

**United Nations Environment Programme**

**Promoting best practices for conservation and  
sustainable use of biodiversity of global  
significance in arid and semi-arid zones**

**GF/1300-99-03**

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**December 2003**

**Evaluation and Oversight Unit**

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## **Acknowledgements**

The consultant would like to thank all of those who have assisted him by giving their time to discuss the project – whether in person, by telephone or through e-mail. In particular he would like to thank the project management team at the Third World Network of Scientific Organizations in Trieste: Mohamed Hassan, John Lemons, Daniel Schaffer and Helen Martin, with whom he spent an instructive and enjoyable two days in late November 2003. Their comprehensive documentation, efficient record keeping and above all frankness has made this evaluator's task much easier.

Thanks are also due to those project partners with whom I spoke on the telephone or who responded to my inquiries by e-mail: Mohammed M. Ajlouni (Jordan), Jorge Araya (Chile), Vincent Campbell (Jamaica), M. B. K. Darkoh (Botswana), Rosanna Ginocchio (Chile), Brij Gopal (India), Carlos A. Joly (Brazil), Gloria Montenegro (Chile), Lambert Georges Ouedraogo (Burkina Faso), Bachir Raissouni (Morocco) and Mary Seely (Namibia).

I am also grateful for the openness of those with whom I discussed the project and the draft evaluation at UNEP in Nairobi: Anna Tengberg, Sheila Agarwal-Khan and Segbedzi Norgbey.

## **Acronyms and abbreviations**

EOU	Evaluation and Oversight Unit
GEF	Global Environment Facility
STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (of GEF)
TWAS	Third World Academy of Sciences
TWNSO	Third World Network of Scientific Organizations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-GEF	UNEP as a GEF implementing agency

## Executive summary

1. The project on promoting best practices for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid zones (also referred to herein as “the project”) was designed to uncover, document and disseminate successes in protecting, while sustainably using, biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid ecosystems in Southern nations. Project implementation – through the Third World Network of Scientific Organizations (TWNISO) based in Trieste, Italy, in collaboration with institutions throughout the South – began in August 2000, and though this was designed to be a two-year project, it had not ended at the time of the evaluation, some three years later.

### A. Findings

2. The target number of case studies or “best practices” originally set was 30, yet the final total documented was 56, with only a few rejected. This is impressive and in itself goes far to justify the underlying rationale for the project. There is a pool of biodiversity initiatives in the drylands. The medium of presentation of the case studies was varied. The “top” cases were reserved for the flagship “Kluwer book” (Lemons, Victor and Schaffer 2003). The remaining case studies have been summarized in a TWNSO monograph (TWNISO/UNEP-GEF 2003).<sup>1</sup> A full version of these case studies will be published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries. In addition, a “popular” version of selected case studies is being planned for distribution to a broader audience.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the academic publisher Kluwer was prepared to publish a print run of 2,500 books, without a mandatory buy-back clause, is testimony to the quality of the best cases. Similarly, the fact that the UNDP Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries has agreed to publish 10,000 copies of the TWNSO monograph speaks well for the broad interest that others have shown in this project.

3. However, not all case studies are necessarily best practices, as indeed discussed in the various writings. Hence there is a need to extract common denominators of success: namely, the lessons. The project seems rather cautious in terms of setting out such lessons prominently. The main lessons presented in the Kluwer book (pages 6 and 7), though useful, are effectively recommendations for better biodiversity conservation at a higher level, rather than elements of successful cases.

4. While well written, every document is presented in English. There are not even summaries in other languages. There is an inherent danger here of linguistic marginalization. The lack of expansive introductory sections detracts from the various written products. There is also a paucity of photographs, diagrams, analytical and summary charts, tables and maps. “Rich biodiversity in arid zones” conjures up exotic images, and leaves the reader (specialist or not) curious to know and see more.

5. The number of institutions worked with rose from the planned 15 to 55, from 33 countries. This was largely because of the attraction of the regional workshops, combined with an intentional effort by TWNSO management<sup>3</sup> to increase participation. This is a very positive aspect, and has helped dissemination through professional contacts. There are several examples of coordination or partnership between institutions and individuals that have occurred and which continue on a case-by-case basis. It is too early to say to what extent this could be sustained without support. Project management regards structured networking as a future, separately funded activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Lemons, Victor and Schaffer 2003 is generally referred to in the text as the “Kluwer book”; TWNSO/UNEP-GEF 2003 as the “monograph”. Both titles are cited in full in annex III.

<sup>2</sup> It is proposed that the popular book be produced through a specialist environmental/development publishing house based in the United Kingdom. Details are currently are being negotiated.

<sup>3</sup> TWNSO management is generally referred to in the text as “management” or “project management”.

6. Judged on the actual wording of objective 3 (“assisting the efforts of local populations ... to manage ...” etc.) the project simply has not performed, and could not reasonably have been expected to. The objective was unrealistic.
7. The impression of frugality and sensible expenditure during the exercise comes across strongly. This has been a cost-effective project.
8. There has been an excellent relationship between all parties: TWNSO, its Southern partners and UNEP as a Global Environment Facility (GEF) implementing agency (UNEP-GEF). There is also a clear sense of Southern ownership of the project. TWNSO has not directed with a heavy hand, but sensitively managed and facilitated from Trieste. Credit should be given for setting up an advisory board, and for delegating much of the organizational work for the regional and international meetings to the collaborating hosts.
9. Management has fulfilled its reporting obligations to UNEP-GEF, though admits that the demands for quarterly, half-yearly and (particularly) programme implementation reports have been something of a chore. An internal evaluation exercise was also carried out and used to inform the terminal report. This was a commendable initiative and very useful to the current evaluation.

## **B. Ratings**

10. The overall average rating awarded by this evaluator, taking the average of 11 parameters, is 2 (on a scale of 1 = best, 5 = poorest), which is “very good”.

## **C. Lessons learned**

11. Whatever project organizational set-up is established, success or failure invariably hangs on the personnel involved. The project has been extremely fortunate in having dedicated professionals at TWNSO, supported by a highly proficient secretariat.
12. There is a clear case of a project objective (number 3) being unrealistic in its scope. Project proposals should be vetted for realism so implementers are not shouldered with impossible targets and project partners’ expectations unnecessarily raised. All parties have implicitly assumed that this objective was never likely to be achieved.
13. Despite the problems of definitions and different understanding of concepts, the project was based on a correct assumption: there are many biodiversity initiatives in the dry zones and the practitioners have a genuine interest in sharing experience.
14. Despite a strong project focus aimed at the research and academic audience it is important, as is planned, to broaden the spread of the message through two more publications, including a popular book. Such media as pictures, drawings, maps and tabular overviews are extraordinarily important aids to understanding. Global interest in biodiversity will surely benefit from more explicit links with visualization. It would also help if the web site was illustrated and made more attractive and user-friendly.
15. Even if there are not many generic or scientifically proven lessons there is always value in highlighting those that can be drawn when a group of quite disparate case studies is presented.
16. Logical frameworks (logframes) should be simplified as much as possible, and those who are bound by them in implementation should be assisted in understanding what they mean and to what extent adaptive management (responsiveness) is permitted. No research or development project should be without a plan for the post-project process, either through institutional embedding or a follow-up programme. This project will take nearly four years, rather than the two envisaged. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. While developing contingency timelines in projects might be an attractive concept it could create problems for good monitoring and evaluation. Better to be realistic – and conservative – about timelines from the outset.

17. Is the burden of mandatory monitoring and evaluation detracting from professional time that could better be spent in the field on content-related matters? To what extent are the checks and balances put in place actually necessary? These are relevant questions in a well-run project such as this: here there may not be the need for so much monitoring and evaluation. However, the monitoring and evaluation procedures required under UNEP-GEF projects act as a safeguard for less well-managed projects.

#### **D. Recommendations**

18. This evaluator strongly supports the idea of a popular book to spread the results of the project more widely. The project should also consider, with its partners, local language versions of the case study summaries, with a fuller introduction.<sup>4</sup> A simple analytical table or matrix presenting the case studies against specific parameters could be very useful in the popular book. This matrix, together with a summary of the five generic lessons learned and the six main recommendations (in the Kluwer book), could be the basis for a self-standing summary handout. The project should consider producing local language versions of the case study summaries, perhaps cost-sharing with its collaborating partners.

19. A few days on web site development would reap significant rewards at relatively little cost. It would also be useful to set up a system to record hits on the web site. Management should also redraft the terminal report towards the end of the project.

20. Efforts should not be allowed to wither, but should be supported by the development of a broad-based, funded network as part of a follow-on project. Furthermore, TWNSO should be supported in its plan to hold a separate workshop to plan a project for pilot activities at the local land-user level. It is recommended that UNEP-GEF encourages and supports, in whatever ways possible, proposed continuation activities by TWNSO, even if UNEP-GEF is unable to be the source of funding.

21. The project has not been officially terminated and there are still funds to spend: it is recommended that adequate time be allowed, certainly until April 2004, to complete the popular publication, and other recommendations made here.

22. With respect to project design and implementation it is recommended that UNEP-GEF looks afresh at objectives, logframes, monitoring and evaluation, and aspects of time contingency planning in its projects.

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<sup>4</sup> Case study summaries: an in-house monograph comprising one-page summaries of 53 case studies with a one-page introduction (see annex III).

## I. Introduction

### A. Background to the project

23. The project on promoting best practices for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid zones was designed to uncover, document and disseminate successes in protecting, while sustainably using, biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid ecosystems in Southern countries (box 1).

24. At the time of project design, in the mid-late 1990s, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) did not have a large portfolio of such practices, yet it was believed that there could be (to quote the 1999 project document) “high potential for achieving global diversity benefits through appropriately designed activities in such ecosystems and the sustainable use of biodiversity resources of global significance”.

25. Thus, in summary, the rationale of the project was that many such examples – or best practices – existed, yet they were not widely known, nor was there adequate contact between the individuals and institutions involved. This spread of information and improved networking could then build a platform for replication of such initiatives in the South. That would involve, and benefit, populations in those dry regions where increasing land degradation and poverty were growing threats.

#### **Box 1. Objectives, outcomes and activities of the project**

*summarized from project document of October 1999*

##### **Objectives**

1. Identifying and disseminating best practices for conserving and sustainably using biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid ecosystems
2. Increasing collaboration between centres of excellence in biodiversity of drylands by facilitating exchange of information, research cooperation and coordination of lessons and best practices
3. Assisting the efforts of local populations in dryland regions to manage and sustainably utilize the fragile ecosystems

##### **Outcomes**

1. Increased availability of and access to information on best practices
2. Increased awareness by local populations of lessons and best practices
3. Increased awareness of the values of the biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid ecosystems
4. Increased coordination between institutions resulting in turn in more effective programming of scarce resources
5. Increased partnership of institutions of excellence in the South working on similar issues resulting in increased capacity

##### **Activities**

1. Preparation by centres of excellence of case studies
2. Convening of four regional meetings to share best practices
3. Convening of one global meeting in Egypt to share experiences, identify best practices and ensure effective coordination of networks
4. Catalysing the establishment of a network of relevant institutions
5. Compiling and analysing the best practices and the development, publication and wide dissemination of these practices

26. In accordance with resolutions made at the September 1996 workshop of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) of GEF, the project was designed to apply a regionally based approach to ensure exchange of experiences between countries sharing similar problems, and, in particular, to ensure that experiences in tackling the more complex transboundary problems were identified and the best practices promoted.

27. Based on recommendations of a consultative meeting on strategies for scientific and technological research in biodiversity and land degradation in the South, held in May 1995 in Trieste, Italy, a concept was developed. The eventual project document was drawn up and signed in October 1999. The total cost of the project was \$900,000, of which the proportion to be financed by GEF was 83.3 per cent (\$750,000), with TWNSO supplying 8.9 per cent (\$80,000) and “participating institutions” the remaining 7.8 per cent (\$70,000). The co-financing from TWNSO and participating institutions was earmarked for personnel (\$50,000) and training and workshops (\$100,000).

28. Project implementation – through TWNSO in collaboration with centres of excellence throughout the South – actually began in August 2000. This delay was due to the late appointment of the lead project consultant, and though it was designed to be a two-year programme, the project had not ended at the time of the current evaluation, some three years later.

## **B. Evaluation process**

29. The evaluation reported in these pages was carried out during late November and early December 2003. It accords with the terms of reference appended in annex I. As the project had actually not yet been completed at the time of the evaluation, as noted above, there was an opportunity to provide various recommendations for the remainder of the project period, as well as others of a more generic nature.

30. In accordance with the terms of reference, this was an in-depth evaluation, carried out in a participatory manner. Those persons contacted were encouraged to be as open as possible, and where recommendations and lessons are those expressed by project stakeholders, and supported by the consultant, this is acknowledged.

31. As specified in the terms of reference there was a desk review of various project documents – including regular monitoring reports and programme implementation reports – which were provided by the project and by UNEP-GEF. Particularly useful in this respect was the project’s draft terminal report (dated 29 October 2003). “Specific products”, implying the various compilations of case studies (see annex III for the most important of these), and workshop reports were also reviewed. The third requirement of the terms of reference was also carried out according to plan: interviews with project management in Trieste over three intensive half-day sessions on 20 and 21 November 2003.

32. Telephone interviews with project stakeholders were mandated in the terms of reference. Some 20 collaborating centres of excellence were approached, first by e-mail and later by phone. Actual telephone discussions were held with seven individuals and e-mail responses received from a further four. Nevertheless, the fact that project management had carried out an internal evaluation exercise<sup>5</sup> of its own (see annex V) meant that the consultant had access to judgements and opinions from 26 Southern stakeholders and partners<sup>6</sup> in the project. This internal evaluation was a bonus.

33. Finally, discussions were held with the UNEP-GEF project officers, past and present, on 9 December 2003. A draft of the evaluation report was submitted to UNEP-GEF on December 11 for comment, and this final version has been amended in response to the constructive comments received.

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<sup>5</sup> This internal evaluation should not be confused with the regular, mandated programme implementation reports. It was a separate exercise carried out by project management, on its own initiative.

<sup>6</sup> This includes those directly contacted by the evaluator and respondents to the internal evaluation: there was considerable overlap.

## **C. Layout of report**

34. The present report continues with “Findings” in chapter II, arranged broadly under the headings specified on pages 4 and 5 of the terms of reference. A brief chapter III gives the numerical ratings as required by the terms of reference. This is then followed by “Lessons learned” in chapter IV. These are both general and specific lessons that have emanated from the evaluation of the project. Chapter V comprises recommendations. There are two sections: first, those recommendations which related directly to the remainder of the project period; and second, those directed towards UNEP for the future. Finally, there are five annexes. Annex I comprises the terms of reference as received from UNEP-GEF. The subsequent four are substantive to the evaluation and were drawn up, with the help of project management, during the visit to Trieste. They comprise a project timeline (annex II), which notes important milestones; a list of the major publications, with some detail of case-study inclusion and distribution (annex III); a comprehensive list of project partners (annex IV); and a summary of the results of the internal evaluation (annex V).

## **II. Findings**

### **A. Objectives met and results obtained**

#### **1. Extent to which best practices have been identified and disseminated**

35. It is clear that, despite its late start, project management began methodically and diligently to address the first objective: centres of excellence were approached and a group of responsive scientists rapidly enlisted to provide the case study information that was core to the project.

36. The original target number of case studies of best practices that was originally set was 30, yet the final total documented was nearly double that: 56, with only a few others rejected as unsuitable or weak. This is impressive and in itself goes far to justifying the underlying rationale for the project. Several stakeholders contacted underlined that this, in their view, was merely the start; many other cases are continuing to come to light.

37. A comprehensive dissemination list with nearly 950 names has recently been prepared to ensure that the information reaches its primarily academic and research institution target.

38. Together with the successful completion of three regional workshops (Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; Africa and the Middle East) and two international conferences (in Egypt and Morocco)<sup>7</sup> and the publication of associated print products and minutes, this implies that the project has achieved its major goal. Certainly this was the consensus among the interviewees. Management and the secretariat deserve due congratulations.

39. The medium of presentation of the case studies (various publications and web site: see annex III) demonstrates the project’s intentional, but not exclusive, academic bias. The top case studies were reserved for the flagship Kluwer book. The remaining case studies have been summarized in the TWNSO monograph and a full version of these case studies will be published in 2004 by the UNDP Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries. In addition, a popular version of select case studies is being planned for distribution to a broader audience. To this evaluator it is strange that the “best of the rest” should be selected for the monograph, and for the forthcoming UNDP publication, rather than chosen by other criteria.

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<sup>7</sup> See annex II for dates and venues.

40. There is also the question (related to the points below) as to whether the net could have been thrown wider to capture a broader dissemination audience. This admittedly is due to be partially addressed by the project with the following additional publications in 2004: first, the UNDP Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries has agreed to publish 10,000 copies of the TWNSO monograph, including case studies not included in the Kluwer book; and, second, a popularized version of select case studies designed for a broader audience (see annex III).

41. Related to the above point is that of language: every single document is written in English. There are not even summaries in French or Spanish (or Portuguese or Arabic). While all the main research partners are anglophone or fluent in English, and of course the global language of biodiversity (and, increasingly, research) is English, there is an inherent danger here of linguistic marginalization, especially when we talk nobly about inclusion of local populations. This was a point of concern raised by several stakeholders in telephone discussions.

42. Case studies may or may not be best practices and many – the majority even – may only be best practice, or relatively best practice in the absence of other practices, in specific local contexts. Hence the need to extract common denominators of success: the lessons. The project is cautious in terms of presenting concise and practical lessons, despite the fact that we are informed in the introduction to the case study summaries that “The project focuses on lessons learned.” In the Kluwer book, the five generic “lessons learned and recommendations” are rather hidden away: they are effectively presented as requirements, and then supplemented, with some overlap, by a bland “summary of recommendations”. These are presented below in box 2.

#### Box 2. Project’s lessons learned and recommendations

“Lessons learned and recommendations”

Source: *Kluwer book, pages 6 & 7*

1. Improving science used in biodiversity research, public policy and management
2. Making connections between local, national and global biodiversity efforts
3. Building institutional capacity for research and protection of biodiversity in drylands and for sharing access and benefits of biodiversity resources
4. Clarifying practical strategies to implement biodiversity protection in drylands
5. Effectively using information obtained from this project to address GEF and other donor issues and positively impact their future activities and programmes

“Summary of recommendations”

Source (summarized from): *Kluwer book, pages 24 and 25*

1. Sound scientific, public policy and social science research should be used to inform public policy and decision makers
2. Local, national and regional governmental policies and plans need to be developed and implemented based on the best scientific and other research available
3. The participation of local people and other stakeholders in policy and decision making should be increased, including the role of women
4. In order for institutions to enhance the relevance and applicability of their work there must be more effective means developed to obtain the views of key personnel working on high-quality national plans and strategies related to the conventions on biological diversity, climate change, and desertification regarding priorities for implementing the conventions in areas that link with the protection of biodiversity
5. Education at all levels on the values of biodiversity should be increased
6. Coordination and collaboration between public and private stakeholders should be increased

43. Reading the various documents one does not have a strong impression that “These are the ingredients of success for sustainable use and management of biodiversity in the drylands.” Neither does a non-specialist in the field gain a clear picture of just why biodiversity in the drylands (said to be “rich” but without explanation or qualification of the term) is important, and what happens if it is mismanaged or degraded.

44. Management has concentrated firmly on this first objective. The draft terminal report tells us: “It needs to be emphasized that the current project was funded to support the writing and dissemination of case studies from research already completed, and to support project workshops and conferences.” Given this, it is not surprising that the first objective receives the highest average rating by stakeholders in the internal evaluation: a grade of 1.6 (midway between “high” (2) and “very high” (1) on a scale of 1–5 in terms of achievement of objective).

45. Assuming such clear-cut activities as a focus, this is an eminently replicable project. Collection of case studies, according to a common format, holding of regional workshops and dissemination of products has been done efficiently and effectively. It could be repeated in another context.

## **2. Extent of contribution to collaboration and exchange of information between centres of excellence**

46. Part of the reason for uncovering the large number of case studies lies in the expansion of institutions worked with, from the originally planned 15 centres to 55 (from 33 different countries). This came about largely as a result of the magnetic attraction of the regional workshops and the intentional efforts of the TWNSO staff to increase participation. This has been a very positive aspect to the project, and has helped dissemination through personal and institutional contact. This is confirmed by various stakeholders.

47. The project admits that the main conduit for collaboration and exchange of information has been a natural spin-off from the various gatherings held. The draft terminal report states: “It needs to be emphasized ... that the case studies and workshops/conferences were meant to serve only as the beginning for collaboration.” Nevertheless stakeholders testify that they have appreciated the ad hoc networking relationships they have been able to establish. Examples of such relationships are given in the terminal report, and have been confirmed by telephone conversations with participants.

48. There are several examples of coordination and partnerships that have occurred and continue to occur on a case-by-case basis between institutions. Some are listed in the terminal report and others have been mentioned in communication with stakeholders during this evaluation. These include:

(a) A joint proposal for GEF (block A) has been developed from institutions in Bolivia, Chile and Peru to “conserve biodiversity through sustainable utilization of fragile high-elevation drylands of the Andes”, building on the current project’s case studies from these countries. The proposal also focuses on development of a regional network for capacity building and scientific training in collaboration with TWNSO and other relevant existing institutions;

(b) Potchefstroom University, South Africa, has used the project’s experiences and findings to foster cooperation with other institutions and colleagues (for example in Kenya, Zimbabwe and several West African countries). In addition, the published case studies are now being used in the training of graduate students;

(c) The Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, Brazil, has stated that the TWNSO project has increased collaboration with other biodiversity and semi-arid sustainable development centres. For example, in June 2003 the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte and Brazil’s Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente organized a state meeting in order to discuss some of the TWNSO case study findings. Joint projects are being developed with research centres in Brazil and Italy focusing on biodiversity in semi-arid regions of Brazil;

(d) According to the Executive Director, Centre of Environmental Issues and Regional Development, Alakhawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco, the TWNSO project has helped in various ways. Specifically, exchange of views is taking place with the Desert Research Centre in Egypt, the American University in Beirut, the University of Jordan, and the Pennsylvania Consortium for Interdisciplinary Environmental Policy;

(e) The Director, Centre for Environmental Studies and Research, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, is collaborating with institutions in North Africa and the Middle East to publish and disseminate studies on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity stemming from the TWNSO project's findings.

49. The spread of information through documentation is basically a one-off achievement. While a formalized networking arrangement has not been set up, and there was simply not enough time or money to achieve this, the number of ad hoc links developed is quite impressive. Just how sustainable these will prove to be is unclear. There was some worry expressed by remote partners about this question. Project management look upon more structured networking as a future activity, based on achievement of funding for network activities in the post-project phase. This is probably all that could have been expected of the project, given the time and money available.

50. The only other way of quantifying the "extent of collaboration and exchange of information" is to look at the verdict from the internal evaluation, where an average figure of 2.2 was awarded: closer to "high" (2) than "average" (3) – again on the scale of 1–5.

### **3. Extent to which case studies and best practices can assist local populations to sustainably manage and utilize dryland biodiversity**

51. The actual wording of objective 3 in the project document of October 1999 – "assisting the efforts of local populations in dryland regions to manage and sustainably utilize the fragile ecosystems" – has been subtly altered in the evaluation's terms of reference (page 4) to the much more reasonable "to what extent the case studies and best practices can assist local populations ..."

52. Taking the wording of the terms of reference, it could be said that there is a foundation that a follow-on phase could build upon. Indeed the letter written by TWNSO in late 2000 – which was the original solicitation letter for case studies to be written – asks that the case studies should, inter alia, demonstrate "the need and prospects to develop long-term and effective relationships with local communities and grass-roots organizations".

53. The phrasing in the terms of reference is what one would have expected to find in the project document, but discussions in Nairobi with the past and present UNEP-GEF project task managers have disclosed that there was pressure in the past from the GEF secretariat to include explicit references in project documents to benefits accruable to local populations.

54. Judged on the actual wording of objective 3, the project simply has not performed, and could not reasonably have been expected to. There may have been some attendance of local land users at the regional workshops. They may also have been some limited participatory analysis of field experiences in the preparation of case studies. But not much more than this.

55. Local populations have hardly been made more aware of biodiversity and the management of their natural resources in this light. Apart from its inherent lack of realism, one specific reason is simply that there is no activity<sup>8</sup> attached to that objective. Another reason is that there was clearly not enough time, or money, to initiate local-level activities. This is acknowledged and noted by project management in the draft terminal report.

56. While the grading average in the internal evaluation awards a score of 3.0 to the fulfilment of this objective (exactly "average" fulfilment of objective on the scale of 1–5) it appears that a number of participants have rated the impact of the actual best practices, rather than the effect of the project on local-level activities.

57. A number of other participants have clearly been disappointed by the lack of fulfilment of this objective, judging by some of the internal evaluation and telephone comments.

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<sup>8</sup> On the topic of activities, the project document (page 6) lists five: the terms of reference for this evaluation also has five (page 2) – but one is an extra one ("refine draft communication strategy ...") and one is left out ("compile best practices"). The programme implementation report (2002, though mistakenly dated 2003) has all six activities.

## B. Quality, use and replicability of studies and dissemination strategies

58. The fact that the academic publisher Kluwer was prepared to publish a print run of 2,500 books – without a mandatory buy-back clause – containing the top case studies is testimony to the quality of the majority of the cases and to the quality of editing and introduction drafting by the management team. Similarly, the fact that the UNDP Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries has agreed to publish 10,000 copies of the TWNSO monograph speaks well for the broad interest that others have in this project.

59. What is apparent is that the project has succeeded in “go-getting” whatever is happening in the field of biodiversity conservation in the arid regions of the South. In this sense it has undoubtedly achieved its most fundamental objective.

60. The letter drafted by the lead consultant in late 2000 soliciting case studies sets out clearly what was expected from the contributors. It is understood that considerable editing was required from management in a number of the cases, but nevertheless very few had to be jettisoned as unsuitable.

61. As already discussed, whether every example of local biodiversity conservation recorded (including overviews and assessments) can really be termed best practice is a moot point. Project management, and some stakeholders also, agree that the term is often inappropriate. Basically the project has collected positive initiatives in biodiversity conservation, together with some overviews of the situation in various countries and regions. Without doubting their scientific value or usefulness, a number sit uncomfortably under the title “best practice”.

62. Several of the second level of case studies (those not included in the Kluwer book) have only a tenuous connection to biodiversity, and may fit better under a general heading of “natural resource management” or “conservation farming”. While the net might have been thrown too widely, one can sympathize with the management of the project for erring on the side of being overinclusive.

63. With respect to broad replicability, it has to be said that many of the case studies appear to be highly site-specific. To illustrate this point, there is even one example of an apparent contradiction: *Prosopis* trees are considered a pest in Oman (chapter 30 in the Kluwer book) yet proposed for mine reclamation, albeit with a caveat, in Brazil (page 42 of the case study summaries). This issue of replicability would certainly have benefited from fuller discussion. The mention of case studies as potential “blueprints” (preface of Kluwer book) is inadequately supported or rejected in the main text.

64. As already noted, the introduction of extra introductory background, analysis and clear strong lessons could have added value to several of the publications. This touches back to the previous point: lessons rather than actual practices tend to be applicable across a wide range of conditions.

65. The paucity of visuals – plates or figures – detracts from the quality of the various written products (book, monograph, articles, workshop reports, etc.), in that it makes them less attractive and less easy to digest. “Rich biodiversity in arid zones” conjures up an assortment of colourful exotic images. These are conspicuous by their absence in the monochrome products. Of course, it was not possible to include colour plates or figures in the Kluwer book due to their prohibitive cost.

66. There is also a lack of the analytical and summary charts, tables and even maps which always help the reader, academic or not, gain an overview of the range of cases.

67. The web site is informative, but relatively basic: management admits that it could benefit from some improvement.

## C. Cost-effectiveness of the project

68. It is the evaluator's strong impression that the project has been value for money. A number of points are worth making here:

69. Case study costs (though high to begin with) were economized upon greatly as it became evident that publication of their work – especially in the Kluwer book – was a lure to the case study authors: reward enough to stimulate them to write.

70. It was even possible to reallocate (through an officially approved project revision) costs away from case studies towards an all-participant meeting. This further demonstrates commendable responsiveness and adaptive management.

71. The fact that Kluwer was prepared to publish, without the project promising a buy-back arrangement,<sup>9</sup> meant a very considerable cost saving. Nevertheless, the cost of the hardback Kluwer book (apparently the early discount offer is \$60 per copy, presumably rising to something in the region of \$100 on the subsequent market) makes it a library-targeted, academic product. When interviewed, some stakeholders mentioned the exclusivity of this book.

72. The advisory board of distinguished scientists is said to have been very valuable – yet services were rendered on a voluntarily basis. This is highly commendable.

73. In each of the workshops – international and regional – there was a cost-sharing arrangement. Workshop reports, for example, were produced in each case by the hosts, at their own expense.

74. The Morocco international conference of 2003 – to which only one project participant from each participating country was invited – was, as already noted, extra to the original plans, and was part sponsored by the host institution, Alakhawayn University. Attended by a STAP staff member,<sup>10</sup> this conference produced a series of detailed recommendations for future follow-up projects of this nature, and these are clearly summarized in the draft terminal report and in box 3.

### Box 3. Recommendations from Morocco conference (2003)

- A. The GEF Land Degradation Committee should review best practices for land restoration and land rehabilitation, particularly in drylands.
- B. Management at the local-community level is important, but ecosystem-level management requires policy and management from higher levels of government.
- C. The primary focus for biodiversity in drylands should be on human values.
- D. There should be a focus on country priorities, following GEF funding policy.
- E. GEF should consider identifying a list of experts from different countries whose area of expertise is in biodiversity of arid and semi-arid regions.
- F. Research and policy initiatives linking protection of biodiversity and the alleviation of poverty should be undertaken.
- G. Research networks focused on food production and conserving biodiversity should be developed and should, from the very beginning, include local farmers in projects.
- H. Biodiversity programmes in drylands must focus on increasing capacity to better utilize taxonomic information and knowledge of ecosystem services.
- I. Problems of biodiversity and poverty in developing countries' drylands demand unique methods and tools – not those developed for humid and temperate areas.
- J. It is very important to bring together, early, all stakeholders: policy makers, scientists, and grass-roots organizations, with gender and age groups represented.

<sup>9</sup> In fact 1,000 copies were purchased at a subsidized price by the project for distribution, but this was a perk rather than part of the deal.

<sup>10</sup> UNEP was not represented here, though the UNEP programme officer was present at the regional meeting in Muscat in April 2002.

- K. In establishing research teams it is recommended that they be multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, and familiar with the needs of local communities.
- L. It is important to establish, early, communication channels between all stakeholders, especially in implementation of research findings and recommendations.
- M. Research agendas should reflect the priorities of national development as well as the (often dominating) priorities of international development agencies.
- N. As appropriate, it is important to follow a bottom-up and decentralized approach, because drylands biodiversity concerns people in remote and marginalized areas.
- O. In some cases laws and regulations might help bridge gaps in understanding and prevent conflicts between policy makers, scientists, and grass-roots stakeholders.
- P. Databases and information networks should be established at local, national, and regional levels. Exchange of such information would prove very useful.
- Q. It was recommended that research findings should be translated into simple, user-friendly language that can be understood by all stakeholders.
- R. When issues cut across international conventions (for example the conventions on biological diversity, desertification and climate change) it is recommended that there should be strong coordination among them.
- S. Research and development in dryland biodiversity should be a significant part of poverty alleviation and economic development at national and global levels.
- T. While scientific research is essential in conserving and sustainably managing biodiversity, indigenous knowledge is essential in research.
- U. A new project based on recommendations and outcomes of the current project should be developed: first, provide grants for joint research projects that include capacity building and training of young researchers; second, identify core issues and problems that require joint actions from institutions, agencies, Governments; third, develop new strategies from the current project's case studies to protect and sustainably use biodiversity in drylands; fourth, develop linkages between key institutions in drylands and national biodiversity strategies and action plans; (v) carry out comparative studies dealing with biodiversity of drylands for such organizations as UNEP, GEF, the World Conservation Union, and the conventions on biological diversity, desertification and climate change.

*Source: Summarized from draft terminal report*

75. The perception of project management is that there has been economical use of funds throughout. The evaluator (again: without having studied the figures) has no reason to question this. The impression of frugality and sensible expenditure comes across strongly. A number of the stakeholders contacted by telephone confirmed this point, and there were no complaints of poorly managed funds.

#### **D. Level of stakeholder participation and southern ownership**

76. The fact that the number of institutions involved rose from the anticipated original 15 to 55 demonstrates the involvement of a wide range of academic stakeholders. There were several researchers involved in each of the institutions.

77. On the other hand there is very little evidence of any local land-user involvement, other than some mention of limited attendance at regional workshops, and indirectly through participation in a few of the cases studied – though this, of course, cannot be claimed as a project achievement.

78. There is certainly a strong sense of Southern ownership of the project. None of the interviewees gave any indication of feeling that TWNSO did anything other than coordinate the project from Trieste.

79. With respect to the regional and international workshops, the local institutions were described to this evaluator by project management as “great hosts” who were proud of their countries and institutions. Management should be congratulated on an imaginative spread of locations for these events.

80. Management and facilitation by TWNSO have been highly effective in this respect. TWNSO has acted as a frame holding the fabric of the project together, rather than claiming ownership.

#### **E. Effectiveness of institutional structure and planning**

81. There appears to have been excellent structure, planning and relationships between all parties directly involved. Again credit should be given to management for the concept of setting up an advisory board, and for delegating much of the organizational work for the meetings to the collaborating hosts.

82. There have been two UNEP-GEF project task managers assigned to the project during the nearly five years from project design to the present. From neither the TWNSO nor the UNEP-GEF side has this been viewed as a difficult relationship. STAP personnel have been little involved other than through attendance at the Morocco conference.

#### **F. Effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation systems**

83. Management has fulfilled its reporting obligations to UNEP-GEF, though it admits that the demands for quarterly, half-yearly and, in particular, programme implementation reports have been something of a chore.

84. Under the programme implementation report (2002, though mistakenly dated 2003) the evaluator notes that management has graded objective 3 with an “S” (satisfactory) while qualifying this with the comment that “This objective implicitly assumes resource support after completion of the current project.” Once again this highlights the non-realism of objective 3 (see previous sections).

85. There has been no recording of hits on the web site.

86. Recording of distribution of documents is in progress (with the obvious exception of the products still under development). A full list of distribution of each product would be available from the records if required.

87. An internal evaluation was carried out (as previously mentioned: see also annex V) and used to inform the terminal report. This is understood to have been a spontaneous initiative rather than a mandated requirement. This evaluation has been very useful to the current exercise: management should be commended for taking this step.

88. Management admits to a misunderstanding regarding the project results in the draft terminal report (pages 3 and 4) where the expected results are cited verbatim from the project document rather than being a critique of how far they have been attained, in the view of the project management.

89. The secretariat has a very well organized digital database and hard-copy archive on the project. No information required by the evaluator was unavailable or difficult to locate.

### **III. Ratings**

90. According to the prescribed list in the terms of reference for project ratings – and in anticipation of implementation of this evaluation’s recommendations before closure – the ratings in table 1 are awarded, on the basis of 1 = highest and 5 = lowest.

**Table 1. Ratings awarded**

Attainment of objectives and planned results	3	Let down by unrealistic objective 3
Achievement of outputs and activities	2	Generally very good
Cost-effectiveness	1	Excellent value for money
Impact	3	Strong as far as it goes: but limited in extent
Sustainability	3	Doubts about continuation without external support
Stakeholder participation	2	Excellent – with exception of local populations
Country ownership (Southern ownership)	1	Excellent feeling of Southern ownership
Implementation approach	2	Top class: only qualification is timing
Financial planning	1	Excellent
Replicability	2	Certainly: but dependent on strong team
Monitoring and evaluation	2	Very good
Average	2	Very good

#### **IV. Lessons learned**

91. The lessons learned as outlined below cover project-specific lessons, as well as more general lessons learned, supported by this project's experiences.

##### **A. Personnel**

92. No matter what project organizational set-up is established, success or failure hangs on the personnel involved. The project has been extremely fortunate in having a nucleus of dedicated professional personnel at TWNSO to guide and manage the programme, supported by a highly proficient secretariat. Judging by the internal evaluation reports and the workshop proceedings, and confirmed by the telephone discussions, there was also a high degree of enthusiastic collaboration by partners in the various countries. Part of this latter phenomenon resulted from the delegation of responsibility to project partners in the field. A final point under personnel was the skilful way the project made use of a voluntary advisory board, composed of luminaries in the field of biodiversity. Project design is important – but the quality of personnel is a sine qua non for effectiveness.

##### **B. Project objectives**

93. As has been discussed at length under findings, this is a clear case of a project including an objective (number 3 in this case) that is unrealistic in its scope. It is understood that there was a strong push from the GEF secretariat to make sure that projects directly benefit land users: but it is still not entirely clear why this was let through the net at project appraisal, without clarification of what was actually expected. The subtle change of language between the project document and the consultant's terms of reference – as well as the escape clause in management's draft terminal report (see paragraph 51 above) – imply a recognition and understanding by both sides that this objective was overambitious. The lesson is clear: project proposals should be vetted for realism, so projects are not then shouldered with impossible targets and project partner's expectations unnecessarily raised. It is gratifying to hear from UNEP-GEF in Nairobi that such a predicament would not be likely to occur these days.

### C. Biodiversity in arid and semi-arid lands

94. Terminology in a relatively new scientific discipline tends to be a minefield of misunderstanding. Some of these issues are addressed in the Kluwer book. The lessons to be drawn are that contextual definitions of what is meant by specific terms (“fuzzy” or not: see page 2 of the Kluwer book) need to be clarified early in GEF-supported projects. Without questioning its importance, the editors of the book ask where can be found a definition of “biodiversity of global significance”? While the question cuts to the core of the GEF philosophy, what turns up in these case studies seems much more to do with biodiversity of local significance. The lesson here is perhaps that GEF needs to go back to these concepts, of which global significance is central, and clarify them so that those involved on the ground, living and working among locally diverse ecosystems, understand what the higher-level stakes are.

95. A subcomponent of the point above is the very understanding of biodiversity itself, and where it is most important. the question must be asked: Why precisely is it a crucial issue in the drylands? This understanding itself appears to be quite diverse, judging from the case studies submitted by partners in the field. Are we talking about preservation of single endangered species in particular areas or simply protecting and preserving every existing species – or a more practical notion of sustainable management of the variety of important species currently used in certain locations? Or all three?

96. Whatever the definitions and understanding, the project was clearly based on a correct assumption: that there are a number of biodiversity initiatives in the dry zones of the world and the practitioners and stakeholders have a genuine interest in sharing experience. Many more initiatives and institutions involved turned up than apparently expected. What is more, there is a very clear message from the project partners (individuals and institutions) that networking and sharing of information is highly valued by them: South to South learning is rapidly growing in importance as capacity is built. Perhaps the project designers should be commended for their optimistic confidence in what they would find in the field.

### D. Maximizing utility of results: appeal and presentation

97. This is an example of a project which is primarily aimed – at this stage – at a research and academic audience. While admittedly there is now an intention to broaden the spread of the message through two more popular publications there was a danger of a much wider interest group being excluded. The web site, if illustrated and made more attractive and user-friendly, would also pay dividends. Neither is there anything wrong with fuller introductory explanations in books and other publications. Clear background should not be confused with dilution of academic value. Dissemination strategies are important in any such project and should be developed from the outset. What information do we wish to get to whom, in what form, how, and when?

98. One lesson that has come through clearly from this project, but again is a general one that cuts across research in particular and development projects and programmes, is that visualization is extremely important. Pictures, drawings, maps, tabular overviews and so forth are extraordinarily powerful aids to understanding. They are also attention grabbing. What, for example, does a vicuña (ssp. *Vicugna vicugna mensalis*, or even its southern cousin ssp. *Vicugna vicugna vicugna*) look like, or for that matter the threatened *quirquincho* or hairy armadillo (chapters 24 and 25, Kluwer book)? Is this evaluator the only one to be ignorant yet intrigued? Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a diagram of how the fascinating “use of creeping fog” works in Chile (chapter 22)? Global interest in biodiversity is surely linked to images, not solely botanical or zoological nomenclature. Of course, it was not possible to include colour plate or figures in the Kluwer book due to their prohibitive cost.

99. It is acknowledged that a requirement from GEF is that project titles should be full and descriptive. Nevertheless, and by no means uniquely, the current project has an ungainly and not entirely appropriate name: “Promoting best practices for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid zones”, with no simple abbreviation or shortened version. Significantly the book publishers, Kluwer, chose a shortened version, with more appeal and clarity: “Conserving biodiversity in arid regions”. Perhaps the project could have been called that, or even “Biodiversity in drylands” (shortened through common usage to “BID”). This could then be developed with a fuller subtitle. This evaluator found it difficult to explain in short, to telephone interviewees, which project he was talking about.

## **E. Drawing analytical lessons**

100. Associated with the point above, even though there may not be many generic lessons to be drawn – or these may not be scientifically proven – there is always value in drawing attention to common denominators, or alternatively the lack of these, when a group of rather disparate case studies is presented. While already discussed in findings, this point is a general one in case study projects regarding local natural resource management practices. If these lessons are not entirely sure, then they can always be qualified with the term “provisional”. If we are to learn from case studies and best practices, assuming that the actual practice will rarely be directly replicable elsewhere, then what are the guiding principles?

## **F. Project design and planning**

101. It is exceptional to find development projects that give adequate attention to continuity and institutionalization in their design. Exit strategies are all too frequently overlooked. This project is not an exception. This is hardly a new lesson but one that is again put in the spotlight. Three or four years of funding hardly do justice to any worthy development initiative, and as has been explained fully in the foregoing, what has been achieved in the current funding period is a portfolio of case studies with reasonably wide distribution and budding institutional networking. Not substantially more. The lesson is that no research or development project should be developed without a plan for the post-project process: either through institutional embedding or a follow-up programme. It should not be left to the last year before steps are taken.

102. Has there ever been a research or development project in the South that has run to its original time plan? Not in this evaluator’s experience. Why then, do we continue to be unjustifiably optimistic? Here is an example of a project that started one year later than the project document had been signed, and will take nearly four years rather than the two years originally envisaged. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, other than the fact that project planners continue to set unrealistic dates and project periods, continually ignoring the evidence of precedence. Part of the reason, of course, is that practical problems are not allowed for. The assumption is that everything will run to a tight plan. However, in many projects personnel must be recruited; equipment purchased; money has to be transferred; messages need to be sent, received, replied to; roads are assumed to be passable, airlines reliable and in business (Air Afrique went out of business during the project, spoiling plans for a workshop in Niger). Projects in developing countries are constantly affected by delays. Financial plans usually have a contingency amount. Why not timelines also? Alternatively, and perhaps more realistically, it may be better to be more conservative and cautious when planning project duration.

103. While there is only a minor example here of a contradiction or confusion in one aspect of the project activities (see footnote 8 regarding the difference between activities in various documents) and a nuancing of one of the objectives (see paragraph 51 above) a larger question is raised: What is the project guidebook? This is not the first time that this evaluator has been confronted with such a situation. The lesson is simply that we should always be clear which is the guiding document or wording. This can quite unintentionally slip, and not come to light until an evaluation takes place.

104. Logical frameworks (logframes) can be a nightmare to the uninitiated. In this project we have seen, in the preceding point, how items can be missed out when documents are copied or reproduced in different forms (see again footnote 8). Likewise the framework can be occasionally illogical as in the case here, where no specific activity was attached to objective 3. As for logframe terminology, this is a constant source of confusion to non-specialists. The lesson is that logframes – useful and important as they are – should be simplified as much as possible, and those who are bound by them in project implementation should always be assisted in understanding what they mean and what is expected of the project.

## **G. Monitoring and evaluation**

105. Is the burden of mandatory monitoring and evaluation detracting from professional time that could better be spent in the field on content-related matters? To what extent are the checks and balances put in place actually necessary? The project staff in this particular situation felt that the monitoring and evaluation requirements were indeed consuming time that might have been better spent on project implementation. UNEP-GEF staff in Nairobi were, at least, sympathetic. However, it should be noted that monitoring and evaluation requirements are usually set up as safeguards to track less well managed projects, and it would be impractical to establish a two-tier system where better-managed or better-performing projects were absolved from such thorough procedures.

## **V. Recommendations**

106. The recommendations that follow are primarily based on this evaluator's findings. However, the draft terminal report provides a full section on the recommendations of management and the project, several of which have been integrated here. Many of these are, however, of a technical nature regarding the study and development of biodiversity issues in arid regions, and suffice it to say here that these are supported and should be used as the basis for development of future programmes of this nature (see box 3 for a summary of those from the Morocco conference).

### **A. Recommendations to management for the remainder of the project period**

107. This evaluator strongly supports the idea of a popular book to spread the results of the project more widely. Here would be an opportunity to compensate for what is underplayed elsewhere – especially to concentrate more on lessons, to put the importance of biodiversity in the semi-arid and arid lands into context, and to include more visual material (photographs, summary charts, analytical tables, etc.). The potential importance of this publication should not be underestimated.

108. A simple analytical table or matrix presenting the case studies and best practices against parameters such as: Where? Land-use type? What is being conserved (single animal species, agrobiodiversity, etc.)? Who is involved (scientists, local communities, etc.)? What type of activity (research, inventory, development, etc.)? How and where replicable? Main lesson? – may be a very useful overview as an inclusion in the popular book and on the web site. The above matrix – together with a summary of the five generic lessons learned and the six main recommendations (Kluwer book, pages 6–7 and 24–25 respectively) – could be the basis for a self-standing two-sided handout summarizing the project. This should be considered as a separate self-standing product. The possibility of different language versions of this handout should be explored in collaboration with partners in the various regions.

109. Web site development: herein is an opportunity to add considerable value to the dissemination impact of the project. An intensive few days on web-site development would reap rewards at relatively little cost. If charts, tables, maps and the analytical matrix are developed, and photographs taken for the popular book, then this is all highly suitable material for the web site. It would be useful to set up a system to record hits on the web site.

110. The project should consider producing local language versions of the case study summaries with a more expansive explanatory introduction (see preceding recommendation), perhaps cost sharing with its collaborating partners. Any savings on budget could now be redirected towards the costs of this, and other, recommendations in this section.

111. As is proposed by the project management, and reiterated by many of the stakeholders, efforts should not be allowed to wither, but should be supported by the development of a broad-based, funded network as part of a follow-on project. The plan to hold a workshop at the beginning of 2004 to discuss a funding proposal to set up a network for information flow, with TWNSO at its hub,<sup>11</sup> is thus strongly supported by this evaluator.

112. Rather than dwelling on the project's lack of fulfilment of what was a wholly unrealistic objective (number 3), it should be supported in its plan to hold a workshop early in 2004 to plan a project proposal for pilot activities at the local stakeholder level.

113. Management should revisit the terminal report towards the end of the project (perhaps March 2004), update and in particular redraft the section under "project results". It would be simple to include here a summary of how many copies of which product have been distributed.

## **B. Recommendations to UNEP regarding follow-up**

114. It is abundantly clear that the current project has built a strong foundation comprising experiences with biodiversity conservation and sustainable use thereof (more than 50 case studies) and has developed links with 55 institutions from 33 countries. That there are many valuable experiences in dryland biodiversity is undoubted. And the assumption is that the list is not limited to those uncovered under the current exercise. Furthermore, contact has been established with a large number of institutions, the large majority of whom are keen to share experiences and continue the networking that has been initiated. Expectations have been raised. Careful thought should be given to where to go from here. Clearly a foundation has been established which must be built upon to reap a dividend from the original investment. While certain benefits have already been ensured through the spread of information and the onset of spontaneous networking (or at least bilateral contacts), there is not sufficient momentum to carry the process forward. It would be a missed opportunity if there was not strategic follow-up.

115. TWNSO and partners are developing proposals for, first, a continuation of networking with TWNSO at the hub and, second, pilot stimulation of community actions in the field of biodiversity management. There are also possibilities of separate proposals emanating from institutions themselves (mention has been made already of such an initiative from South America). It is recommended that UNEP-GEF encourages and supports such continuation activities for the foregoing compelling reasons, even if UNEP-GEF is unable to be the source of funding in each case. Perhaps UNEP-GEF could help set up the network under the strategic partnership that focuses on knowledge management.

116. In the meantime, the project has not been officially terminated and apparently there are still funds to spend: it is recommended that adequate time be allowed, certainly until April 2004, to complete the popular book and UNDP publication, the two planning meetings (see above) and other recommendations made here.

117. With respect to project design and implementation it is recommended that UNEP-GEF looks carefully at the following aspects in medium-sized projects (and others):

(a) Objectives which are realistic so as not to raise expectations, or place unfair burdens on project staff;

(b) Logframes which, first, can be easily understood; second, assist monitoring and evaluation; and, third, allow for flexibility and response to changing or unforeseen situations (adaptive management);

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<sup>11</sup> The international workshop held in Egypt in 2002 recommended TWNSO as the lead advocate and focal point for a future network.

(c) Monitoring and evaluation systems that strike a balance between what we need to know and what does not detract unduly from implementation time and effort;

(d) Reviewing carefully time planning for projects to allow for inevitable time-consuming constraints.

## Annex I

### **Terms of reference for the evaluation of the project on promoting best practices for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid zones (GF/1300-99-03)**

Under the guidance of the Chief of Evaluation and Oversight Unit (EOU) and in close cooperation with the Programme Officer, Land Degradation in the Division of GEF Coordination, and in collaboration with the Programme Officer for Medium-Sized Projects in the Division of GEF Coordination, the evaluator shall undertake a detailed review and evaluation of the project Promoting Best Practices for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity of Global Significance in Arid And Semi-Arid Zones, GF/1300-99-03. The evaluation shall be conducted by a consultant and EOU during the period 27 October to 8 December 2003.

#### **1. Background**

The overall goal of this global project is to increase the size of and more widely disseminate a portfolio of case studies aimed at protecting and sustainably utilizing biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid ecosystems in Southern nations. The protection of biodiversity and sustainable use of resources in drylands is important because: more than one third of the earth's land area is drylands; up to 1 billion people (mostly poor) depend on drylands for their survival; the biological resources of drylands are both unique and vulnerable; and loss of dryland species increases the threats to the lives of millions of people. In part, the successful policies and programmes described in the case studies are a follow-up to the Earth Summit Conference and the ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification and, hence, provide examples of understudied measures by nations of the South to conserve and use biodiversity in a sustainable manner. Recommendations from this project will be used as the basis to develop a larger long-term programme focused on experimentation and implementation of best practices and lessons learned.

Against this background, the Consultative Meeting on Strategies for Scientific and Technological Research in Biodiversity and Land Degradation in the South, held in May 1995 in Trieste, Italy, recommended the urgent need for identifying lessons learned and best practices for promoting conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in arid and semi-arid ecosystems.

The project examined experiences (case studies) from approximately 17 institutions worldwide. Primary goals of the project were:

- (a) Identifying and disseminating best practices for conserving and sustainably using biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid ecosystems;
- (b) Increasing collaboration between centres of excellence in biodiversity of drylands by facilitating exchange of information, research cooperation and coordination of lessons and best practices;
- (c) Assisting the efforts of local populations in dryland regions to manage and sustainably utilize the fragile ecosystems.

Project duration was initially 30 months (January 2000 to June 2002), which was extended for another 10 months for completion in October 2003. The budget was US\$900,000 funded by the GEF Trust Fund (US\$750,000) and TWNSO and the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) (\$150,000).

## 1.1 Legislative mandate

The project refers to the UNEP programme of work 2000–2001, and its subprogramme on sustainable management and use of natural resources. The project also supports the GEF Operational Strategy in which “GEF activities will be designed to support capacity building, human resource development and skills that are necessary to achieve global environmental objectives”, and the GEF Operational Programme No. 1 on Arid and Semi-Arid Zone Ecosystems and its emphasis on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

## 1.2 Scope of the evaluation

In accordance with UNEP-GEF policy, the evaluation shall be conducted as an in-depth evaluation. The objective of the evaluation is to establish project impact, and review and evaluate the implementation of planned project activities, outputs and outcomes against actual results. The performance indicators provided in the project logframe (table 2) should be used together with the evaluation parameters of appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency, impact and sustainability. Guidelines on performance indicators are provided in the UNEP project manual pages 13/89–13/99 and are also available on [http://www.unep.org/Project\\_Manual/](http://www.unep.org/Project_Manual/).

### Project logical framework

<b>Project objectives</b>	<b>Indicator(s) including target value and time frame</b>
Objective 1 Identifying and distributing best practices for conserving and sustainably using biodiversity	Wide dissemination of best practices in conservation and sustainable utilization of biodiversity in drylands
Objective 2 Increasing cooperation between centres of excellence in biodiversity of drylands by facilitating exchange of information, research cooperation and coordination of lessons and best practices	Increased communication between centres of excellence working in biodiversity areas of common concern
Objective 3 Assisting local populations in dryland regions to manage and sustainably utilize the fragile ecosystems	Effective community-based management measures of fragile ecosystems implemented by local populations
<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Indicator(s) including target value and time frame</b>
Activity 1 Refine draft communication strategy agreeing on actual activities to be undertaken and the delineation of responsibilities among the participating countries	Agreement between TWNSO, the centres of excellence and UNEP on a communication strategy for disseminating best practices with agreement on delineation of responsibilities for executing the strategy
Activity 2 Preparation by centres of excellence for case studies and best practices	Agreements with identified centres of excellence to prepare best practices
Activity 3 Convening four regional meetings to share best practices, disseminate information, generate lessons and facilitate effective coordination and cooperation as well as increase awareness of the opportunities provided by Global Environment Fund	Setting up appropriate databases to analyse and collate the information received on best practices

<b>Project objectives</b>	<b>Indicator(s) including target value and time frame</b>
Activity 4 Convening, in consultation with STAP, one global meeting to share regional and national experiences that may have some bearing on issues being addressed by institutions in other regions; identify the best practices, generate lessons learned and ensure the dissemination of this information to a wider audience	Reports, conclusions and follow-up of workshops and conferences
Activity 5 Increasing coordination and promoting partnerships between institutions by catalysing the establishment of a network of relevant institutions	Modalities for how centres of excellence will continue to work together and share experiences developed and agreed

The findings of the evaluation will be based on:

(a) Desk review of the project documents, outputs, monitoring reports (such as the quarterly reports to UNEP and the GEF annual programme implementation reports), and relevant correspondence;

(b) Specific products including publications in international journals, peer-reviewed books, case study database, and reports from regional workshops, highlighting presentations, case studies, technical information, strategies and recommendations related to wider adoption of best practices identified in case studies;

(c) Interviews with project management at TWNSO, Trieste, Italy;

(d) Telephone interviews with stakeholders from the 14 collaborating centres of excellence in the third world that were involved with this project;

(e) Telephone interviews with the UNEP-GEF project manager and STAP members involved in the project.

The evaluator should develop a participatory evaluation methodology to carry out this exercise.

## **2. Terms of reference**

The evaluator shall:

(a) Establish to what extent the project's objectives were met and planned results obtained, taking into account the indicators listed in the project logical framework, and the extent to which project activities are completed and outcomes are attained, particularly focusing on:

At the objective level:

- (i) To what extent the project has managed to identify and widely disseminate best practices;
- (ii) To what extent the project has contributed to enhanced collaboration and exchange of information between centres of excellence in biodiversity of drylands;
- (iii) To what extent the case studies and best practices can assist local populations in dryland regions to sustainably manage and utilize dryland biodiversity.

At the outcome (results in UNEP terminology) level:

- (i) Identify modalities established and the effectiveness of these to increase availability and access to information on best practices;
- (ii) Determine the increased awareness of local population and communities and awareness of biodiversity;

- (iii) Determine the level of coordination between institutions, more effective programming of financial resources, and reduced duplication of activities achieved through the activities of the project;
- (iv) Establish the level of partnerships of institutions of excellence in the South and contribution to increased capacity of the institutions achieved.

At activity level:

- (i) Determine the quality, usefulness and replicability of identified case studies and best practices and dissemination strategy used;
  - (ii) Determine the quality and usefulness of other project outputs, such as peer-reviewed publications, global and regional meeting reports, workshop reports and project database;
  - (iii) Assess the cost-effectiveness of the project taking into account the achievement of the project objectives detailed above.
- (b) Identify and establish the various aspects of the project as follows:
- (i) Impact achieved through the project, including the capacity built and sustainability thereof in participating countries and within the existing network;
  - (ii) Level of stakeholders' participation. Particular attention should be paid to the level of participation of target groups, representativeness of the 14 centres of excellence and participation by third world countries, the private sector and civil society non-governmental organizations;
  - (iii) Country ownership of the project during project design and implementation. Attention should be paid to the relevance of the project to national development and environmental agendas, regional and international agreements, and recipient country commitment;
  - (iv) Effectiveness of the institutional structure, financial planning including the level of co-financing both cash and in kind, the staffing, administrative arrangements and operational mechanisms at the project level and backstopping provided from STAP from the point of the flexible implementation approach;
  - (v) Replicability of the project, taking into account arrangements and steps taken in this respect;
  - (vi) Effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation system as an effective management tool of the project. Attention should be paid to the identification of baselines and indicators, quality of backstopping, quality assurance, and control of deliverables.
- (c) Identify problems encountered and lessons learned during project implementation.
- (d) Provide recommendations to UNEP and its executing partners regarding future actions to follow up this project.

### **3. Evaluation report format and procedures**

The evaluation report shall be a detailed report, written in English, of no more than 20 pages exclusive of the executive summary, the lessons learned, and the findings and recommendations, and include:

- (a) Executive summary (no more than three pages);
- (b) Separate section on lessons learned;

- (c) Separate section on findings and recommendations;
- (d) Appropriate annexes, which should be typed.

The success of project implementation will be rated on a scale of 1–5 with 1 being the highest rating and 5 being the lowest. The following items should be considered for rating purposes:

- (a) Attainment of objectives and planned results
- (b) Achievement of outputs and activities
- (c) Cost-effectiveness
- (d) Impact
- (e) Sustainability
- (f) Stakeholders' participation
- (g) Country ownership
- (h) Implementation approach
- (i) Financial planning
- (j) Replicability
- (k) Monitoring and evaluation

Each of the items should be rated separately and then an overall rating given. The following rating system is to be applied:

1 = Excellent	(90–100% achievement)
2 = Very Good	(75–89%)
3 = Good	(60–74%)
4 = Satisfactory	(50–59%)
5 = Unsatisfactory	(49% and below)

The ratings will be converted under separate sheet to the GEF rating system of Highly satisfactory (80–100%), satisfactory (65–79%), marginally satisfactory (50–64%), unsatisfactory (49% and below), and N/A.

In accordance with UNEP-GEF policy, all GEF projects are evaluated by an independent evaluator contracted by the EOU, and not associated with the implementation of the project. The evaluator should have the following qualifications: first, basic expertise on the subject matter; second, experience with projects in developing countries; and, third, project evaluation.

#### **4. Outputs of evaluation**

The final report shall be written in English and submitted in electronic form in MS Word format by 8 December 2003, and should be addressed as follows:

Mr. Segbedzi Norgbey, Chief, Evaluation and Oversight Unit  
 UNEP  
 P.O. Box 30552  
 Nairobi, Kenya  
 Tel: +254 20 623387  
 E-mail: segbedzi.norgbey@unep.org

With copies to:

Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, Director  
UNEP/Division of GEF Coordination  
P.O. Box 30552  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel: +254 20 624166  
Fax: +254 20 624041/2  
E-mail: ahmed.djoghlaif@unep.org

Ms. Anna Tengberg  
Programme Officer, Land Degradation  
UNEP/Division of GEF Coordination  
Tel: +254 20 624147  
Fax: +254 20 624041  
Email: anna.tengberg@unep.org

The evaluation report will be printed in hard copy and published on the EOU's web site [www.unep.org/eou](http://www.unep.org/eou). Subsequently the report will be sent to the GEF secretariat for its review and inclusion in the GEF web site.

## **5. Schedule of evaluation**

The contract will begin on 27 October and end on 8 December 2003 (three weeks spread over six weeks). The consultant will travel to TWNSO, the executing agency, Trieste, Italy, to interview relevant staff. The consultant will submit a first draft to EOU on 18 November 2003. Comments to the final draft report will be sent to the consultant after a maximum of two weeks. After incorporating the comments, the consultant will submit the final report by 8 December 2003.

## **6. Schedule of payment**

The evaluator will receive an initial payment of 50 per cent of the total amount upon submission of the first draft and final payment will be made upon satisfactory completion of work. The fee is payable under the individual SSAs of the evaluator and is not inclusive of expenses such as travel, accommodation and incidental expenses.

If the evaluator cannot provide the products in accordance with the terms of reference or the time frame agreed, or if his products are substandard, the payment to the evaluator could be withheld, until such a time as the products are modified to meet the UNEP standard. If the evaluator fails to submit a satisfactory final product to UNEP, the product prepared by the evaluator may not constitute the evaluation report.

17 September 2003

## Annex II

### Project timeline

#### **TWNSO and UNEP-GEF project on promoting best practices for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid zones**

May 1995	Consultative meeting on strategies for scientific and technological research in biodiversity and land degradation in the South
May 1998	Submission of original project concept
October 1999	Project document approved
November 1999	Proposed start date
August 2000	Lead consultant appointed: actual commencement of project
September 2000	Letters to heads of centres of excellence (specifying layout of case studies)
December 2000	Project advisory board formed
January 2001	Project modification
April 2001	Trieste organizational meeting (initial project participants and advisory board members)
August 2001	Proposed finish date
August 2001	Asia regional workshop, Mongolia (report)
March 2002	Latin American and Caribbean regional workshop, Chile (report)
April 2002	Africa, North Africa and Middle East regional workshop, Oman – combined workshop (abstracts)
December 2002	International conference, Egypt (report)
August 2003	International Conference, Morocco (report)
October 2003	Internal evaluation: questionnaires sent
October 2003	Ended (terminal report)
Nov/Dec 2003	External project evaluation
Early 2004	Workshops (a) Public policy makers for network proposal (b) Advisory board for new project proposal
Early 2004	UNDP/TWNSO/GEF book
Mid 2004	Popular book
Mid 2004	Proposed end date

## Annex III

### Publications and products

#### TWNSO and UNEP-GEF project on promoting best practices for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid zones

Main publications cited in text

“Kluwer book”: Lemons, J., Victor, R. and Schaffer, D., eds. 2003. *Conserving Biodiversity in Arid Regions*. Boston, USA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

“TWNSO monograph”: TWNSO/UNEP-GEF. 2003. *Promoting Best Practices for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity of Global Significance in Arid and Semi-Arid Zones: Selected Case Studies from the South*. Trieste, Italy: TWNSO.

**Table 1. Project publications and products**

Publication/Product	Date	Criteria for selection	Case studies	Target audience	Number of Copies	Distribution
Kluwer book	2003	Scientific merit	35	Scientists, technologists and scholars	2,500	1,000 rest to be sold
TWNSO monograph	2003	Scientific and policy relevance (all different from those in Kluwer book)	21	Policy makers (ministries of science and techn.) and scientific organizations interested in policy	2,000	2,000
Summaries of case studies	2002	Abstracts of all case studies as prepared for workshops	53	Scientists and policy makers. Document initially prepared for the World Summit for Sustainable Development, South Africa, and subsequently distributed at TWAS and TWNSO conferences and workshops	2,000	2,000
Popular book	<i>proposed</i> 2004	Education relevance policy interest	20	General audience, including students	proposed 5,000	Not yet
UNDP	<i>proposed</i> 2004	Scientific and policy relevance (same as those in TWNSO monograph)	21	Policy makers and administrators	proposed 10,000	Not yet
Web site	2002	All case studies under project (three added after hard copy summaries)	56	Primarily for exchange of information among project participants	N/A	N/A

## Annex IV

### Affiliated institutions and case studies

#### TWNSO AND UNEP-GEF project on promoting best practices for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid zones

**Table 2. Africa: affiliated institutions and case studies**

Country	Institution	Publication of case studies
Botswana	Department of Environmental Science, University of Botswana	Kluwer
Burkina Faso	Centre National de Semences Forestieres	Original project member Kluwer and monograph
Kenya	Department of Wetland Resources, National Museums of Kenya	Kluwer
	Phytochemistry Department, National Museums of Kenya	Monograph
	Kenyan Agricultural Research Institute	Monograph
Mali	Institut du Sahel	Original project member Monograph
Namibia	Desert Research Foundation of Namibia	Kluwer and monograph
Nigeria	Forestry Research Institute, Savannah Forestry Research Station	Original project member No case study
Niger	African Center for Meteorological Applications for Development	Monograph
Senegal	Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles	Original project member No case study
South Africa	National Botanical Institute	Kluwer
	International Plant Genetic Resources Institute	Kluwer
	School of Environmental Sciences and Development, Potchefstroom University for CHE	Kluwer

**Table 3. Asia: affiliated institutions and case studies**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Publication of case studies</b>
China	Cold and Arid Regions Environmental and Engineering Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Sciences	Kluwer
	Department of Geography, Yantai Normal University	Kluwer
India	School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University	Kluwer
Mongolia	Institute of Botany and Institute of Biological Sciences, Mongolia Academy of Sciences	Original project member Kluwer
Nepal	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development	Kluwer
Pakistan	Department of Botany, University of Karachi	Monograph
	Arid Zone Research Institute, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council	Original project member No case study
Russia	Institute of Ecology and Evolution, Russian Academy of Sciences	Kluwer
Uzbekistan	Uzbek Scientific Research Institute of Forestry	Monograph

**Table 4. Latin America and the Caribbean: affiliated institutions and case studies**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Publication of case studies</b>
Bolivia	Conservacion Internacional Bolivia, Irpavi	Kluwer
Brazil	Centro de Pesquisa Agropecuária do Trópico Semiarido	Original project member Kluwer and monograph
	Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (England) and Associação Plantas do Nordeste, Recife, Pernambuco (Brazil)	Kluwer
	Department of Social Sciences, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte	Kluwer
	Centro de Referência em Informação Ambiental	Kluwer
Chile	Fundación para la Recuperación y Fomento de la Palma Chilena	Monograph
	Atmospheric and Environmental Physics Area, Departamento de Física, Universidad Católica del Norte	Kluwer
	Facultad de Ciencias, Red Latinoamericana de Botánica	Kluwer
	Departamento de Ciencias Vegetales, Facultad de Agronomía e Ingeniería Forestal, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile	Kluwer
	Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile	Kluwer
	Departamento de Ecología and Facultad de Ciencias Biológicas, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile	Monograph
	Instituto de Geografía, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile	Monograph
Jamaica	International Centre for Environmental and Nuclear Sciences, University of the West Indies	Original project member Monograph
Mexico	Regional Center for Arid and Semiarid Studies, Postgraduate College	Original project member Monograph
Peru	Comisión Nacional de Política Ambiental	Kluwer

**Table 5. North Africa and the Middle East: affiliated institutions and case studies**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Publication of case studies</b>
Egypt	Desert Research Centre	Original project member Monograph
Jordan	National Centre for Agricultural Research and Technology Transfer	Original project member Monograph
	Biological Science Department, University of Jordan	Monograph
Kuwait	Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research	Original project member No case study
Lebanon	Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, American University of Beirut	Monograph
Morocco	Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique	Original project member Kluwer
	Center of Environmental Issues and Regional Development, Alkhawayn University	Monograph
Sultanate of Oman	Centre for Environmental Studies and Research	Kluwer
	Department of Biology, College of Science, Sultan Qaboos University	Kluwer
	Department of Soil and Water Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University	Kluwer
Syria	Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands	Original project member No case study
Tunisia	Ecole Supérieure d'Horticulture, Université du Centre	Kluwer
	Institut des Régions Arides	Original project member Monograph

**Table 6. Regionwide: affiliated institutions and case studies**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Publication of case studies</b>
Australia	Agroforestry and Novel Crops Unit, School of Tropical Biology, James Cook University	Kluwer
United Kingdom	Ornithological Society of the Middle East	Kluwer
USA	World Bank Nile Basin Initiative	Kluwer
	Florida Center for Environmental Studies, Florida Atlantic University	Kluwer
	Pennsylvania Consortium for Interdisciplinary Environmental Policy	Kluwer

**55 institutions from 33 countries**

## Annex V

### Internal evaluation: summary of results

#### TWNSO and UNEP-GEF project on promoting best practices for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of global significance in arid and semi-arid zones

This was an exercise carried out by project management to help inform their final report: it is not to be confused with the regular project implementation reports. Stakeholders were contacted with a questionnaire: there were 23 respondents from around 75 project participants approached during October 2002.

Ratings were awarded by the respondents (table 9) on a scale of 1 (very high) 2 (high) 3 (average) 4 (below average) 5 (poor) in answer to the question "How well has this objective been achieved?"

#### Summary of results of internal evaluation

Respondent (anonymous)	Objective 1 (Identification and distribution of best practices)	Objective 2 (Increased cooperation between centres)	Objective 3 (Assisting local populations to manage ecosystems)	
	Rating	Rating	Rating	Total
A	2	1	2	5
B	2	3	(missing)	
C	(missing)	1	3	
D	2	3	5	10
E	1	1	3	5
F	2	5	5	12
G	1	1	1	3
H	1	3	2	6
I	1	2	5	8
J	1	1	3	5
K	2	2	3	7
L	2	2	4	8
M	1	2	2	5
N	1	3	3	7
O	1	1	2	4
P	1	2	2	5
Q	3	(missing)	(missing)	
R	3	5	5	13
S	1	2	4	7
T	2	1	2	5
U	1	2	2	5
V	2	3	3	8
W	2	2	3	7
Average	1.6	2.2	3.0	