

Conservation of Arid and Semi-Arid Ecosystems in the Caucasus

**United Nations Development Programme/Global
Environmental Facility**

Project No: GEO/99/G35/A/1G/72, PIMS 1265

Final Evaluation, May 2006



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Abbreviations

BSAP	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
CASEC	Conservation of Arid and Semi-arid Ecosystems in the Caucasus
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CO	Country Office
EA	Executing Agency
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GoG	Government of Georgia
IA	Implementing Agency
LF	Log Frame
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MSP	Medium Sized Project
NACRES	Noah's Arc Centre for the Recovery of Endangered Species
NAPCDG	National Action Plan to Combat Desertification in Georgia
PDF A	Project Development Facility A
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
SC	Steering Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank
WB GPADP	World Bank Georgian Protected Areas Development Project

Conservation of Arid and Semi-Arid Ecosystems in the Caucasus Project Number GEO/99/G35/A/1G/72, PIMS 1265 - Final Evaluation Report

1. Executive summary

The Conservation of Arid and Semi Arid Ecosystems in the Caucasus (CASEC) was a bold and ambitious project, one of the first of its kind to be funded by GEF in the region; it integrated elements of conservation and development within the framework of a project.

In the absence of government agencies to implement the project, the NGO execution modality has worked very well. This can be attributed to a very capable NGO sector in Georgia, the efficiency of the IA and a capable and committed PIU.

The project rating for the various components, management, interventions and outcomes, etc, were on the whole, Satisfactory.

The importance of CASEC is that it has provided a basis for ecosystem monitoring and management and successfully brought together *conservation* and *development* in the instance of the hunting farm development. In addressing the issues of over grazing it has also been successful, although the initial intervention (a historical system of rotational grazing) proved unworkable, the adaptive management approach used this experience to further understand the processes that are driving unsustainable resource use in the area, correctly identifying the issues of *cost* and *benefit*, *authority* and *responsibility*, and *tenure* and *pricing* that cause the existing land use patterns.

CASEC highlighted the challenges of engaging with a process within the constraints of a project. The project achieved this by using an adaptive management approach. While the project should not be considered a *blueprint* for resolving unsustainable land use and the over-exploitation of natural resources, the experience gained during the project has important implications for the way these resources are managed outside the protected areas and even within the protected areas system of the region.

1.1 Brief description of project

The project **Goal** elaborated in the Project Document was to:

- Conserve a highly threatened Arid and Semi-arid ecosystem through the participatory planning and sustainable use of natural resources.

Immediate **Objectives** were:

- To increase coordination among countries concerned in participatory planning and sustainable management of natural resources.
- To develop agreed alternative land use strategies aimed at recovering and protecting the ecosystem and key species
- To increase awareness and develop management techniques for the sustainable use of biological resources among land users and other stakeholders

The project's target area has been described as one of the most endangered in Georgia in particular and in the Caucasus in general (Biodiversity Country Study, 1996). The arid and semi-arid zone is subject to intensive human disturbance, particularly as a result of winter grazing and hunting.

The arid and semi-arid ecosystem of south eastern Georgia, north eastern Armenia and north western Azerbaijan are of significant biological importance. Many species of the arid and semi-arid zone migrate over the administrative borders, as do some of the pastoralists communities that use the area. Some sections of the ecosystem subsidize others by maintaining population numbers, or function as biological

corridors or reservoirs. Georgia was in a unique position to take the lead in coordinating trans-boundary conservation activities, a role confirmed by Armenia and Azerbaijan representatives in the workshops and discussions that led to the project funded by UNDP/GEF.

Since independence, Georgia has undergone a number of radical reforms in relation to land ownership. Although pasturelands are not privatised, extensive leases have been granted over pasturelands and critical components of the overall system have been subject to significant changes in tenure regimes. Georgia is promoting innovative approaches to biodiversity conservation by supporting local land users' participation in the design of new land use patterns and their integration in its implementation and management. Local conservation efforts greatly emphasize capacity building components for managers and local communities while authorities are increasingly taking into account local lifestyles and traditional land use schemes.

1.2 Context and purpose of the evaluation

The evaluation is initiated and commissioned jointly by UNDP/Georgia country office and by the UNDP/GEF regional coordination unit (Bratislava). According to the GEF monitoring and evaluation program, an MSP requires a terminal evaluation upon completion of implementation. The project ended in May 2002.

The evaluation assesses the progress and achievements against the project's logical framework and analyzes adaptations to changing conditions (adaptive management), partnerships in implementation arrangements, changes in project design, overall project management main findings and key lessons including examples of best practices for future projects in the country, region and GEF. The results of the evaluation will be reviewed by the GEF Evaluation Unit and will be subsequently incorporated in the annual Project Performance Review (PPR) to complement findings of other monitoring and evaluation exercises.

The lesson learned study analyses outcomes of the project and develops a Knowledge Product (ex. prospectus) demonstrating the main achievements and lessons learned. The target audience for the Knowledge Product includes UNDP Country Office specialists working with GEF portfolio, UNDP/GEF project teams and practitioners in the Eastern Europe and CIS region. The Knowledge Product will be disseminated through the UNDP/GEF knowledge networks and will be also used as a case study at the forthcoming UNDP/GEF COP workshop.

1.3 Main conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned

The CASEC was the first UNDP/GEF-funded biodiversity project of this type to be completed in the region¹. It was designed to address the issue of ecosystem conservation through a holistic approach that included elements of biodiversity protection, conservation management and development of rural livelihoods. Importantly, the project area lay, for the most part, outside of the protected areas system.

The project applied a basic adaptive management approach in the implementation of the project in as much as it:

- Provided a basic hypothesis about the workings of the system to be managed;
- Made a clear statement of management objectives;
- Provided a project monitoring system to provide information needed to modify the project interventions or the objectives, or to revise the hypothesis if necessary;
- Provided the means to modify the project to bring it in line with the objectives.

The project demonstrated that it is necessary to take a multi-disciplinary approach to ecosystem conservation and even at this level, external factors, such as the summer pastures of nomadic pastoralist or absentee lease holders, can exert an influence on both the ecosystem and the project outcomes. Perhaps

¹ The WB Danube Delta Biodiversity project (June 1994 – December 1998) had a GEF allocation of US\$1.5 million and cofinancing of US\$ 0.24 million. The project area was 1,500 km² and the project had a large component of support to protected areas management.

most importantly, the project recognised when one of the original proposed interventions was not going to work and took appropriate action based upon the new evidence available.

The positive NGO execution modality greatly enhanced the project outcomes. At the time of implementation the GoG was in disarray and the presence of a strong, confident and capable civil society sector was able to fill this “vacuum”. However, it is important to note that this was only possible because the EA had excellent human resources and operated in an efficient and business-like manner. The efficiency of UNDP CO also contributed to this and the mutual confidence allowed the CO to release quarterly advances based on clear work plans in the safe knowledge that there would be clear and concise reporting. However, the inability of government administration, at the national and local level, to fully participate in the project has resulted in a number of weaknesses in the outcomes (beyond the control of the project) that can adversely affect the sustainability of some of the achievements.

The main recommendations of the evaluation are:

- The important international links with Armenia and Azerbaijan that have been forged by CASEC continue to be developed at the level of government agencies concerned with biodiversity conservation, academic institutions and NGOs geared towards further developing the coordinated approach to the management of the semi-arid areas in the Caucasus at the ecosystem level. This is important to ensure that, long-term, there is functional efficiency in the management of the system. Initially these should be on aspects of conservation monitoring, species recovery etc. However, as the relationship is developed it can expand to issues such as grazing management and resource tenure.
- The MAP 1 database is updated periodically. The semi-arid ecosystem in the Caucasus is not a closed ecosystem but is influenced by numerous external factors such as the summer grazing in mountainous and upland regions of Georgia or markets prices for sheep in urban areas, etc. MAP 1 includes “sheets” on all administrative regions of the country and can operate on strata, district and nationwide scales. Biodiversity data collectors in any region (usually rangers of protected areas or any other designated staff) gather information on target populations, abundances on the ground, etc. that is entered on simple data sheets identical to those in the software. Subsequently the data are entered, processed and stored in the database. Dynamics of single or multiple biodiversity components over required periods are easily accessible for one, several or all area units (e.g. strata, district, nationwide) of the territory that is being monitored. This can be used to develop a greater understanding of the often complex, socio-political, economic and biological relationships necessary to manage an ecosystem.
- The WB/GEF GPADP Vashlovani National Park project pays particular attention to the project experience relating to rotational grazing, the availability of grazing and the complexity of the overall system when planning traditional use areas within the protected areas and in particular when considering resettlement of resource users into a system that is probably now at capacity. This could be achieved by sharing the Lessons Learned document with the WB/GEF GPADP through a seminar or round table meeting presented by NACRES personnel who worked on these aspects of the CASEC project and have a good understanding of the complexities of the system
- NACRES continues to provide technical assistance to the Dalis Mta Hunting Farm and investigates ways in which habitat management can increase productivity of target species and conducts a financial review after the next hunting season. The UK British Association of Shooting and Conservation has done considerable work on habitat management for conservation and shooting, particularly with relation to farming practices and partridge rearing. NACRES should consider developing a relationship with BASC with a view to developing the hunting farm approach to conservation and using this relationship to develop funding proposals and leverage funds.
- GEF continues to support *the process* by funding the development of a follow up project or programme that builds on the experience gained so far. The scope of the intervention should be extended to include summer pastures and the migratory corridors. It should address the issues of common property management and the integration of pastures, protected areas and hunting farms.

It would require a strong commitment from the GoG to address these issues and could create the necessary management linkages between summer and winter pastures. One possible approach to this would be the creation of a Biosphere Reserve because “biosphere reserves are much like laboratories where new and optimal practices to manage nature and human activities are tested and demonstrated. They outpace traditional confined conservation zones, combining core protected areas with zones where sustainable development is fostered by local dwellers and enterprises. Their governance systems are often highly innovative. In some cases, new legislation can be introduced.”² Whether a biosphere reserve approach is used or not, the project or programme would need to be embedded at the local socio-political and administrative level and have multi-agency support if it is to effectively bring about changes in the land use management outside of the protected areas system.

- Other GEF projects in the CIS should take advantage of the positive experiences of the project. One such project is the Nuratau Kyzylkum Biosphere reserve that is attempting similar activities particularly in relation to the hunting farm and approach to the issues of grazing.

There are a number of important lessons about the system resulted from the project:

- In most instances, neither the state nor the leaseholders of pastures have the capacity or motivation to impose any grazing regulations on the pasturelands.
- Not all resource users in the system will consider ecological sustainability as a priority. They are responding to a number of different forces (economic, tenurial, political and cultural). However, in an uncertain world they will attempt to maximise profit against an uncertain future. This does not make them “bad” people; it is a sensible response to the uncertainty that they face, and a natural response to risk.
- One of the most promising achievements of the project occurred when resource tenure, authority, responsibility, cost and benefit were brought together in one unit of management, the *hunting farm*.
- The traditional rotational grazing system that the project hoped to re-establish was in fact a common property system. This system would have conferred strong ownership rights upon the “members” linking *cost* and *benefit*, and, *authority* and *responsibility* within the unit of management. It would have had strongly defined tenure rights providing the long-term security of “ownership” that provided the motivation for investing in the future. Furthermore, it would have had effective institutional structures for internal management and control, determining membership of the commonage and defining relationships with external agencies and neighbours. This historical common property regime was severely disrupted during the Soviet Union by the imposition of a “command and control” economy and the subsequent creation of *Kolkhozes* and *Sovkhozes* or *collective farms* and has not recovered following independence. The challenge now, as over most of the CIS, is developing a system that equitably incorporates the components of tenure, cost and benefit, authority and responsibility within a defined user group and within the framework of modern government and an emergent free-market economy.
- Well thought out monitoring, whether from background monitoring or focused studies, provided the information that allowed an adaptive management approach in implementing the project.

2. Introduction

The Final Evaluation provides an analysis of the attainment of global environmental objectives, outcomes/impacts, project objectives, and delivery and completion of project outputs/activities (based on indicators). It evaluates the project’s achievements according to GEF Project Review Criteria:

- Implementation approach
- Country ownership/Driveness
- Stakeholder participation/Public Involvement
- Sustainability
- Replication approach

² <http://www.unesco.org/mab/BRs.shtml>

- Financial planning
- Cost-effectiveness
- Monitoring and evaluation

The evaluation reviewed project documentation (Annex 5), interviewed key personnel where available (Annex 3), carried out a field trip to the project area (Annex 4) and met with and interviewed stakeholders where possible (Annex 3). The use of questionnaires was considered ineffective given the short time available for the evaluation. Because there were no serious issues raised by either the IA, EA or project audit, the evaluation team focused on working with the EA to capture the positive experience from the project.

The report is structured in line with GEF guidelines and the ToR, that is:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- The project and its development context
- Findings and Conclusions (Rated using the criteria: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Marginally Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory where appropriate)
- Project Implementation
- Results
- Recommendations
- Lessons Learned
- Annexes

In addition to a descriptive assessment, a number of criteria have been rated using the following divisions: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Marginally Satisfactory, and Unsatisfactory.

3. The project and its development context

The GEF Project Preparation and Development Facility (PDF A) was submitted July 1997 and endorsed October 1997. The MSP Project Document was approved in 1999 and started in December 1999 and lasting 29 months (to May 2002).

The project sought to address the issues of:

- Extensive habitat degradation and soil erosion as a result of inappropriate land uses, particularly intensive grazing;
- Over exploitation of biodiversity and potential loss of species due to habitat conversion and over-hunting;
- Knowledge gaps on the current situation regarding biodiversity resources in the arid and semi-arid areas of south-eastern Georgia, Northern Azerbaijan and Armenia, and;
- Improved cross border conservation collaboration between Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The principal development objectives of the project were to create a sustainable grazing regime, develop an area based hunting farm and raise awareness of the problems associated with environmental degradation in general and over grazing in particular and provide a mechanism for monitoring biodiversity in the arid and semi-arid areas of the Caucasus.

The key stakeholders in the project were identified during the project formulation as:

- Local land users
- National and international communities (benefiting from preservation of a unique ecosystem)

The project was broadly supported by representatives of farmers, local hunters, hunting unions, local NGOs, ecological tourism centres, local authorities, experts from academic institutions, Ministry of Environment and their local offices, and agencies responsible for protected areas and their local offices in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The project goal was to: “Conserve a highly threatened Arid and Semi-arid ecosystem through the participatory planning and sustainable use of natural resources.”

The Immediate Objectives were:

- To increase coordination among countries concerned in participatory planning and sustainable management of natural resources.
- To develop agreed alternative land use strategies aimed at recovering and protecting the ecosystem and key species
- To increase awareness and develop management techniques for the sustainable use of biological resources among land users and other stakeholders

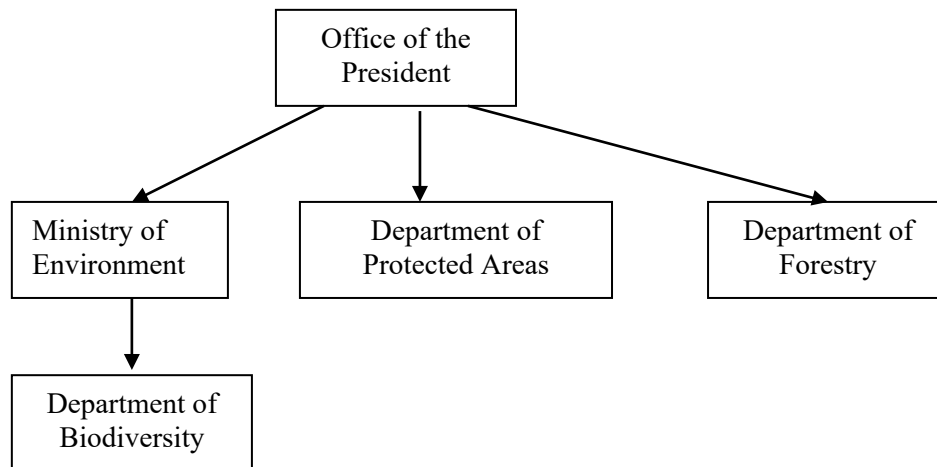
The expected Outputs were:

- An arid and semi-arid zone Coordination unit established for formulation, information management, communication, and implementation of protection activities;
- Develop agreed principles, guidelines and actions for conservation of the arid and semi-arid zone conservation.
- The establishment of replicable pilot demonstration projects based on the principles of the agreed management criteria.
- A biodiversity monitoring system for the arid and semi-arid zone.
- Replicable capacity and public awareness strengthening programs

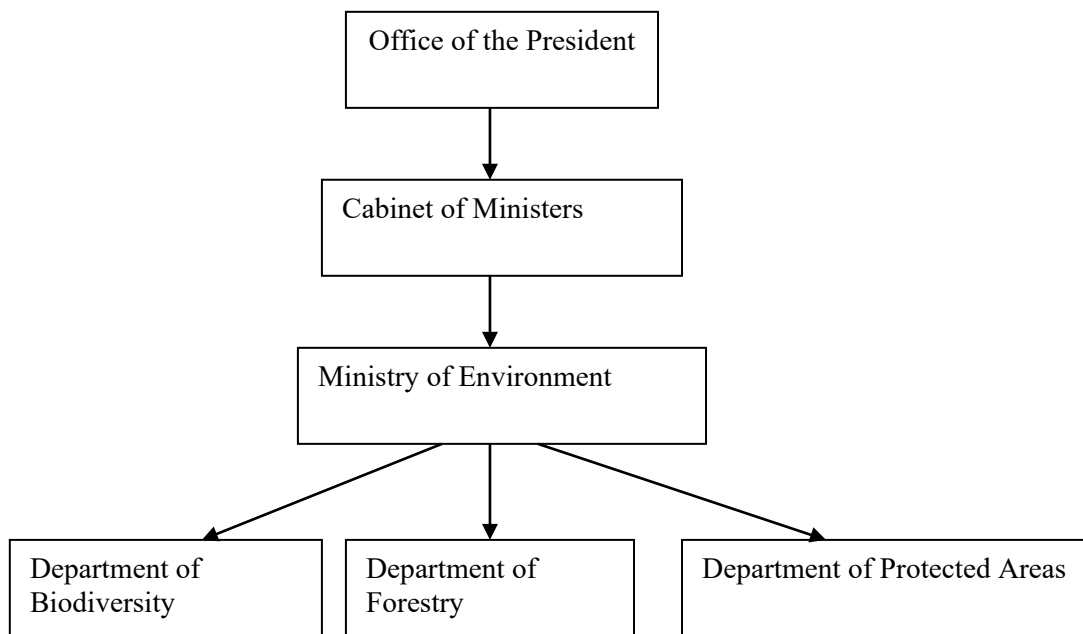
4. Findings and conclusions

The findings and conclusions need to be set in the context of the socio-political situation prevailing in Georgia during 1999. During the project formulation and implementation, there was an institutional vacuum, with the then Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection being severely underfunded with very little capacity. In the project areas the rule of law was extremely weak and informal capture of the local administration by various external interests had taken place following independence. The institutional structure during the project was different from the present framework.

Prior to 2003



Post 2003



4.1. Project formulation

The project conceptualisation was one of the first GEF biodiversity projects to be designed in the region. It was also the first project, known to the evaluators, that took a holistic and expansive ecosystem approach to conservation with the main interventions occurring outside of the protected areas system.

Conceptualisation/Design (Satisfactory)

The problem conceptualisation identified the issue of overgrazing and over-exploitation of wildlife resources as one of the principal threats to the biodiversity of the area. The root causes of this were, to a large extent, also defined. However, unravelling the complexities of a grazing system requires time and dedicated research, which is invariably greater than the time and resources available for a GEF PDF A project formulation. As a result, there are inevitably assumptions made in the planning process that need to be addressed in the implementation. Given the time and resources available for the PDF A phase it is reasonable to make these assumptions as long as they are clearly articulated in the Log Frame.

One such assumption was that a historical common property system of rotational grazing that had been destroyed by the intervention of the Soviet Union, and resulting policies of collectivisation of agriculture during that period, would be applicable under the prevailing free-market economy and existing socio-political and economic conditions. However, this assumption proved to be unrealistic. The need for a greater understanding of the ecological aspects of the ecosystem was identified. But, further research into the grazing regime would have revealed the complexity of social, political and economic forces that have created the unsustainable pattern of land use.

However, given that these issues had to be addressed within the framework of a project, it is understandable that this happened and the project concept and design is considered to be satisfactory.

The log frame development was on the whole satisfactory, but there were a number of weaknesses. These were predominantly in the assumptions made and some of the risks should have been given a higher rating. However, it is possible that given the reality of the assumptions GEF may not have easily funded the project. This is not to suggest that there was any attempt to mislead during the PDF A, but is rather a reflection on the challenges of a project approach in supporting a process. Components that fitted efficiently into a project approach (biodiversity monitoring, establishing a hunting farm, etc) were readily and efficiently completed. But, effecting change in the existing grazing regime required a greater understanding of the dynamics of the system, the communities and the agencies that they were interacting with. Furthermore, the internal and external forces that are driving the process are operating in different time scales. For example, the driving forces that will effect changes in community perceptions and values will operate over much greater timeframes than those expected by project cycles.

At the time the project was being designed there were no other relevant projects that were tackling biodiversity conservation in this way. Therefore, there was little or no past experience that the PDF A could draw on.

Because of the issues that CASEC was addressing (transitory grazing regime, land use, ecosystem management, etc.) a GIS to provide spatial data and maps would have been extremely useful to help in understanding the dynamics of the system. However, during the PDF A there was little GIS capacity available in Georgia.

Country-ownership/Drivenness.

The concept for the CASEC was developed in a policy vacuum. Georgia was in the process of developing national policy, sectoral and development plans related to biodiversity and the environment following independence. The GoG had identified the most sensitive ecosystems in the process of developing a national protected areas system, the semi-arid zone in the southeast being amongst those identified and approved by the State Council in 1992 (Biodiversity Country Study Report, 1996) and later in the BSAP (2005) and further strengthened by the development of the Vashlovani National Park in 2003. However, the general lack of resources within the Ministry of Environment, the short time since independence and the generally chaotic system of government prevailing prior to 2003 meant that much of the policy and legislation was espoused and there was very little chance of the GoG delivering on its stated policy goals. Therefore, the overall policy framework at the time reflected intentions rather than practised policy. The policy and legal framework is represented below and includes those conventions, policies and laws that were being acceded to or formulated at that time:

Supporting Conventions, policies and Legislation

International Conventions	
Title	Date of Accession
Convention on Biological Diversity	1994
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species	1996
Convention to Combat Desertification	1999
Convention on Migratory Species	2000

National Policies and Regional Agreements	
Title	Date
Agreement between the Governments of Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan on Cooperation in the field of Environmental Protection	1998
Agreement between the Governments of Georgia and the Republic of Armenia on Cooperation in the field of Environmental Protection	1998
National Environmental Action Plan	1999
National Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Georgia	2003
National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan	2005

Environmental Legislation	
Title	Date
Law on the Protection of Soils	1992
Decree of the Parliament of Georgia on the State Regulation and Licensing of Natural Resources	1995
Law on the Protected Areas System	1996
Law on Environmental Permits	1996
Law on State Ecological Expertise	1996
Law on the Protection of the Environment	1996
Law on Wild Fauna Protection	1996
The Forest Code of Georgia	1999

It is not possible to comment in depth on the involvement of the other two participating countries, Azerbaijan and Armenia, as they were not visited during the evaluation. But, their acceptance and understanding of the projects objectives appears to have been good.

Stakeholder participation (Satisfactory)

Participation by various stakeholder groups was, on the whole, satisfactory. However, a more thorough and detailed stakeholder analysis should have better revealed the complexities of the tenurial system and the distorting influence of local interests that, through political capture, had acquired long term leases on pastures from the state and were, therefore “rent seeking”. Similarly, control of key elements in the overall system (e.g. the sheep stables) placed these parties in a position to exert excessive and distorting influence over the grazing regime.

The PDF A did not adequately incorporate the role of Tushetian and Azeri shepherds in the system. Had these groups played a greater part in the design of the project it may have taken a different approach towards attempting to impart a historical rotational grazing system. But, this is with the benefit of hindsight and the understanding that nomadic pastoralists are by nature suspicious of authority and outsiders and participation of these groups would have required more time and resources than would normally have been available for a PDF A. Therefore, these weaknesses in stakeholder participation are not considered sufficient to warrant a marginally satisfactory rating.

Due to the critical importance of grazing, the Ministry of Agriculture could have played a role in the project development (and subsequent implementation). However, at the time the project was being formulated the MoA was not widely consulted probably because the project was considered to be entirely within the remit of the MoE and also because of the general lack of formal government capacity. But, a multi-sectoral approach may have enhanced the projects achievements, despite the risks of inter-ministerial differences and rivalries.

At the time of the project design the key statutory stakeholders, the Ministry of Environment (Biodiversity Department), the Department of Protected Areas and the Department of Forestry were separated and directly under the Office of the President. Post 2003 they were merged as departments under a single

Ministry of Environment and many of the key personnel left the Ministry. Under these conditions the MoE participated in the planning to the limits of its available resources.

Replication approach

CASEC was dealing with a process; the process of reforming land use practices. In order to do this it embarked on a number of pilot projects that addressed particular components, however, its greatest impact will be in influencing the upstream policy approach to land use in Georgia. Therefore, the CASEC approach provided basic hypothesis about the workings of the system to be managed, made a clear statement of management objectives, provided a project monitoring system to provide information needed to modify the project interventions or the objectives, or to revise the hypothesis if necessary and the means to modify the project to bring it in line with the objectives. The project was therefore able to modify its approaches as lessons were learnt (not retrospectively), greatly increasing the effectiveness of the pilot projects (such as the hunting farm) and, for instance, by helping to move the process forwards in relation to the issue of grazing.

However, the experience from CASEC has also been captured in GoG policy. The development of the final NBSAP document was considerably delayed, and it was necessary to update the draft NBSAP to incorporate rapid changes in the socio-economical situation and the availability of new information. On behalf of the GoG, the MoE requested NACRES to undertake the completion and finalization of the draft document (which was achieved through an allocation of funds from the UNDP/GEF/NACRES funded project, CASEC).³

Elements of the CASEC project have been incorporated into the BSAP indicating that the GoG broadly supports the project's approach. For instance, *inter alia*:

- Strategic Goal A: To develop a protected areas system to ensure conservation and sustainable use of biological resources. A15 – Implement pilot projects in buffer (support) zones of protected areas.
 - The hunting farm pilot project offers an exciting example of sustainable use and biodiversity benefits.
- Strategic Goal B: To maintain and restore Georgia's habitats, species and genetic diversity through *in situ* and *inter (ex) situ* conservation measures, and through sustainable use of biological resources.
 - CASEC addressed a number of issues relating to Strategic Goal B principally because it took an ecosystem-wide view of conservation. In particular B26 – Continue the implementation of the Arid and Semi-arid Ecosystems Management Plan.
- Strategic Goal D: To promote sustainable hunting and fishing through adequate planning, restoration and protection of key biological resources.
- Strategic Goal E: To develop a biodiversity monitoring system and an active and integrated biodiversity database to ensure sustainable use and conservation of biological resources.
 - According to the regulations of the MoE the MAP 1 has been officially recognised as one of the standard software products for biodiversity monitoring in Georgia.

CASEC provided assistance to the GoG in drawing up the NAPCDG (2003). The NAPCDG appears to have drawn on the experience of the project in developing the action plan. If not directly, then the CASEC approach is heavily supported in the document through the overall National Plan of action to Combat Desertification, Economic Mechanisms to Control Desertification, Preserving Biological Diversity Against the Background of Desertification, Raising Public Awareness, Monitoring, Desertification and Agriculture and International and regional Cooperation that contain numerous synergies with the approach of the earlier CASEC project.

³ National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan - Georgia, 2005, Tbilisi, pages 106, P. 3

However, three years after the project it remains to be seen how the management of common property resources such as grazing and the social and logistical arrangements of Tushetian and Azeri nomadic pastoralists, which was one of the key issues the project was addressing, will fit with the GoG stated policy of privatisation.

The experience from CASEC has contributed to the approach taken by the consortium of civil society groups in developing their strategies, identifying development and conservation issues and accessing funding for their work. NACRES has used the experience of this project in developing its approaches to conservation and is clearly illustrated in the organizations continued relationship with other CBOs, support to the Dalis Mta Hunting Farm and ongoing research and monitoring work.

The project's approach has also been incorporated into the WB-funded GPADP's Vashlovani National Park development component. However, it is not clear whether this project has fully absorbed the experience from CASEC. GPADP is attempting to "resettle" a number of shepherds from the park's territory and institute a rotational grazing system in traditional use zones. But the CASEC experience has demonstrated that; almost all pastures are currently operating at capacity, therefore, there are no vacant areas to absorb resettled shepherds. Decisions on stocking densities are a result of more than just environmental carrying capacity and are, *inter alia*, a complex arrangement of time, labour, rents and external market forces. Furthermore, there are considerable distortions in the system as a result of rent seeking by some key players. For instance, the original intention of the GoG was to ensure that pasturelands remain outside the drive to privatise land tenure. This was presumably to protect the long established rights of pastoralists to access to grazing resources. However, the current lease system has allowed individuals, not necessarily involved in livestock production, to control access to these resources. While the lease from the GoG is 49 years, which is sufficient to engender a duty of care through long-term security this does not appear to occur when the lease is sub-let to the shepherds. The lessons for replication lie in the approach that the project took. Looking beyond the narrow confines of the protected area system and addressing conservation issues with a broader-based ecosystem approach that incorporates elements of rural livelihoods, tenure, pricing, cost, benefits and authority and responsibility for natural resource management.

The most important elements of the project's approach were: the rigorous analysis of the causes of biodiversity loss, developing a robust hypothesis (the project interventions) and an adaptive management approach based upon rigorous and transparent monitoring.

UNDP CO comparative advantage as Implementing Agency

During the project design phase UNDP had a comparative advantage over the WB because it had established a good working relationship with NACRES. The UNDP CO considered the project important and took a keen interest in its development and implementation. The UNDP CO maintained good relations with an extensive stakeholder network including GoG and civil society, which appears to have fostered a genuine feeling of ownership of the project within these stakeholders. The programme implementation modalities of NEX/NGO execution provided a great deal of flexibility ensuring that the project was firmly embedded at the national level and effectively building the capacity of the NGO (NACRES). As a result the project appears to have been regarded as a national or NACRES project and less of a UNDP/GEF project reflecting a genuine national interest. UNDP CO procedures appear to have streamlined the project formulation, and ultimately its implementation, adding greatly to its effectiveness.

The GEF/WB was in the process of designing the GPADP at the same time as the CASEC PDF A was taking place. NACRES attempted to ensure that the WB project integrated the CASEC project, as the two were complementary and there were important synergies. The timeframe for developing the GEF/WB project funding was longer than that required to develop and begin implementation of a GEF MSP and CASEC could have collaborated on issues such as biodiversity monitoring, support zone interventions and, critically, addressing the issues of grazing both within and outside the protected area. However, it would appear that GPADP was unwilling or unable to collaborate closely and therefore an important opportunity to use the MSP to the advantage and "add value" to the WB project was lost. As a result, the Vashlovani National Park was not included in the CASEC project area, despite the efforts of the CASEC

project to integrate the two projects. The UNDP/GEF SC included a member of the WB/GEF project representative. However, a reciprocal arrangement only occurred much later in the project. Given the urgency of the issues facing the semi-arid areas of Georgia, the speed with which the CASEC project was developed, agreed and funded and successfully implemented suggests that there is considerable merit to the UNDP/GEF CO procedures.

The programme implementation modalities of NEX/NGO execution developed a strong feeling of country ownership both within NACRES, other civil society organisations and the GoG. In building the capacity of NACRES and the other civil society organisations involved in the project the human and intellectual capital has been retained in Georgia. This has a considerable impact upon the projects sustainability, particularly with regards to supporting the long-term process of land use reform. It is reasonable to assume that this would be less likely to occur if the project had been implemented directly by UNDP/GEF. This is in part due to the UNDP CO approach and also partly due to the particularly strong civil society sector in Georgia.⁴

4.2 Project Implementation

Implementation Approach (Satisfactory)

(i) Use of logical framework

The LF is an important tool in managing the implementation of a project. The project implementation appears to have adhered to the log frame during the project and this is reflected in the reporting. When it was found that components of Objective 3 – *to increase awareness and develop management techniques for the sustainable use of biological resources among land users and other stakeholders* was only partially possible within the project timeframe, the decision to concentrate efforts on raising awareness rather than implementing the proposed rotational grazing regime was justified. But, it should have been documented in a revised log frame possibly through an *ad hoc* log frame workshop. This need not have altered the Objectives.

(ii) Other elements that indicate adaptive management such as comprehensive and realistic work plans routinely developed that reflect adaptive management and/or; changes in management arrangements to enhance implementation.

Workplans and reporting appear to have been realistic and implementation was efficient and effective. The decision to concentrate the remaining resources on awareness raising once it was established that the implementation of improved grazing regimes was not possible within the projects resources and timeframe was a reasonable decision to make. It suggests that there was sufficient flexibility within the project and this adaptive management approach made the best use of the resources.

(iii) The project's use/establishment of electronic information technologies to support implementation, participation and monitoring, as well as other project activities.

The Project developed the software “MAP 1”⁵ as a monitoring tool for the staff of the regional offices of the MoE. The MoE Department of Protected Areas has received all the data collected by the project. However, neither CASEC nor NACRES have the capacity to collect data nationally or to carry out continuous monitoring necessary to build up a baseline and establish trends. But, the GoG, MoE and protected areas still do not have any system in place that can effectively use MAP1. NACRES have been using MAP1 within their different biodiversity research projects in protected areas and they have been

⁴ The projects experience in Azerbaijan was different because there is no civil society sector there, rather quasi-government organizations. Furthermore, the Author found that in Botswana, 15 years and very large sums of funding to the NGO sector to support community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) all but collapsed when donor organizations priorities changed, funding ceased and the NGO network virtually collapsed. The key point is that this type of implementation is very effective when there is strong civil society base to build upon.

⁵ Monitoring Automating Program

providing this information to Department of Protected Areas since the completion of CASEC. However, NACRES cannot cover all Georgia and its PAs and data provided to them are mainly from their own research sites (semi-arid ecosystems, Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park in Central Georgia and the Lagodekhi Reserve in extreme northeast of the country). The data collected by NACRES during CASEC has been used in establishing the GPADP (Vashlovani National Park), project.

Recently the GoG has approached NACRES requesting help in developing a national monitoring system. NACRES has developed funding proposals on behalf of the GoG and it is likely that funding will be obtained from a number of sources, namely⁶:

- The pending UNDP/GEF project Enabling Activities Phase II, component on creation of a Clearing House Mechanism for Biodiversity.
- The WB GPADP.
- NACRES.

Because of the multiplicity of issues affecting biodiversity in the project area, the use of an ecosystem approach and the impact of external factors on the ecosystem CASEC would have benefited from greater use of spatial data. Mapping the semi-arid ecosystem, migration routes and summer pastures and overlaying land-use, land tenure and other socio-political information will provide a clearer understanding of the forces at work and help to develop a system of land use. It would also form an important tool in allowing stakeholders to understand the magnitude of the challenges and conceptualise ways in which land use can be rationalised and made more sustainable.

(iv) The general operational relationships between the institutions involved and others and how these relationships have contributed to effective implementation and achievement of project objectives.

The project established a good working relationship with the Implementing Agency and the line Ministry (MoE) through the Project Implementation Unit and the Steering Committee. It was apparent that both the PIU and the SC had considerable, and justifiable, confidence in NACRES. This strong working relationship contributed to the successful outcomes of the project.

(v) Technical capacities associated with the project and their role in project development, management and achievements.

The capacity of the Executing Agency, NACRES, was an important factor in the successful implementation of the project. Good organizational and managerial capacities and a strong grasp of technical issues combined with a willingness to question existing paradigms and adjust the project strategies and interventions, based upon available evidence, greatly enhanced the projects outcomes. However, NACRES lacked sufficient capacity to carry out the socio-economic analysis, set priorities and adequately cost measures that are necessary to integrate the management plan into the local administrative framework. For example, the Management Plan states,⁷ “*on the local level and in relation to biodiversity use and monitoring, “Sakrebulo” – elected local government body, is responsible for the following:*

- *Supervision over the use of natural resources*
- *Taking measures for the ecological safety and protection of the environment*
- *Implementation of catastrophes, natural disasters and epidemics liquidation programs*
- *Dealing with social issues and job creation*
- *Dealing with issues of human rights, justice and social order*
- *Development of regional socio-economic plans*
- *Management of education and healthcare systems”*

⁶ NACRES Pers. Com.

⁷ The MP also makes it clear that this information was obtained before June 1st 2000

Embedding the management plan at this or a similar administrative level might be more efficient and effective. The findings of the project make it clear that the factors driving unsustainable use of natural resources in the project area are mostly as a result of inefficiencies (and inequalities) in the tenure system and external market forces. However, the management plan does not provide a clear framework for local government participation in the implementation. Effectively, the plan lacks a local institutional home necessary to drive the process of land use reform that will bring about environmental and biodiversity conservation benefits and or an adequate framework for collaboration with neighbouring Azerbaijan and Armenia.

It is very likely that the confusion and political tension that led to the collapse of government in 2003 may well have contributed to this and should be considered to be a mitigating factor when evaluating this component of CASEC.

Monitoring and evaluation (Satisfactory)

There was no external review, but, an internal evaluation was carried out by UNDP CO during the course of the project and the following recommendations were made at the TPR on the 26th March 2002:

- Overgrazing still remains to be addressed by the project and beyond
- More work has to be done to ensure sustainability of the project. What remains already solid is information system and institutional system for further action as well as some prospects for future funding.

The PIU, UNDP and SC had considerable oversight of the projects activities. This appears to have been a good working relationship with regular and concise reporting by the Executing Agency and timely, informed decision making by the PIU. Reporting by the EA was timely, concise and transparent and there appears to have been considerable, and justifiable, confidence in the EA by the PIU, SC.

Stakeholder participation (Satisfactory)

(i) The production and dissemination of information generated by the project:

Awareness of the project was widespread and there was a wide distribution of information generated by the project. The EA made the findings of the project openly available and a number of other projects, most notably the WB-funded GPADP Vashlovani National Park has used the data from the monitoring and is planning to implement similar projects, although it not clear if the GPADP intervention in Vashlovani National Park has fully absorbed the lessons from CASEC in dealing with the complexities of nomadic pastoralism and resource tenure.

(ii) Local resource users and NGOs participation in project implementation and decision making and an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach adopted by the project in this arena:

The project's success in engaging local resources users and civil society organizations was on the whole satisfactory across the following broad groups:

- The project worked closely with a consortium of civil society organizations and actors. It mobilized a broad base of support for the objectives of the project and acted as a catalyst for these groups to develop their own agendas broadly in line with the objectives of the project and assisted the consortium in organization that enabled them to leverage funding from other sources.
- The pilot project for the development of the hunting farm has been a model for the participation of a local resource user in implementation and decision-making.
- The participation of nomadic shepherds (mostly Tushetians and Azeries) has proven more difficult and CASEC determined their participation in the project would require a better understanding of the economic and social constraints that determine their patterns of resource use. Having determined this early on in the project, the EA embarked upon an awareness programme

to begin the lengthy process of engaging these groups. Although this has not progressed as rapidly as was envisaged in the project design, experience from other similar situations will confirm that this is a lengthy process and likely to extend beyond the life of any one project. It was not possible to assess the current situation in the short time available, particularly as the two groups had dispersed from the project area to their respective summer grazing areas. However, the evaluation feels that this issue has been dealt with as much as possible by CASEC within the framework of the project. It is a complex issue that requires a careful and thoughtful approach and there is no “blue print” that can be followed. The approach taken by the project provides a solid and sensitive “first step” in engaging these particular user groups and future interventions can build upon this. It is important to sound a word of caution when dealing with these issues. Finding a sustainable and equitable solution leads conservationists from familiar territory of biodiversity management into the more complex issues of economics, human rights, and livelihoods issues. Considering experiences from other regions and projects, CASEC would not have necessarily known about the complexity of the system and subsequently dealt with these issues responsibly and sensitively.

- (iii) The establishment of partnerships and collaborative relationships developed by the project with local, national and international entities and the effects they have had on project implementation:

A good working relationship was developed with Fauna and Flora International (FFI), a well-established and highly regarded international conservation organization which provided considerable in kind support to both NACRES as the EA and the project as a whole. The most significant contributions from the relationship with FFI were:

- Co-organization (together with NACRES) and facilitation of the participatory workshops in Georgia for development of the project concept paper.
- Using FFI networks at the initial stage, promoted close contacts between NACRES and institutions in Azerbaijan and Armenia (NGOs, Academic institutions, governmental agencies, etc).
- Co-organization and facilitation of a series of seminars during the PDF A development (in Georgia).
- Daily base work for the development and editing of the Project Document.
- Reviews and consultations on the project findings and reports.
- Reviews and comments on the Ecosystem Management Plan.
- Reviews comments and other consultancy (free of charge) on the Hunting Farm pilot project preparation/implementation process.
- Raising parallel funds to the project funds for revising the NBSAP.
- Facilitation of participatory seminars targeted at revising the NBSAP document.
- Editing of the English version of the NBSAP.
- Publishing of the NBSAP.

- (iii) Involvement of governmental institutions in project implementation, the extent of governmental support of the project.

Government institutional involvement in the project was hampered by the lack of available GoG resources and must be considered in the context of the prevailing conditions prior to 2003. Material resources were lacking and the GoG in kind contribution was not realized. However, support amongst individuals within the government appears to have been good and GoG participation in the SC was one demonstration of this commitment.

It is hard to gauge the impact of the projects collaboration between the three participating countries, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, in part, due to the time that has elapsed since the project ended. CASEC was able to bring together individuals from both Armenia and Azerbaijan despite tensions that existed at the time between these two countries. Meetings between representatives from government

agencies, Armenian NGOs and Azerbaijan quasi-government organisations took place in Tbilisi on a quarterly basis. Project activities were carried out in Armenia through the NGO *Environmental Survival of Armenia* and in Azerbaijan through the quasi-government organisation, the *Ecological Union of Azerbaijan*. Both organisations received US\$40,000 to implement biodiversity conservation activities, research and monitoring and awareness campaigns. Azerbaijan apparently carried out considerable work on biodiversity monitoring and conservation research, whereas Armenia focused mostly upon biodiversity monitoring and conservation education⁸. Considerable work was carried out jointly between the Azerbaijani participants and CASEC to develop guidelines and a plan for the ecosystem conservation in the territory of Azerbaijan. This was submitted by way of recommendation to the Government of Azerbaijan^{9,10}. In the final analysis, CASEC was setting a very “high bar” in attempting “to increase coordination among countries concerned in participatory planning and sustainable management of natural resources” if the expectations were to have a management plan agreed by all three countries. However, this should not distract from the success and value of the groundwork carried out between the three countries and the future benefits that could arise from this.

Financial Planning

The matrix of incremental costs is given in Annex 6. Budget execution of the GEF component was 99.7% (US\$747,750) and execution of the Co-financing component was 90.6%¹¹ (US\$116,149). The shortfall in the co-financing component was almost entirely as a result of the GoG contribution (9.36% or US\$12,000) that was not disbursed. At the time of implementation the GoG was in turmoil and suffering from serious financial constraints. NACRES covered this shortfall from their own funds.¹² The GoG contribution was never specified for any particular activity, it was merely promised as a global sum and the modalities would be organised during the project implementation. Apparently, this was a common practice during the previous government.

The cost effectiveness of this project is measured against (i) compliance with the incremental cost criteria (e.g. GEF funds were used to finance a component of a project that would not have taken place without GEF funding) and securing co-funding and associated funding and, (ii) against the project completing the planned activities and meeting or exceeding the expected outcomes in terms of achievement of Global Environmental and Development Objectives as initially planned. It is not considered appropriate to use either a benchmark or a comparison approach.

The global environmental benefits resulting from the project with the GEF incremental costs and their effectiveness can be summarized as:

- Transboundary coordination for conservation and sustainable use of the arid and semi-arid zone was enhanced through establishing communication exchange between public organisations and institutions. However, the effective management of a transboundary ecosystem with extensive participation of local land users did not reach the expectations outlined in the project document. There are weaknesses in the management plan and a number of critical issues remain to be resolved. However, the evaluation considers that this task was underestimated and therefore under-resourced and this should not distract from the achievements made by CASEC, namely, by laying a sound groundwork for future efforts to influence the process of land use reform. Despite the shortcomings of the management plan this component should be considered “value for money” because it has positively influenced the process of reforming land use towards a more sustainable regime that incorporates biodiversity values within local livelihood options and takes into account the social aspects of conservation.

⁸ NACRES Pers. Com.

⁹ CASEC Terminal Report, 2002

¹⁰ The final evaluation did not have an opportunity to see these guidelines and therefore cannot comment on them.

¹¹ 31.9% of which was in kind support from NACRES

¹² NACRES Pers. Com.

- The development of capacity in GoG and public organisations for sustainable management of the transboundary ecosystem was achieved given the limited resources of the GoG in as much as the human capital now exists in the MoE, however, this was adversely affected by the financial constraints and restructuring of GoG departments that took place during the project. The development of capacity within public organisations met, and in many cases, exceeded the expectations of the project (the understanding of the complexities of ecosystem management outside of protected areas was demonstrably greater at the time of the evaluation than it had been as evidenced by the less detailed understanding of the dynamics of the system in the Project Document). However, it was not possible to assess the impact upon local authorities and the absence of a framework in the management plan for local institutional participation (e.g. the Ministry of agriculture or the “*Sakrebulo*” or similar local authority) suggests that this is a shortcoming in the project’s achievements.
- The development of environmental awareness campaign appears to have been well designed and well implemented and provides important first steps towards developing a sustainable system of management for the semi-arid ecosystem. It was not able to reach the shepherds for a number of reasons such as cultural differences and widely differing priorities.
- CASEC established a biodiversity monitoring system for the arid and semi-arid zone. This and the collection of data is considered to have met the expectations and would have been extremely limited in its applications without the GEF alternative. A question mark remains over the GoG ability to maintain this monitoring in the long term, however, CASEC provided a valuable baseline and system.
- The development of participatory integrated transboundary management criteria and its implementation on selected areas as part of replicable demonstration pilot projects met with the GEF incremental costs criteria by expanding the conservation of biodiversity outside of the protected areas boundaries and thus reducing the pressures on the protected areas boundaries and expanding the area of land where biodiversity management takes place. While the development of alternative sustainable grazing regimes did not meet the expectation of the project, as stated above, CASEC made some very important moves towards achieving this. The establishment of the hunting farm met and even exceeded the projects expectations.

CASEC was independently audited in March 2000, February 2002 and April 2003. The audits found that the projects finances were in accordance with UNDP guidelines for material execution of UNDP funded projects. The final audit declared that:

- The Combined Deliver Report and the Financial Reports (for the project) present fairly, in all material aspects, the Projects disbursements for the year ended December 31, 2002 in accordance with UNDP guidelines for Nationally Executed UNDP funded projects;
- The rate of project delivery is as per the work plan;
- The disbursements have been made in accordance with the Project Document, financial rules, regulations, practices and procedures of the Government of Georgia, and in the absence of financial governance of the Government, are in accordance with UNDP rules and regulations;
- The project disbursements are valid and supported by adequate documentation;
- The equipment management is proper;
- An appropriate financial management structure, internal controls and record keeping systems are maintained by the project management.

Co-financing – planned, actual and disbursement

Co-financing (Type/Source)	IA Own Financing (mill. US\$)		Government (mill. US\$)		Other* (mill. US\$)		Total (mill. US\$)		Total Disbursement (mill. US\$)	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Grants			0.012	0	0.0752	0.09	0.102	0.09	0.102	0.09
Loans/Concessional (compared to market rate)										
Credits										
Equity investments										
In-kind support					0.041	0.041	0.041	0.041	0.041	0.041
Other (*)										
Totals			0.012	0	0.1162	0.131	0.143	0.131	0.143	0.0131

Sustainability (Satisfactory with some components Marginally Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory)

The assessment of the global environmental benefits and their sustainability can be simply judged as the extent to which benefits continue, within or outside the projects domain, after GEF or external assistance has come to an end. However, as has been stated earlier one of the main objectives of CASEC was changing or reforming land use practices to bring about biodiversity conservation benefits. This is a long-term process likely to extend beyond the lifetime of a “normal” project. But, this is not say that such processes cannot be positively affected by projects, indeed projects may be the only way to bring external interventions into the system and bring about change.

One of the challenges in evaluating a project such as CASEC is in understanding the dynamics that are driving not only the process but also the communities and agencies that the project is interacting with. Furthermore, these driving forces are operating in different time scales for example; driving forces that effect change in community perceptions and values operate over a much longer time frame than those expected by project cycles and may be influenced by externalities (such as the disruption of sheep migration routes or the closure of historically used pastures in other countries). This inconsistency sets up a tension between “project” vs “process”.

Natural resource management is further influenced by even greater ecological time scales, which because they are so long we tend to cast aside as unmanageable. Therefore, evaluating projects tends to be done against a specific set of “outputs” or “deliverables” as determined by the project log frame or such other tool. To evaluate a process it is more effective to monitor trend – if the trend is negative then it may be possible to use a project to correct the trend¹³. The project’s target area has been described as one of the most endangered in Georgia in particular and in the Caucasus in general (Biodiversity Country Study, 1996). CASEC started in December 1999 and lasted 29 months (to May 2002). The “process” had been going on long before this and will continue to carry on responding to environmental, political, economic and social changes. CASEC has begun to monitor and influence the process or trend for the first time with the specific aim of sustainably managing biodiversity resources.

Therefore the sustainability of the global environmental benefits can be measured thus:

- Transboundary coordination for conservation and sustainable use of the arid and semi-arid zone – this is unlikely to be sustainable without continued external financial support although the broad political support appears to be in place and the relationships have been developed. NACRES has proved itself an effective organisation for leveraging funds in the past. Therefore, although the overall strategy is not yet clear (see following comments on the management plan) this is considered to be **Satisfactory**
- Development of capacity in government and public organisations for sustainable management of a transboundary ecosystem – the problems experienced by the GoG during the project were beyond the control of CASEC. At the level of the MoE much of the capacity was lost due to restructuring of the various departments. The collaboration between NACRES and the MoE on the issues such as MAP 1 suggest that this can be considered sustainable and therefore **Satisfactory**. The development of these capacities at the local level is more problematic and it is hard to see how this can be sustainable without greater participation by, and a clearer framework for the participation of local authorities and is therefore considered **Marginally Satisfactory**. Public (civil society) organisations appear to have a good understanding of the issues, a clear focus and are able to deliver specific services and leverage funding to support their work. This was considered **Satisfactory**, as was the development of environmental awareness. However, it should be stated that environmental awareness will have to be expanded to include some of the issues that shepherds and other resource users are concerned with and not restrict itself to rigid environmental and conservation messages if it is sustain its impact

¹³ Murphree, M. J., Wildlife Division Support Project, CREMA Review Report No. 56. Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission, Ghana and IUCN. October 2005.

- Establishing a biodiversity monitoring system for the arid and semi-arid zone – NACRES is working closely with the MoE to develop this further and the benefits are very likely to be sustainable, however, they will be dependent upon the resources made available long-term by the MoE. This is considered a **Satisfactory**.
- Development of participatory integrated transboundary management criteria and its implementation on selected areas as parts of replicable demonstration pilot projects – the establishment of the pilot hunting farm meets most of the criteria for sustainability and was considered to be **Highly Satisfactory**. Although the project was unable to establish a sustainable grazing regime, as outlined in the discussion above on “process vs. project”, the approach of CASEC in dealing with this is considered to provide a good basis for developing a sustainable system and is therefore considered **Satisfactory**. The management plan lacked the appropriate linkages to local administrative institutions necessary for its effective implementation and therefore lacked a local “institutional home”. A management plan for such a large area, particularly as it is not a protected areas management plan, will need greater integration into the local administrative framework and a broader socio-political and socio-economic remit to provide the incentives for local investment in the interventions. The management plan is therefore considered **Marginally Satisfactory**.

Execution and implementation modalities (Satisfactory)

The disbursement of project funds was satisfactory. The strong working relationship between the IA, EA and PIU combined with timely and transparent reporting greatly assisted the project implementation. The disbursement of funds by the IA on a quarterly basis according to the submitted quarterly work plans greatly facilitated the project implementation.

The NGO execution modality provided significant advantages in project implementation for a number of reasons:

- The poor financial situation experienced by the GoG at the time of implementation,
- The apparently chaotic situation that the GoG was in prior to 2003,
- The high number of technical experts that were required for short-term inputs to various components were more efficiently engaged through NACRES.
- NACRES had a strong and effective network and was able to access other networks of civil society organisations more rapidly than might have been possible for a state institution;
- There was little experience with working directly with communities within the state institutions and rural stakeholders probably more readily trusted civil society organisations.

4.3. Results

The project objective, to “conserve highly threatened arid and semi-arid ecosystems through participatory planning and sustainable use of natural resources” was to a large extent achieved. The outcomes are considered to be on the whole satisfactory and the establishment of the hunting farm being highly satisfactory. The development of management techniques for the sustainable use of biological resources, cross border collaboration and strategies aimed at recovering and conserving the ecosystem and key species is part of a much longer process to which the project has played a very important role in. The project has made the first important steps towards this and put in place a robust and rational framework that will allow the process of change to take place. However, this will require further support to develop a system of land use that is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

The project developed the skills and capacity of a number of organizations. NACRES, and the consortium of civil society organizations that participated in the project, benefited from the project and lessons and skills are firmly embedded in the organization. Civil society organizations appear to have stepped in to fill the vacuum that resulted from the chaotic situation that prevailed in government prior to 2003. These civil society organizations retain the institutional memory that would normally be held by government institutions. While they are not a replacement for statutory agencies, they fulfil a vital and effective role in society.

The institutional restructuring that took place following the change in the GoG in 2003 resulted in much of the institutional memory and capacity being lost from the MoE. However, individuals who were involved in the project did increase their understanding of the issues and those that have remained within the system continue to contribute in a meaningful way.

TABLE 1: PROJECT RATINGS

Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Marginally Satisfactory (MS), and Unsatisfactory (U)

PROJECT COMPONENT OR OBJECTIVE	RATING SCALE				RATING
	U	MS	S	HS	
PROJECT FORMULATION					S
Conceptualization/Design			√		S
Stakeholder participation			√		S
PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION					S
Implementation Approach			√		S
The use of the logical framework			√		S
Adaptive management			√		S
Use/establishment of information technologies			√		S
Operational relationships between the institutions involved			√		S
Technical capacities			√		S
Monitoring and evaluation			√		S
Stakeholder participation			√		S
Production and dissemination of information			√		S
Local resource users and NGOs participation			√		S
Establishment of partnerships			√		S
Involvement and support of governmental institutions		√			MS
PROJECT RESULTS					S
Attainment of Outcomes/ Achievement of objectives			√		S
Achievement of objective – to increase coordination among countries concerned in participatory planning and sustainable management of natural resources			√		S
Achievement of objective – to develop agreed strategies aimed at recovering and protecting the ecosystem and key species			√		S
Achievement of objective – to increase awareness and develop management techniques for the sustainable use of biological resources among land users and other stakeholders			√		S
Outcome 1: An arid and semi-arid zone coordination unit established for formulation, information management, communication and implementation of protection activities			√		S
Outcome 2: Develop agreed principles, guidelines and actions for conservation of the arid and semi-arid zone conservation			√		S
Outcome 3: The establishment of replicable pilot demonstration projects based on the			√		S

principles of agreed management criteria					
Outcome 4: A biodiversity monitoring system for the arid and semi-arid zone			√		S
Outcome 5: Replicable capacity and public awareness strengthening programs			√		S
OVERALL PROJECT ACHIEVEMENT & IMPACT			√		S

TABLE 2: STATUS OF OBJECTIVE / OUTCOME DELIVERY AS PER MEASURABLE INDICATORS

OBJECTIVE	MEASURABLE INDICATORS FROM PROJECT LOGFRAME	FINAL TARGET	STATUS OF DELIVERY*	RATING**
To increase coordination among countries concerned in participatory planning and sustainable management of natural resources	Official minutes and transcripts from meetings and consultations	Quarterly meetings (at least 10 by the end of the project) and monthly consultations among representatives of governments, public organisations and local users	COMPLETED	S
To develop agreed strategies aimed at recovering and protecting the ecosystem and key species	Official minutes and transcripts from meetings and consultations	An official agreement by stakeholders on proposed alternative land uses by the 13 th month of the project	COMPLETED	S
To increase awareness and develop management techniques for the sustainable use of biological resources among land users and other stakeholders	Polls and questionnaires taken at the beginning and end of the project	Statistically significant difference (between baseline situation and end of project) in awareness and management skills of land users and local communities	COMPLETED	S
OUTCOMES	MEASURABLE INDICATORS FROM PROJECT LOGFRAME	FINAL TARGET	STATUS OF DELIVERY	RATING
An arid and semi-arid zone coordination unit established for formulation, information management, communication and implementation of protection activities	By the 3 rd month of the project governments and NGOs recognise the unit as the coordinating body for development of transboundary criteria	Formal (written) appointments from respective government units and NGO representatives to the implementation unit	COMPLETED	S
Develop agreed principles, guidelines and actions for conservation of the arid and semi-arid zone conservation	Delivery of document at the 13 th month of the project with a description of critical habitats, species protection needs, grazing rotation scheme, allowed levels of hunting activities, enforcement and monitoring needs, feasible sources of funding and execution arrangements	Formal (written) agreement with the document from government units	COMPLETED	S

The establishment of replicable pilot demonstration projects based on the principles of agreed management criteria	Between 13 th and 29 th months selected stakeholders will be involved in 5 alternative land use and species recovery activities proposed in the project	Field surveys and interviews with local communities	COMPLETED	S
A biodiversity monitoring system for the arid and semi-arid zone	An agreed yearly calendar of sampling agreed indicators and thresholds completed within the first eight months of the project	Minutes from the coordination meetings approving the establishment of the monitoring system	COMPLETED	S
	At the end of year 1 a database containing at least 75% of known species in the arid zone, together with their status, current threats and proposed management is accessible through the WWW	Access to the WWW	COMPLETED	S
Replicable capacity and public awareness strengthening programs	Monthly execution of seminars and/or community workshops and publication of material	Reports of seminars and workshops	COMPLETED	S

* STATUS OF DELIVERY:

- GREEN / COMPLETED** = Indicators show successful achievement
- YELLOW** = Indicators show expected completion by end of Project
- RED** = Indicators show poor achievement - unlikely to be complete by end of Project

** RATINGS:

- Highly Satisfactory = HS
- Satisfactory = S
- Marginally Satisfactory = MS
- Unsatisfactory = U

5. Recommendations

The Arid and Semi-arid Ecosystem Conservation in the Caucasus project was a bold and ambitious project. Historically conservationists have, on the whole, responded to loss of habitat and species with conventional protection measures, through exclusion and prohibition. These measures have met with limited success because they tend to address the *symptoms* and not the *root causes* of biodiversity loss. These underlying *causes* are mostly the result of weak or perverse incentives for sustainable management and often fall outside the technical experience of conservationists. This project broke with convention and attempted to address these *causes* at an ecosystem level and within the prevailing socio-political and economic framework. In doing so, it has begun to address the weaknesses and inequalities in tenure, pricing, authority, responsibility, cost and benefit that are the driving forces behind unsustainable use and the loss of biodiversity.

In the course of the project, NACRES and other partners have developed considerable experience while contributing greatly to our understanding of the dynamics that are driving the processes and the communities, individuals and agencies that are involved.

NACRES and its partners continue to be involved in the process of developing sustainable management of the arid and semi-arid areas of eastern Georgia within the constraints of their available resources. However, the pressures upon the ecosystem are likely to increase as a result of external and internal factors. The nomadic pastoralists are an integral part of this ecosystem. Loss of this traditional transhumance could have as serious implications to the conservation values as overgrazing. Replacement of existing extensive grazing with more sedentary, irrigated systems or transported rather than herded sheep movements are all possible future scenarios that could dramatically affect the entire ecosystem. The *process* is the change in human activities within the arid and semi-arid ecosystem that occurs as a result of external and internal forces. The project *intervention* has been to understand the dynamics of the system and attempt to control these forces to give the *process* direction that allows for sustainable management and maintaining the integrity of the ecosystem. If there is a hiatus in support to this *process* there is a risk that this capacity to deal with these issues, and the good work achieved by CASEC, could be lost.

It is therefore recommended that:

- **Across borders relationships** – Funding is sourced to further develop these important international links with Armenia and Azerbaijan and follow up visits are arranged.
- **Ecosystem monitoring** – The MAP 1 database is updated periodically and a mapping component should be added to the system.
- **The WB/GEF GPADP Vashlovani National Park project** pays particular attention to the project experience relating to rotational grazing, the availability of grazing and the complexity of the overall system when planning traditional use areas within the protected areas and in particular when considering resettlement of resource users into a system that is probably now at capacity. This could be achieved by sharing the Lessons Learned document with the WB/GEF GPADP through a seminar or round table meeting presented by NACRES personnel who worked on these aspects of the CASEC project and have a good understanding of the complexities of the system.
- **Hunting farm development** - NACRES continues to provide technical assistance to the Dalis Mta Hunting Farm, investigates ways in which habitat management can increase productivity of target species and conducts a financial review after the next hunting season. The UK British Association of Shooting and Conservation¹⁴ (BASC) has done considerable work on habitat management for conservation and shooting, particularly with relation to farming practices and partridge rearing. NACRES should consider developing a relationship with BASC with a view to

¹⁴ www.basc.org.uk, contact Tim Russell tim.russel@basc.org.uk

developing the hunting farm approach to conservation or alternatively the Federation of associations for hunting and conservation of the EU, FACE¹⁵.

- **GEF continues to support *the process*** by funding the development of a follow up project or programme that builds on the experience gained so far. The scope of the intervention should be extended to include summer pastures and the migratory corridors. It should address the issues of common property management and the integration of pastures, protected areas and hunting farms. It would require a strong commitment from the GoG to address these issues and could create the necessary management linkages between summer and winter pastures. One possible approach to this would be the creation of a Biosphere Reserve because “biosphere reserves are much like laboratories where new and optimal practices to manage nature and human activities are tested and demonstrated. They outpace traditional confined conservation zones, combining core protected areas with zones where sustainable development is fostered by local dwellers and enterprises. Their governance systems are often highly innovative. In some cases, new legislation can be introduced.”¹⁶ Whether a biosphere reserve approach is used or not, the project or programme would need to be embedded at the local socio-political and administrative level and have mutli-agency support if it is to effectively bring about changes in the land use management outside of the protected areas system. Furthermore, biosphere reserves can form a discrete package that can be more readily understood and therefore “politically sold” and accepted.

The management plan forms an important document for conserving a number of key species and critical areas in the short term and it includes a large amount of valuable information. However, it will be necessary to develop a larger rationale and strategy to incorporate the wider social, cultural and political imperatives. Conserving the biodiversity of the arid and semi arid areas of the Caucasus is a worthy challenge but it is also very daunting. The work carried out so far provides a solid basis to build upon this.

- **Sharing the experience** - Other GEF projects in the CIS should take advantage of the positive experiences of the project. One such project is the Nuratau Kyzlekum Biosphere Reserve that is attempting similar activities particularly in relation to the hunting farm and approach to the issues of grazing.

7. Evaluation report Annexes

Annex 1 Evaluation ToR

Annex 2 Itinerary

Annex 3 List of persons interviewed

Annex 4 Summary of field visits

Annex 5 List of documents reviewed

Annex 6 *Aide Memoire*

Annex 7 Project Log Frame

Annex 8 Explanation of terminology

¹⁵ <http://www.face-europe.org/>

¹⁶ <http://www.unesco.org/mab/BRs.shtml>