draft report will be sent to UNEP / EOU for collation and the consultant will be advised of any necessary revisions. Comments to the final draft report will be sent to the consultant by October 29th, 2007 after which, the consultant will submit the final report no later than 12nd November, 2007.

In accordance with UNEP/GEF policy, all GEF projects are evaluated by independent evaluators contracted as consultants by the EOU.

The evaluator should not have been associated with the design and implementation of the project. The evaluator will work under the overall supervision of the Chief, Evaluation and Oversight Unit, UNEP. The evaluator should be an international expert in biodiversity management or conservation with a sound understanding of issues relating to protected areas. The consultant should have the following minimum qualifications: (i) experience in biodiversity and protected area management; (ii) experience with management and implementation of biodiversity projects and networks and, in particular, with development and implementation of local, regional and national biodiversity planning initiatives; (iii) experience with project evaluation. Knowledge of UNEP programmes and GEF activities is desirable. Fluency in oral and written English is a must.

7. Schedule Of Payment

The consultant shall select one of the following two contract options.

Lump-Sum Option The evaluator will receive an initial payment of 30% of the total amount due upon signature of the contract. A further 30% will be paid upon submission of the draft report. A final payment of 40% will be made upon satisfactory completion of work. The fee is payable under the individual Special Service Agreement (SSA) of the evaluator and IS **inclusive** of all expenses such as travel, accommodation and incidental expenses.

Fee-only Option

The evaluator will receive an initial payment of 40% of the total amount due upon signature of the contract. Final payment of 60% will be made upon satisfactory completion of work. The fee is payable under the individual SSAs of the evaluator and is NOT inclusive of all expenses such as travel, accommodation and incidental expenses. Ticket and DSA will be paid separately.

The consultant's choice of payment option will be specified in the signed contract with UNEP.

In case, the evaluator cannot provide the products in accordance with the TORs, the timeframe agreed, or his products are substandard, the payment to the evaluator could be withheld, until such a time the products are modified to meet UNEP's standard. In case the evaluator fails to submit a satisfactory final product to UNEP, the product prepared by the evaluator may not constitute the evaluation report.

Annex 1. OVERALL RATINGS TABLE

| Criterion | Evaluator's Summary Comments | Evaluator's Rating |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Attainment of project objectives and results (overall rating) | | |
| Sub criteria (below) | | |
| Effectiveness | | |
| Relevance | | |
| Efficiency | | |
| Sustainability of Project outcomes (overall rating) | | |
| Sub criteria (below) | | |
| Financial | | |
| Socio Political | | |
| Institutional framework and governance | | |
| Ecological | | |
| Achievement of outputs and activities | | |
| Monitoring and Evaluation (overall rating) | | |
| Sub criteria (below) | | |
| M&E Design | | |
| M&E Plan Implementation (use for adaptive management) | | |
| Budgeting and Funding for M&E activities | | |
| Catalytic Role | | |
| Preparation and readiness | | |
| Country ownership / driveness | | |
| Stakeholders involvement | | |
| Financial planning | | |
| UNEP Supervision and backstopping | | |
| Overall Rating | | |

RATING OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

Highly Satisfactory (HS): The project had no shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Satisfactory (S): The project had minor shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Moderately Satisfactory (MS): The project had moderate shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): The project had significant shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Unsatisfactory (U): The project had major shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): The project had severe shortcomings in the achievement of its objectives, in terms of relevance, effectiveness or efficiency.

Please note: Relevance and effectiveness will be considered as critical criteria. The overall rating of the project for achievement of objectives and results **may not be higher** than the lowest rating on either of these two criteria. Thus, to have an overall satisfactory rating for outcomes a project must have at least satisfactory ratings on both relevance and effectiveness.

RATINGS ON SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability will be understood as the probability of continued long-term outcomes and impacts after the GEF project funding ends. The Terminal evaluation will identify and assess the key conditions or factors that are likely to contribute or undermine the persistence of benefits after the project ends. Some of these factors might be outcomes of the project, i.e. stronger institutional capacities, legal frameworks, socio-economic incentives /or public awareness. Other factors will include contextual circumstances or developments that are not outcomes of the project but that are relevant to the sustainability of outcomes..

Rating system for sustainability sub-criteria

On each of the dimensions of sustainability of the project outcomes will be rated as follows.

Likely (L): There are no risks affecting this dimension of sustainability.

Moderately Likely (ML). There are moderate risks that affect this dimension of sustainability.

Moderately Unlikely (MU): There are significant risks that affect this dimension of sustainability

Unlikely (U): There are severe risks that affect this dimension of sustainability.

All the risk dimensions of sustainability are critical. Therefore, overall rating for sustainability will not be higher than the rating of the dimension with lowest ratings. For example, if a project has an Unlikely rating in either of the dimensions then its overall rating cannot be higher than Unlikely, regardless of whether higher ratings in other dimensions of sustainability produce a higher average.

RATINGS OF PROJECT M&E

Monitoring is a continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing project with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds. Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, its design, implementation and results. Project evaluation may involve the definition of appropriate standards, the examination of performance against those standards, and an assessment of actual and expected results.

The Project monitoring and evaluation system will be rated on ‘M&E Design’, ‘M&E Plan Implementation’ and ‘Budgeting and Funding for M&E activities’ as follows:

Highly Satisfactory (HS): There were no shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Satisfactory (S): There were minor shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Moderately Satisfactory (MS): There were moderate shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): There were significant shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Unsatisfactory (U): There were major shortcomings in the project M&E system.

Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): The Project had no M&E system.

“M&E plan implementation” will be considered a critical parameter for the overall assessment of the M&E system. The overall rating for the M&E systems will not be higher than the rating on “M&E plan implementation.”

All other ratings will be on the GEF six point scale.

| GEF Performance Description | Alternative description on the same scale |
|--------------------------------|---|
| HS = Highly Satisfactory | Excellent |
| S = Satisfactory | Well above average |
| MS = Moderately Satisfactory | Average |
| MU = Moderately Unsatisfactory | Below Average |
| U = Unsatisfactory | Poor |
| HU = Highly Unsatisfactory | Very poor (Appalling) |

Annex 2. Co-financing and Leveraged Resources

Co-financing (basic data to be supplied to the consultant for verification)

2.

| Co financing (Type/Source) | IA own Financing (US\$) | | Government (US\$) | | Other* (US\$) | | Total (US\$) | | Total Disbursement (US\$) | |
|--|-------------------------------|--------|----------------------|--------|------------------|--------|-----------------|--------|---------------------------------|--------|
| | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual |
| – Grants | | | | | | | | | | |
| – Loans/Concessional (compared to market rate) | | | | | | | | | | |
| – Credits | | | | | | | | | | |
| – Equity investments | | | | | | | | | | |
| – In-kind support | | | | | | | | | | |
| -- Other (*) | | | | | | | | | | |
| - | | | | | | | | | | |
| - | | | | | | | | | | |
| - | | | | | | | | | | |
| - | | | | | | | | | | |
| - | | | | | | | | | | |
| Totals | | | | | | | | | | |

* Other is referred to contributions mobilized for the project from other multilateral agencies, bilateral development cooperation agencies, NGOs, the private sector and beneficiaries.

Leveraged Resources

Leveraged resources are additional resources—beyond those committed to the project itself at the time of approval—that are mobilized later as a direct result of the project. Leveraged resources can be financial or in-kind and they may be from other donors, NGO's, foundations, governments, communities or the private sector. Please briefly describe the resources the project has leveraged since inception and indicate how these resources are contributing to the project's ultimate objective.

Table showing final actual project expenditure by activity to be supplied by the UNEP Fund management Officer. (insert here)

| Co financing (Type/Source) | IA own Financing (US\$) | | Government (US\$) | | Other* (US\$) | | Total (US\$) | | Total Disbursement (US\$) | |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-------------|------------------|----------|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual | Planned | Actual |
| – Grants | \$130 000 | \$300 000 | | | \$25 000 | \$25 000 | \$155 000 | \$325 000 | \$155 000 | \$325 000 |
| – Loans/Concessional (compared to market rate) | | | | | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| – Credits | | | | | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| – Equity investments | | | | | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| – In-kind support | | | \$1 195 000 | \$6 400 000 | \$35 000 | \$35 000 | \$1 230 000 | \$6 435 000 | \$1 230 000 | \$6 435 000 |
| - Other (*) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Totals | \$130 000 | \$300 000 | \$1 195 000 | \$6 400 000 | \$60 000 | \$60 000 | \$1 385 000 | \$6 760 000 | \$1 385 000 | \$6 760 000 |

* Other is referred to contributions mobilized for the project from other multilateral agencies, bilateral development cooperation agencies, NGOs, the private sector and beneficiaries.

Annex 3

Review of the Draft Report

Draft reports submitted to UNEP EOU are shared with the corresponding Programme or Project Officer and his or her supervisor for initial review and consultation. The DGEF staff and senior Executing Agency staff provide comments on the draft evaluation report. They may provide feedback on any errors of fact and may highlight the significance of such errors in any conclusions. The consultation also seeks agreement on the findings and recommendations. UNEP EOU collates the review comments and provides them to the evaluators for their consideration in preparing the final version of the report. General comments on the draft report with respect to compliance with these TOR are shared with the reviewer.

Quality Assessment of the Evaluation Report

All UNEP GEF Mid Term Reports are subject to quality assessments by UNEP EOU. These apply GEF Office of Evaluation quality assessment and are used as a tool for providing structured feedback to the evaluator.

The quality of the draft evaluation report is assessed and rated against the following criteria:

| GEF Report Quality Criteria | UNEP EOU Assessment | Rating |
|---|----------------------------|---------------|
| A. Did the report present an assessment of relevant outcomes and achievement of project objectives in the context of the focal area program indicators if applicable? | | |
| B. Was the report consistent and the evidence complete and convincing and were the ratings substantiated when used? | | |
| C. Did the report present a sound assessment of sustainability of outcomes? | | |
| D. Were the lessons and recommendations supported by the evidence presented? | | |
| E. Did the report include the actual project costs (total and per activity) and actual co-financing used? | | |
| F. Did the report include an assessment of the quality of the project M&E system and its use for project management? | | |
| UNEP EOU additional Report Quality Criteria | UNEP EOU Assessment | Rating |
| G. Quality of the lessons: Were lessons readily applicable in other contexts? Did they suggest prescriptive action? | | |
| H. Quality of the recommendations: Did recommendations specify the actions necessary to correct existing conditions or improve operations ('who?' 'what?' 'where?' 'when?'). Can they be implemented? Did the recommendations specify a goal and an associated performance indicator? | | |
| I. Was the report well written? (clear English language and grammar) | | |
| J. Did the report structure follow EOU guidelines, were all requested Annexes included? | | |
| K. Were all evaluation aspects specified in the TORs adequately addressed? | | |
| L. Was the report delivered in a timely manner | | |

| |
|---|
| GEF Quality of the MTE report = $0.3*(A + B) + 0.1*(C+D+E+F)$ |
| EOU assessment of MTE report = $0.3*(G + H) + 0.1*(I+J+K+L)$ |
| Combined quality Rating = $(2* \text{'GEF EO' rating} + \text{EOU rating})/3$ |
| The Totals are rounded and converted to the scale of HS to HU |

Rating system for quality of terminal evaluation reports

A number rating 1-6 is used for each criterion:

Highly Satisfactory = 6

Satisfactory = 5

Moderately Satisfactory = 4

Moderately Unsatisfactory = 3

Unsatisfactory = 2

Highly Unsatisfactory = 1

and unable to assess = 0.

Annex 4 GEF Minimum requirements for M&E

Minimum Requirement 1: Project Design of M&E⁵

All projects must include a concrete and fully budgeted monitoring and evaluation plan by the time of Work Program entry (full-sized projects) or CEO approval (medium-sized projects). This plan must contain at a minimum:

- SMART (see below) indicators for project implementation, or, if no indicators are identified, an alternative plan for monitoring that will deliver reliable and valid information to management
- SMART indicators for results (outcomes and, if applicable, impacts), and, where appropriate, corporate-level indicators
- A project baseline, with:
 - a description of the problem to address
 - indicator data
 - or, if major baseline indicators are not identified, an alternative plan for addressing this within one year of implementation
- An M&E Plan with identification of reviews and evaluations which will be undertaken, such as mid-term reviews or evaluations of activities
- An organizational setup and budgets for monitoring and evaluation.

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⁵ <http://gefweb.org/MonitoringandEvaluation/MEPoliciesProcedures/MEPTools/meptstandards.html>

Minimum Requirement 2: Application of Project M&E

- Project monitoring and supervision will include implementation of the M&E plan, comprising:
- Use of SMART indicators for implementation (or provision of a reasonable explanation if not used)
- Use of SMART indicators for results (or provision of a reasonable explanation if not used)
- Fully established baseline for the project and data compiled to review progress
- Evaluations are undertaken as planned
- Operational organizational setup for M&E and budgets spent as planned.

SMART INDICATORS GEF projects and programs should monitor using relevant performance indicators. The monitoring system should be “SMART”:

1. **Specific:** The system captures the essence of the desired result by clearly and directly relating to achieving an objective, and only that objective.
2. **Measurable:** The monitoring system and its indicators are unambiguously specified so that all parties agree on what the system covers and there are practical ways to measure the indicators and results.
3. **Achievable and Attributable:** The system identifies what changes are anticipated as a result of the intervention and whether the result(s) are realistic. Attribution requires that changes in the targeted developmental issue can be linked to the intervention.
4. **Relevant and Realistic:** The system establishes levels of performance that are likely to be achieved in a practical manner, and that reflect the expectations of stakeholders.
5. **Time-bound, Timely, Trackable, and Targeted:** The system allows progress to be tracked in a cost-effective manner at desired frequency for a set period, with clear identification of the particular stakeholder group to be impacted by the project or program.

Annex 5 List of intended additional recipients for the Terminal Evaluation

| Name | Affiliation | Email |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Mail list | UNEP DGEF Professional staff | |
| | | |
| Aaron Zazueta | GEF Evaluation Office | azazueta@thegef.org |
| Government Officials | | |
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| GEF Focal Point(s) | | |
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