

Final Evaluation
(May 2003)

**“Conservation of Biodiversity in the Talamanca
Caribe Biological Corridor”**
(COS/99/G35)
A GEF/UNDP PROJECT

FINAL DRAFT
(July 29, 2003)

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The evaluation mission wishes to express appreciation to all those who patiently engaged in sometimes lengthy interviews that were all of great help to the evaluation mission in assessing the project, and to those in UNDP/Costa Rica who organized and facilitated the mission and demonstrated a strong commitment to learn and apply lessons from this evaluation.

Acronyms

ACLAC	Área de Conservación Amistad-Caribe
ANAI	Asociación ANAI
APPTA	Asociación de Pequeños Productores de Talamanca
CBTC	Corredor Biológico Talamanca Caribe
GEF	Global Environment Facility
MINAE	Ministerio Para el Medio Ambiente y Energía
MSP	Medium-Size Project
PEU	Project Executing Unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SGP	Small Grants Programme
SINAC	Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
CO	Country Office
RCU	Regional Coordinating Unit

Executive Summary

Situational Overview

Central America is an important corridor for migratory birds. It is also the northernmost limit for many South American plants and animals, and the southernmost limit for many North American plants and animals. Thus, it is an important transition zone.

Although only 100 years ago, most of Central America, including most of Costa Rica, was covered with forests, today, due to conversion of forest in the early 1900's to cacao and banana plantations, and later to rangeland for beef cattle production in the 1980s, followed by intensive logging to extract timber (activities which continue today), only about 40% of Costa Rica is forested today, much of this degraded.

The Talamanca region, in the eastern part of Costa Rica where the project is focused, contains the largest single block of primary forest left in the country. Most of the forests in Talamanca are, however, degraded (secondary) forests. It is estimated that less than 10% of the Talamanca forests are primary forests. Almost all of the primary forest of Talamanca is within Indigenous Territories, of which there are three in the Talamanca-Caribe biological corridor.

Ecologically defined, the Corridor includes the area reaching from the *Parque Internacional de La Amistad* down to the Atlantic coast. The project has focused its activities on the most heavily populated and most immediately threatened part of the Corridor, mostly in its lower reaches, covering an area of 46,560¹ ha or 15% of the actual ecological corridor². This is a relatively small area when one considers that the estimated area required for a single jaguar (40 km²) would allow for less than a total population of 10 females within the Corridor. Other species, such as the white-lipped peccary, for example, require much larger areas to maintain a minimum viable population over the long-term.

One of the most important threats to the biodiversity of the Corridor is logging. Although the Corridor area suffers from illegal logging, because most illegal logging is *small scale*, the impact of illegal logging on the forest (and all that live therein) is far less than that of *legal* logging. According to an audit conducted by the *Corredor Biológico Talamanca Caribe* (CBTC), the NGO that executed the project, it is estimated that 171,435 cubic meters of timber were extracted legally from Talamanca forests during the five year period between 1995-2000. Illegal extraction was estimated at not even 1% of legal logging during the same period. Legal logging is poorly planned and managed, and there are few controls in place to ensure sustainable extraction.

¹ Figures presented in some CBTC documents indicate a total area of 39,000 ha, however, the Project Director indicated that the indigenous territories of Cabecar (6,144 ha) and that of Bribri (2358 ha) should also be included, and gave a total figure of 46,561 ha for the size of the Corridor in which the CBTC focuses its activities.

² The ecological corridor includes a total area of 305,412 ha.

The Project

This three year, medium-size (US\$ 1,269,930), NGO-executed project was to conserve globally significant biodiversity in the Talamanca-Caribe Biological Corridor, hereafter referred to as “the Corridor”. The approach involved: 1) promotion of ecotourism to provide incentives for local communities to conserve biodiversity; 2) institutional strengthening of ACLAC, the government entity responsible for natural resource management within the Corridor and of other community-based organizations; 3) development and promotion of biodiversity-friendly, sustainable timber extraction practices; 4) reforestation of degraded areas, 5) application of incentives for maintaining forest cover on private forest lands, 6) identification and acquisition of key areas required to enhance connectivity within the corridor, 7) environmental education in primary schools in the Corridor; 8) establishment of a system of community-based rangers, and 9) enhanced production of cacao grown under shade, including strengthening of the main cacao producers cooperative in the region.

Overall Assessment of the Project

The project has made a positive difference. Without this project, it is almost certain that more forests in the Corridor would have been destroyed or degraded over the past three years through both *illegal* and unsustainable *legal* logging. Although the evaluation mission believes that the project has indeed had a positive impact, because of the limited data available comparing pre- and post-project situations, and the questionable approach used to arrive at comparative deforestation rates, the evaluation mission does not have confidence in the data presented by CBTC regarding changes in deforestation trends over the project life. That data suggests that deforestation rates have been reduced from 11 % per annum at the beginning of the project to 7.15% per annum today. Although it is difficult to quantify changes in deforestation rates in the project area over the project life, it seems clear that more forest would have been destroyed or degraded without this project.

It is unreasonable to suppose that the biodiversity of the Corridor could have been conserved over the short time span of three years. Indeed, even over a very long time, conservation of biodiversity can never be assured, as new threats will certainly be introduced even if existing threats are removed. The most that a project can do is work in partnership with others to create the enabling institutional, political, and legal environments that promote long-term conservation. The project has made significant positive advances in this direction.

Given the deforestation rates at the outset of the project, a realistic goal for this three-year project might have been to reduce the annual loss of forest cover in the area, while removing the most critical constraints to forest biodiversity conservation. Perhaps a better basis for evaluating the project (rather than using the indicators developed by the project) would be to determine whether or not the *conditions for success* in conserving biodiversity in the corridor are now in place or not. Another way of looking at this would be to determine whether or not the critical barriers to conservation have been removed. Clearly, to determine this, the critical barriers must first be defined. Although the critical barriers were never explicitly defined in the project document, it is clear that the CBTC, having worked in the area for more than a decade, is well aware of what these are, and has focused their efforts on removing these. Nevertheless, [a clear definition of critical barriers during project design would have been helpful.](#)

Although, as described in detail in the section on project weaknesses, it is clear that the project could have achieved even more than it did, it is also clear that the situation regarding biodiversity in the Talamanca-Caribe Biological Corridor would have certainly been worse today without this project.

Should another opportunity arise to provide support to conserve biodiversity in the area, the evaluation mission believes it would be well worth pursuing, either for the GEF or for other donors. In this event, the lessons to be learned from this project should be applied to any future initiatives to enhance prospects of success.

Overall Project Strengths

Despite various deficiencies, including some serious shortcomings in project design and monitoring, the project has accomplished a lot.

The staff of the Executing Agency, a Costa Rican NGO, the Association of the Talamanca-Caribe Biological Corridor, hereafter referred to as the CBTC, are highly committed, and there is excellent collaboration between project staff and several of the key entities that ultimately determine whether or not biodiversity will be conserved in the Corridor. The collaboration between the project and the government entity responsible for natural resource management in the region, ACLAC, and also between the *fiscalia publica* in the *Ministerio Publico* is exemplary. This collaboration can be attributed in large part to the fact that the project did not represent a new initiative, nor did it create a new entity, but rather was implemented by an existing organization, the CBTC, that had been working in the region for many years.

There appears to be a real opportunity for conserving the remaining forests in Talamanca given the individuals currently in decision-making positions in key institutions (including ACLAC and the *fiscalia publica* in Bribri), and the interest of local residents in conserving biodiversity. The current leadership of ACLAC is very capable and committed, and the project support offered to ACLAC is considered highly successful. Even more support to ACLAC could have usefully been provided by this project.

There is a strong commitment by UNDP/Costa Rica to learn from this experience and to ensure that future UNDP/GEF and other UNDP projects build on this experience.

Project strengths related to the various components of the project are described in Section (5) of this report.

Weaknesses outlined below should be understood in the context of a generally positive assessment of the project.

Overall Project Weaknesses

- The project scope was too broad. Any single one of the four Specific Objectives could have been an entire project in and of itself.
- Given the project scope, the time frame and budget were inadequate.

- Disproportionate use was made of GEF funds to cover personnel costs. More than 50% of the GEF project funds were dedicated to personnel costs. This is significantly more than what most UNDP/GEF projects spend on personnel. Furthermore, these funds were used inappropriately to pay salaries of CBTC staff (many of whom were paid by the project during the project life). Use of GEF monies to fund personnel or activities funded prior to the project with other funding sources represents replacement, as opposed to additional, funds. The GEF requires that its funds represent additional, new financing. The CBTC should have continued to pay the salaries of its own staff with other funding sources, and used GEF funds to implement project activities.
- Only 57 % of the funds committed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as co-financing for the project were actually made available to the project by TNC during project implementation³. Details were never presented in the project document on how the TNC funds were to be spent. Only the overall figure of \$475,311 was presented. [Clearer definition of how co-financing was to be spent and a letter of intent from TNC may have helped ensure that committed funds were actually made available.](#)
- Insufficient project monitoring and oversight. Although the project document envisaged a Project Steering Committee (PSC), and even specified its composition, no such committee was established. It is normal for both a PSC and a Project Executing Unit (PEU) to be established at project outset. Many UNDP/GEF projects also include some type of scientific and technical consultative committee that may include national and international experts not involved in the project. [Existence of a PSC and a scientific consultative committee might have been helpful in preventing some of the weaknesses of the project.](#) Both the UNDP Country Office (CO), and the CBTC, acting in the capacity of the Executing Agency for the project, should have ensured that a PSC was established.
- Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Project Executing Unit (PEU), as outlined in the project document, were inappropriate, giving the PEU the responsibility for both implementing project activities as well as overseeing, monitoring and evaluating them. The TOR for the PEU as presented in the project document should not have been approved. [The UNDP CO should carefully review proposed TOR for all project committees and personnel before releasing GEF funds.](#)
- Inappropriate modification of project objectives. Two of the four Specific Objectives of the project were modified after the first year of project operation. Although the UNDP CO indicated that these did not represent substantive changes, in the case of one of the objectives, the change was indeed substantive and resulted in a revised objective that is, in the opinion of the evaluation mission, less relevant to the GEF, and of lower priority for conserving biodiversity in the project area. Greater involvement in the project by the UNDP CO (through the establishment of the foreseen but never established Project Steering Committee) and greater oversight/direction from the UNDP/GEF RCU could have precluded this from happening.
- Poor indicators used to monitor and assess project success. Because they were recognized to be inadequate, many of the indicators described in the original project document were subsequently

³ During the debriefing of the final evaluation mission, it was recommended that UNDP facilitate a dialogue between CBTC and TNC to attempt to address this shortcoming. As a result, an agreement has been reached which stipulates that total co-financing from TNC will amount to US\$ 515,000 (more than the originally agreed amount) by 2006.

revised after project approval by the GEF. The original indicators were indeed poor and required revision, but unfortunately, the revised ones do not represent a significant improvement. Even in the case of the revised project indicators, many, if not most, of these are either not quantifiable, not verifiable, are not good indicators of what they are trying to measure, or are simply not indicators at all. Ex: “una *mejora* en el *estado* de los bosques intervenidos por aprovechamiento forestal con respecto al manejo tradicional”. Good indicators are essential to enable project monitoring and evaluation, and also in clarifying exactly what a project intends to accomplish. Because there appears to be a rather widespread problem with definition of indicators in GEF projects, it may be worthwhile introducing some type of proficiency assessment to ensure that UNDP CO personnel responsible for overseeing GEF projects are competent in reviewing indicators before responsibility for GEF projects is assumed. Meanwhile, the UNDP GEF RCU must carefully review all proposed indicators before proposals are forwarded to the GEF for consideration, and should ensure that these are given a very thorough review again during project initiation workshops.

- The Project Director and several project staff reside primarily in the capital city, whereas the project is in the Talamanca region. Perhaps more could have been accomplished during the project, and more cost-effectively, had the Project Director and project staff resided in the region of the project⁴.
- Insufficient attention was given to designing project elements to promote sustainability of those initiatives/activities that require continuation after project end.
- Although excellent collaboration existed between CBTC and several key entities, other logical institutional links were not successfully developed, e.g., with INBIO or universities. [Establishing appropriate institutional links or strengthening existing positive institutional links is helpful in project implementation and also in promoting sustainability.](#)
- Inadequate awareness of, and learning from, other relevant GEF and non-GEF initiatives (biological corridor projects, co-management projects, sustainable forestry projects, ecotourism projects, environmental education activities). [Unless becoming aware of and learning from other relevant initiatives is included in the project document as a project activity, with associated outputs, it usually does not happen.](#) At the outset of any GEF project, the UNDP CO should, at a minimum, inform new projects of the existence of the GEF website (gefweb.org), and should assist in making the necessary contacts with other relevant GEF projects or with the GEF Secretariat in the event that more intimate contact with those projects is desired.
- Information dissemination of project results/products is inadequate. Even the evaluation mission had difficulties accessing some of the information produced by the project. Access would certainly be even more difficult for persons not involved in the project who may not even be aware of the project's concrete outputs or products. As one example, biomonitoring results of the project's biomonitoring activities exist only in untitled, undated, apparently CBTC internal documents.
- Most of the materials produced by the project provide no indication that they have been produced with project funds. Lack of recognition of UNDP/GEF support on these materials makes it difficult to identify the products produced by the project. Further adding to the confusion, several documents are undated and untitled.

⁴ Refer to Annex 4 for CBTC comment on this evaluation point.

- Incomplete efforts. Some of the environmental education materials that were to have been produced during the project were still in draft form during the final evaluation mission. There does, however, appear to be a genuine intent to finalize these materials. Thus, although not produced during the time frame of the project, they will undoubtedly be finalized soon. Likewise, there is still much work to do in the sustainable forestry component. Although a plan was produced, it was not yet approved at the time of the evaluation, and not all trees had been marked.
- Insufficient emphasis on quantifying the impact of hunting on wildlife populations, and inadequate focus on controlling hunting. This omission is apparently due to a lack of relevant expertise on the CBTC staff. None of the CBTC staff have wildlife expertise, and no solid links were made with institutions with expertise in this area (universities, other conservation organizations).
- Insufficient emphasis on resolving wildlife/human conflicts. Some wildlife/human conflicts, e.g. pizotes in San Rafael de Bordon, were inappropriately ignored, while others, such as the current conflict between jaguar and people in San Rafael de Bordon were not being adequately addressed at the time of the evaluation. The evaluation mission provided some guidance on groups to contact to pursue resolution of this second conflict. The first conflict between pizotes and people no longer exists as the residents left that settlement (for unrelated reasons). New wildlife/human conflicts are bound to arise and it is important that mechanisms be in place to allow for their quick resolution.
- Inadequate attention given to selection or monitoring of key indicator species. The project did initiate a good system for monitoring of freshwater ecosystems, but monitoring of key terrestrial wildlife populations was very weak and no reliable information can be obtained from the data collected.
- Numerous changes in personnel within the UNDP CO resulted in four different UNDP Programme Officers being responsible for the project during three years. This frequent change of staff makes it difficult to effectively monitor a project. Perhaps the more critical constraint however, was the hands off approach adopted by the UNDP CO. Most of the Programme Officers responsible for the project never visited the project, and thus had no first hand knowledge of it. There does not appear to have been much monitoring of the project even from a distance. For example, even though a Project Steering Committee is called for in the project document, a Committee in which UNDP would normally be very much involved, the lack of establishment of such a committee was never pursued by UNDP CO, and apparently never noticed until close to project end.
- Even though tourism (much of this based on Costa Rica's natural resources) represents the number one revenue earner for Costa Rica, no co-financing or other form of substantive commitment for this conservation project was obtained from the Government of Costa Rica. The Government entity responsible for overseeing both timber extraction as well as biodiversity conservation, ACLAC, is severely understaffed and ill equipped. ACLAC has severe transport constraints, for example, that do not permit it to regularly inspect or monitor logging activities (both legal and illegal). [No project activities or pre-project activities \(during project negotiation\) engaged the Government in a dialogue regarding these critical budget constraints. The project should have negotiated some counterpart contribution by the Government and an incremental increase in the government's own financing of ACLAC over the project life.](#)

- The project did not undertake activities focused on marine ecosystems or on wetlands as envisaged in the project document. This is *not*, however, considered to be a weakness, as the project was overly ambitious even without adding this element. Exclusion of this element was appropriate, but the project document should have reflected this modification.
- Project reporting demands were overwhelming. Project personnel spent 15 days out of every 3 months preparing unnecessarily detailed and comprehensive trimester reports. According to the minutes of the 2001 Tripartite Review, the UNDP CO recommended that CBTC abbreviate the reports. Annual reports also indicated that reports were too long. However, CBTC continued using their old format and UNDP did not insist on the recommended change. [The type and level of information required in reports should have been clearly outlined at the outset of the project.](#) Fortunately, the system has now been changed and trimester reports are no longer required. This is, of course, too late for this project but will be a welcome relief for others.
- Inadequate preparation by the UNDP CO and by project personnel prior to the evaluation mission. Although eventually obtained, numerous products produced with project support were not readily available to the evaluation mission (e.g., the economic analysis associated with the forestry model, comprehensive biomonitoring results, maps, environmental education manuals, and other materials). Adding to the confusion, many *non*-project produced products were presented to the evaluation mission with little explanation or prior sorting. The tentative agenda prepared prior to the mission was very sketchy and required more time and attention of the evaluation mission than what should have been necessary. The briefings on the project provided at the outset of the mission could have been more helpful had UNDP CO been more involved with the project.
- Lack of participation of a national consultant on the evaluation mission. This was due to insufficient funds reserved for the evaluation. [A national consultant should be involved in all external project evaluations. The UNDP CO and the UNDP/GEF RCU should assure that sufficient funds are reserved for monitoring and evaluation purposes in all project proposals before they are submitted to the GEF.](#)

Future Focus

Following are some priority areas that donors, including the GEF, may wish to consider supporting in future efforts to conserve biodiversity of global significance in the Talamanca-Caribe Biological Corridor.

- Strengthen the capacity of *ACLAC*. Although at present *ACLAC* has strong and dedicated leadership and a lot of potential, lack of adequate resources for *ACLAC* to perform its functions represents one of several critical barriers to conserving biodiversity within the Talamanca-Caribe Biological Corridor.
- Assist indigenous groups to conserve biodiversity within the *indigenous territories* within the Corridor. Most primary forests remaining in the Corridor are found within indigenous territories.
- Improve the system of *regentes forestales*.
- Determine the effects of hunting (legal and illegal) on wildlife populations in the Corridor, and manage hunting so that it does not have a negative effect on these populations.

- Identify and put mechanisms in place to resolve wildlife/human conflicts in the Corridor.
- Provide support for the judicial system to more effectively address environmental justice.

1. Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation is based on interviews and review of documentation conducted during 20 days in May, 2003 (See Annex 2, Agenda for the Project Evaluation Mission).

The evaluation was conducted by one international consultant experienced in GEF project evaluation, Ms. Virginia Ravndal, whose expertise is in biodiversity conservation and in the design and evaluation of biodiversity conservation projects. Because insufficient funds were programmed for the evaluation, no national consultant was involved in the evaluation mission. The Programme Officer in UNDP/Costa Rica responsible for the project, Mr. Kasper Koefoed-Hansen, accompanied the evaluation mission on several field visits.

Visits were made to one of the two protected areas within the Corridor, the Refugio de Vida Silvestre Gandoca-Manzanillo, the Indigenous Territory of Yorquin, the *cativera* forest, the ecotourism lodge of ASACODE, the *finca* of Don Omar Peraza where the sustainable forestry model is being developed, and to the communities of San Miguel, San Rafael de Bordon, and Oliva.

Interviews were conducted with the Project Director, the Coordinators of the various project components, members of communities involved in the project, ACLAC, the *fiscalia publica* in Bribri, member organizations of the ecotourism network, an elementary school teacher, elementary school students, managers of the Gandoca-Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge, members of the co-management committee for Gandoca-Manzanillo, rangers, a logger, ecotourism operators, members of the co-management committee for sea turtles in Gandoca, women's groups involved with tree nurseries and organic farming, APPTA, and an indigenous group involved in ecotourism.

A debriefing to share and discuss preliminary evaluation results was held at the end of the mission. Annex 3 presents a list of the participants in the debriefing.

Note: Because this project provided support to an existing organization that has been working in the area for more than a decade and whose own five year strategic plan coincides to a very large extent with the objectives of the GEF project, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between what was accomplished with the support from the GEF project and what was accomplished by the CBTC with support from other donors. For the most part, the GEF project did not introduce new elements, but rather provided support which allowed for ongoing efforts to be enhanced. Thus, it is almost impossible to distinguish between accomplishments made by this project and those resulting from regular CBTC activities. In addition, especially for the ecotourism component of the project, it was difficult to distinguish between the achievements resulting from this medium-size GEF project and those activities undertaken with support from the GEF Small Grants Programme. The Small Grants Programme provided support to many, if not most, of the same communities involved in the medium-size project. Thus, successes attributed to the project in this report may more appropriately be attributed to not only the project, but to the CBTC's efforts in general, and successes attributed to the project in the area of ecotourism should be attributed to both of the above as well as to support provided by the GEF Small Grants Programme.

2. Project Design

2.1 Project Scope

The scope of the project was overly ambitious for an MSP. Any one of the four project components, i.e., protection and restoration of ecosystems; sustainable forest management; ecotourism; or institutional strengthening; could have been a project in and of itself. Although it could well be argued that a simultaneous effort in these various aspects of conservation was required, and that the project itself should undertake these various efforts for want of involvement by other entities in the region, this approach, to be most successful, would have required a full-scale project rather than an MSP, and would also have required establishing links with several other institutions and organizations.

2.2 Project Length

Given the project scope, three years was insufficient. A more realistic time-frame for the project as presented would have been eight years.

2.3 Project Budget

Given the project scope, the budget was grossly inadequate. The scope of the project required a full-size project rather than a MSP.

2.4 Project Document

The Original Project Document

There is lack of consistency throughout the original project document, including lack of consistency between Specific Objectives and Expected Outcomes, and between Expected Outcomes and Activities. The indicators described in the project document for all of the above were, for the most part, poor.

The Amended Project Document

An amendment to the project document was elaborated in February, 2001 by the Project Executing Unit (PEU). The amendment was sent to the UNDP CO, indicating that the changes had been approved by the PEU, and requesting that these be formalized by UNDP. The UNDP CO responded that in that the project document maintained its original objectives that the modifications were thereby formalized and a copy of the letter was then sent to the UNDP/GEF Regional Bureau indicating that objectives remained unchanged. In actuality, two of the four Specific Objectives (Specific Objectives 2 and 4) had been substantively modified from the original.

Several lessons might be learned from this experience. First, [a PEU does not have the authority to approve substantive changes in GEF project objectives. These should first be discussed and agreed upon in the Project Steering Committee \(which, in the case of this project was, unfortunately, never formed\), and subsequently submitted to the UNDP RCU for approval. Depending on the nature of the changes, the GEF Secretariat's approval may also need to be sought.](#) Had the UNDP CO been more aware of the project, it would have recognized that the changes proposed by the PEU did indeed represent substantive changes.

The original Specific Objective 4 was modified to, “Strengthen local organizations and the ACLAC office”. The result of this change was disproportionate focus on strengthening one agricultural organization focused on cacao production, the Asociación de Pequeños Productores de Talamanca (APPTA), and, in the opinion of this evaluation mission, too much emphasis on cacao production as a means of conserving globally significant biodiversity. This change in focus cost the project in the sense that funds spent on cacao production aspects could better have been spent on strengthening ACLAC and/or the co-management committees established for the two protected areas (PAs) in the Corridor. This was, in the opinion of this evaluation mission, a higher priority, especially because another GEF project (the GEF/WB cacao project) could well have included the cacao aspects in that project⁵.

In the case of Specific Objective # 2, the objective was modified from the original, “Adopt and apply improved *biodiversity friendly* sustainable forest management practices”, to, “Adopt and apply sustainable forest management practices”, thus the focus was changed from biodiversity-friendly sustainable forest management to merely sustainable forest management. This was an inappropriate change as the GEF priority is on biodiversity conservation, not merely on sustainable forestry. The Project Director confirmed that this was a purposeful change, and not simply an oversight in translation from English to Spanish. Nevertheless, the activities actually undertaken were more in keeping with the objective as originally stated, thus this presented no problem in the end.

3. Project Implementation

3.1 Institutional Arrangements

Many of the positive aspects of the project can be attributed in part to the fact that the project did not represent a new initiative, nor did it create a new entity, but rather was implemented by an existing organization, the CBTC, that had been working in the region for many years. The excellent collaboration between project staff and several of the key entities that ultimately determine whether or not biodiversity will be conserved in the Corridor is one example. The collaboration between the project and the government entity responsible for natural resource management in the region, ACLAC, and also between the *fiscalia publica* in the *Ministerio Publico* was exemplary.

Although excellent collaboration existed between CBTC and several key entities, other logical institutional links were not successfully developed, e.g., with INBIO or universities. Although lack of outreach to establish institutional links with the NGO community is a shortcoming sometimes associated with government-executed projects, the same concern holds true for NGO-executed projects. Greater efforts must be made to establish helpful and sometimes unusual institutional links. Again, a PSC could have helped to promote such institutional links. [Establishing appropriate institutional links or strengthening existing positive institutional links is helpful in project implementation and also in promoting sustainability.](#)

It is the responsibility of any entity implementing a GEF project to be fully aware of other relevant GEF and non-GEF experiences. In the case of this project there was inadequate awareness of, and learning from, other relevant GEF and non-GEF initiatives, including those focused on biological corridors, co-management of PAs, sustainable forestry, ecotourism, and environmental education.

⁵ Refer to Annex 4 for CBTC comment on this evaluation point.

In the event that a project is both executed and implemented by the same entity, a functional Project Steering Committee is indispensable. In addition, GEF experience suggests that a scientific and technical advisory committee is also helpful in guiding biodiversity projects.

3.2 *Disbursement and Use of Committed Funds*

Only 57 % of the funds committed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as co-financing for the project were actually made available to the project by TNC during project implementation⁶. Details were never presented in the project document on how the TNC funds were to be spent. Only the overall figure of \$475,311 was presented. Clearer definition of how co-financing was to be spent and a letter of intent from TNC may have helped ensure that committed funds were actually made available.

Disproportionate use was made of GEF funds to cover personnel costs. More than 50% of the GEF project funds were dedicated to personnel costs. This is significantly more than what most UNDP/GEF projects spend on personnel. Furthermore, these funds were used inappropriately to pay salaries of CBTC staff (many of whom were paid by the project during the project life). Use of GEF monies to fund personnel or activities funded prior to the project with other funding sources represents replacement, as opposed to additional, funds. The GEF requires that its funds represent additional, new financing. The CBTC should have continued to pay the salaries of its own staff with other funding sources, and used GEF funds to implement project activities.

Even though tourism (much of this based on Costa Rica's natural resources) represents the number one revenue earner for Costa Rica, no co-financing or other form of substantive commitment for this conservation project was obtained from the Government of Costa Rica. The Government entity responsible for overseeing both timber extraction as well as biodiversity conservation, ACLAC, is severely understaffed and ill equipped. ACLAC has severe transport constraints, for example, that do not permit it to regularly inspect or monitor logging activities (both legal and illegal). No project activities or pre-project activities (during project negotiation) engaged the Government in a dialogue regarding these critical budget constraints. The project should have negotiated some counterpart contribution by the Government and an incremental increase in the government's own financing of ACLAC over the project life.

4. **Project Monitoring & Evaluation**

4.1 *Project Steering Committee*

Although the project document envisaged a Project Steering Committee (PSC), and even specified its composition, no such committee was established. It is normal for both a PSC and a Project Executing Unit (PEU) to be established at project outset. In addition to a PSC and the PEU, many UNDP/GEF projects also include some type of scientific and technical consultative committee that may include

⁶ During the debriefing of the final evaluation mission, it was recommended that UNDP facilitate a dialogue between CBTC and TNC to attempt to address this shortcoming. As a result, an agreement has been reached which stipulates that total co-financing from TNC will amount to US\$ 515,000 (more than the originally agreed amount) by 2006.

national and international experts not involved in the project. Existence of a PSC and a scientific consultative committee might have been helpful in preventing some of the weaknesses of the project. Both the UNDP CO, and the CBTC, acting in the capacity of the Executing Agency for the project, should have ensured that a PSC was established.

4.2 Project Executing Unit

Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Project Executing Unit (PEU), as outlined in the project document, were inappropriate, giving the PEU the responsibility for both implementing project activities as well as overseeing, monitoring and evaluating them. Clearly, no check and balance exists in this system. The TOR for the PEU as presented in the project document should not have been approved. The UNDP CO should carefully review TOR for all committees and project personnel before releasing funds.

4.3 Backstopping by UNDP

It would have been helpful for both the UNDP CO and the UNDP RCU to have been more involved in monitoring and backstopping this project. The UNDP CO is normally expected to partake as an active member of a PSC for any GEF project. This would have ensured that the UNDP CO was fully aware of the project's progress throughout project implementation, and would have been fully apprised of, and involved in, the decision making process regarding the substantive modifications made to the project. Although occasional backstopping of the UNDP CO by the UNDP RCU may be necessary, it is expected that the training and materials provided to the environment focal points in the UNDP COs has sufficiently prepared them to be the primary responsible parties for ongoing monitoring of GEF projects once approved by the GEF.

There is a clear commitment from the UNDP CO to adopt a more hands on approach to projects in future.

4.4 Selection and Use of Project Indicators and Benchmarks

Because indicators described for monitoring and evaluating the project were poor, the evaluation mission was not able to use them as the basis for the project's final evaluation.

Although the revised indicators represent an improvement over those presented in the original project document, they too have their weaknesses. For example, originally, only one indicator, "percentage of existing forest cover" was presented for Specific Objective 1, which was to "protect, preserve and restore the ecologically and globally significant forest, marine and freshwater ecotypes present in the Corridor". Clearly, percentage of forest cover is not a good indicator for marine and freshwater ecotypes. It is also inadequate for forests as only forest cover is considered, while forest *quality* and *connectivity* are ignored. In the revised project document, two indicators are presented. The first, "forest cover and quality is maintained compared to existing forest cover as reported in the Rapid Ecological Assessment", is an improvement, as forest quality is now considered. The second indicator, "an increase in the presence of key species in areas of the Corridor", can hardly be considered an

improvement as: 1) an increase seems unrealistic over such a short time period and especially given the extreme pressures on most of the species in the area (maintaining current population levels of key indicator species may have been a more realistic indicator), 2) the objective should not refer to presence or absence of species, but rather to population levels of key species (this was probably just sloppy wording, but the two mean drastically different things), Finally, “areas” of the Corridor is too general to be measurable.

No benchmarks associated with the achievement of project activities or objectives were defined.

4.5 Project Evaluation

Insufficient funds were set aside for project evaluation. No mid-term evaluation took place, and the final evaluation consisted of a one-person evaluation mission.

5. Project Activities and Products

5.1 Specific Objective 1

Specific Objective 1: “Conservation and restoration of species and of the structure and function of globally significant forest, marine and wetland ecotypes found within the Corridor.”

Cost: US\$ 227,000

A wide variety of activities were pursued in an attempt to meet this objective, including strategic conservation planning, acquisition of critical areas for biodiversity conservation, promotion of a programme of payment for environmental services, rehabilitation of degraded areas, and establishment of a system of community rangers.

Strategic Conservation Planning

A highly participatory strategic planning exercise, modeled on The Nature Conservancy (TNC) methodology, was held at the outset of the project. More than 30 individuals and organizations met to identify priority “elements” for conservation as well as key indicator species in the Corridor. Actions required for the conservation of these were also identified. Although the exercise was helpful in arriving at a consensus amongst a variety of stakeholders on a series of actions that should be pursued to conserve biodiversity in the Corridor, most of these actions had previously been identified by the CBTC; indeed the organization had been pursuing many of these for almost a decade before the strategic planning exercise. The exercise was never completed because TNC, the party providing the financing and technical support for the exercise, withdrew.

Identification of conservation actions was based on identification of the “priority conservation elements” for the Corridor. These were identified as: 1) tropical rainforests, 2) coastal wetlands, 3) rivers, gorges and lagoons, 4) large mammals, 5) migratory birds, and, 6) agroecological systems. Common knowledge would have suggested that these were important elements to conserve. One could have expected more from the investment of time and funds in identifying these “conservation elements”. Also disappointing was the failure to identify key indicator species or methodologies for monitoring these.

It may have been more appropriate to hold this type of exercise during a PDF A phase, rather than as part of the MSP itself. In cases where no PDF funds are requested, such as was the case in this project, it is normally assumed that the proponent organization has already engaged in a strategic planning exercise and that the project they propose represents a well thought out strategic intervention. This project would have benefited from a PDF A.

Acquisition of lands critical for biodiversity conservation

Almost one half million dollars (US\$ 475,311) was presented in the project document as co-financing from TNC. There was no written agreement specifying how these funds were to be used. Such agreements should be written and should detail the proposed uses of the funds. According to the Project Director, TNC funds were to be used to undertake a strategic planning exercise to identify priority “elements” for conservation (see above), and subsequently to purchase areas in the Corridor deemed critical for biodiversity conservation. Only \$ 264,000 or 57% of the TNC funds were actually spent. These funds were used to purchase a total of 202 ha of forest. Due to legal questions pertaining to land ownership of the lands that were originally slated for acquisition, TNC was not able to proceed with the purchase of some of the area originally intended for purchase. Moreover, during the project period, TNC’s priorities shifted, and the organization decided it should focus its activities in another area, the *Parque Internacional de La Amistad*.

As the discrepancy between the amount committed and the amount actually spent by TNC is significant, it was agreed at the debriefing of the final evaluation mission that UNDP CO would facilitate a meeting between the CBTC and TNC to try to resolve the matter of the remaining funds. This process is currently underway.

GEF funds are made available in part based on the amount of co-financing secured for a proposed project. The project budget should include both the GEF funds as well as the co-financing, indicating specifically how all funds will be used. In addition, a letter of commitment of co-financing should be secured before GEF funds are released.

Payment for Environmental Services

The project has done well in promoting the Government programme for payment for environmental services. Mostly as a result of this promotion by the project, participation in the Government programme has significantly increased since the project began. The programme offers compensation to landowners for maintaining forest cover on their land. Although the programme could be further refined in some ways by, for example, offering relatively greater compensation for longer time commitments (at present the commitment is only for 5 years), and providing options for permanent conservation

easements, overall it has potential for being an effective conservation tool, and the involvement of the project in supporting this activity was worthwhile.

CBTC adopted a strategic approach to their involvement in promoting this programme, charging clients less than other *regentes forestales* to do the studies required by the Government to become involved in the programme. This helps guarantee good quality (quality of studies by most *regentes forestales* is poor) and, at the same time, helps promote financial sustainability of the CBTC.

Some constraints still exist to greater application of this helpful programme, including the existing contradiction in policies between two government entities, IDA and MINAE. CBTC has done what it could to resolve this contradiction, but, as is the case with the other constraints associated with greater application of this programme, only the GOC can remove these. Another critical constraint to greater participation in the programme for payment for environmental services is insufficient funds available for the programme. Although the Government has increased the funding for the programme, the public interest in the programme is strong and there is still a long waiting list for interested landowners.

Rehabilitation and Restoration of Degraded Areas

Although Specific Objective 1 is to “protect, preserve and restore the ecologically and globally significant forest, *marine and freshwater* ecotypes present in the Corridor”, actual project activities were limited to forests.

There was inconsistency in the project document between the Specific Objective and the described activities intended to meet the objective. The activities were described as “restoration of degraded areas in the core areas by improving soil management techniques in traditional crops, growing crops organically, and introducing trees into traditional agriculture and pasture areas”. This would have been an inadequate and inappropriate approach to achieve the objective. Most of the Corridor is degraded or secondary forest. The priority for restoration activities should have been to restore degraded forests rather than to restore degraded agricultural areas. A project to reduce the negative effects of agriculture on biodiversity would, in any case, be an entire project in itself, and would require incentives and policy adjustments far beyond the scope of this project.

Some project activities were aimed at rehabilitating abandoned cacao areas, and reforesting small areas immediately surrounding water sources on which communities depend. Community brigades were formed in six communities and these engaged in reforestation efforts of small areas averaging around 4 ha in size. The reforestation efforts have served to protect community water sources, and perhaps just as importantly, have served to enhance environmental awareness within these communities. In the case of the community of Oliva, a very active brigade exists involving women, men and children from the community, who regularly climb the steep mountainside under which they live, carrying saplings to reforest the watershed.

Community Rangers

Although the idea of establishing a network of community rangers was a good one, only 22 people (in 11 communities) were involved in the project, and this number diminished, instead of increased, over

the project life – an important indicator of sustainability, or more precisely, the lack thereof. At the time of this evaluation, only 10 community rangers were active on a part-time basis, and the likelihood that these would continue to work as community rangers after project end was highly questionable. Insufficient attention was given to ensuring sustainability of this activity.

The monitoring activities undertaken by the community rangers may have been helpful to some extent in maintaining their interest in the programme (they chose the species they wanted to monitor), but because the “surveys” were so casual and sporadic and because no rigorous census techniques were used, little data of any value can be garnered from these monitoring activities.

Although biomonitoring efforts by the community rangers were weak, the contacts and the relationships established between the CBTC and the rangers was helpful in that the CBTC in essence extended its presence into communities where it otherwise would not have known of illegal logging or hunting or other activities affecting biodiversity. Although a “network” of local community-based rangers cannot be said to have been established (as was envisaged), individual rangers effectively served as a first alert of irregularities in the forests.

Biomonitoring

The *terrestrial* monitoring effort involved a total of 20 community rangers, only 10 of which were still working as community rangers at project end. Although the amount and quality of information obtained in the terrestrial biomonitoring effort was poor, the effort served to establish an informal first alert system as described above. In the case of one community association, the *Asociación de Desarrollo de Bribri*, the group integrated the community rangers into their own association efforts to monitor illegal logging.

The *aquatic* biomonitoring effort was much more successful. This effort involved two secondary schools and many local volunteers. Students and volunteers helped with the monitoring. As a direct result of this community participation in the biomonitoring effort, several communities are now involved in reforestation efforts, and in one case, fences have been built to protect the river from cattle. The effort has served as a good environmental education tool, and has also resulted in gaining new scientific information. Indicator species for monitoring the health of the rivers have been identified, as well as an index for determining river health. A new species of fish previously unknown has also been identified. A partial biological baseline has been established.

Although the aquatic biomonitoring effort was relatively successful, certain weaknesses are evident. Biomonitoring results were not widely distributed. Results were not presented for public or institutional consumption. Sustainability of the biomonitoring effort is highly questionable. By end of project, no one had been trained sufficiently in the biomonitoring techniques to be able to take over from the departing CBTC/project staff member. Furthermore, no continuing funding source had been identified. There was dependence on an expensive technology which has limitations in rough field conditions. Biomonitoring could have been very useful in the indigenous territories, but indigenous communities only began participating in the biomonitoring effort at the end of the last year of the project. Finally, the project was unsuccessful in making institutional links (with Costa Rican universities or INBIO, for example) that might have helped to ensure the sustainability of this effort.

Conservation efforts on indigenous territories

Some evidently significant conservation issues on indigenous territories were not addressed by the project. Future biodiversity conservation efforts in the Corridor should address the hunting issue (determine the effect of hunting on wildlife populations, and adopt conservation measures as appropriate).

Hunting

Hunting was not addressed either on indigenous lands or elsewhere. Nothing was done to try to quantify the impact of hunting on wildlife populations, and very little was done to attempt to control hunting. Yet, hunting (mostly illegal) is said to be very common and uncontrolled, and according to many local residents, is having a negative effect on several wildlife species. The project might have usefully offered assistance in this area.

According to the Project Director, hunting was considered to be too difficult to tackle. Hunting is certainly a difficult issue, but no more difficult than logging, and does need to be addressed if the biodiversity of the Corridor is to be conserved. The lack of project focus on this issue appears to be mostly related to the fact that none of the CBTC staff have wildlife expertise (rather, they are mostly foresters). It would have been helpful to form links with institutions with wildlife expertise (universities, other conservation organizations).

Although the project did not directly undertake activities related to hunting, it inspired individual efforts such as those by Don Jose Luis Zuniga, a beneficiary of the ecotourism component of the project, to engage young hunters from San Miguel in dialogue and to enhance their awareness of the impact of their activities on wildlife populations. Future donor support could usefully support his good efforts and focus more on this threat to biodiversity in the Corridor.

Resolving Human-Wildlife Conflicts

Greater emphasis might well have been placed on resolving wildlife/human conflicts. Some wildlife/human conflicts, e.g. pizotes in San Rafael de Bordon, were inappropriately ignored, while others, such as the current conflict between jaguar and people in San Rafael de Bordon were not being adequately addressed at the time of the evaluation. The evaluation mission provided some guidance on groups to contact to pursue resolution of this second conflict. The first conflict between pizotes and people no longer exists as the residents left that settlement (for unrelated reasons). New wildlife/human conflicts are bound to arise and it is important that mechanisms be in place to allow for their quick resolution.

5.2 Specific Objective 2

Specific Objective 2: “Adopt and apply sustainable forest management practices.”

Cost: US\$ 51,000

Both illegal, as well as legal, logging has contributed to forest degradation in the Corridor. Project activities related to forest conservation have had a positive effect on reducing illegal logging as well as minimizing the negative effects on forest health resulting from legal (but poorly managed) logging. Notwithstanding these positive efforts, unsustainable timber extraction prevails in the Corridor.

Successes

- The forest audit conducted by the CBTC at the outset of the project, which included a review of all logging permits granted from 1995-2000, catalyzed many of the other project activities and initiated a significant and very positive change in ACLAC’s practices related to their responsibilities in forest management. Publication of the results of the audit was a turning point for ACLAC, wherein there was a conscious decision by ACLAC’s leadership to improve forest management in the region. Project support has allowed ACLAC to significantly enhance its efforts. Whereas before the project ACLAC rarely inspected proposed timber sale areas, they now do this on a regular basis and are now accompanied by other members of the *Comité Local Forestal* (and not just the logger as before). ACLAC now requires much more detailed information before granting logging permits, and monitors these much more closely. There is still much that can be done to improve this effort. The political will to continue to improve forest management in the region clearly exists in the ACLAC leadership, but resources are a severe constraint. ACLAC lacks sufficient trained personnel, vehicles, and equipment. Additional future support to ACLAC is deemed highly appropriate, especially given its excellent leadership at this point in time.
- Establishment of the *Comité Local Forestal* (CLF) which has significantly improved the system of approving and monitoring logging permits. The Project financed two forest forums in which key stakeholders participated, including MINAE, *Aqueductos Y Alcantarillados* (AYA), indigenous groups, ecological groups, loggers, FUNDECOR, CBTC, municipalities, the Comité Regional Ambiental. The objective was to define timber extraction policies. The result of these fora was the creation of several local forest committees, of which the only one that continues to meet regularly today is the one in Talamanca. The CLF for Talamanca is comprised of representatives of ACLAC, CBTC, environmental NGOs, regentes forestales, loggers, indigenous groups, *covirenas*, and *Comités de Aqueductos Locales*. The CLF is responsible for reviewing all requests for forest permits and for making joint field visits to verify that these permits are well prepared and that the logging is well managed. The CLF only recently began to function. Once a problem revolving around one of the participants on the Committee is resolved, the CLF should make a positive difference. Although the CLF has not yet proposed a ban on extraction of endemic species or protection of a special forest area, the existence of this committee provides the possibility of pursuing these and other regionally-based policies regarding timber extraction.

- Enhanced information related to biodiversity of the forests in the Corridor, including identification of a new tree species.
- Acquisition by the CBTC of some forest areas deemed critical for conservation. A total of 202 ha was acquired by the project and is now owned by the CBTC and managed for nature conservation.
- Increase in the forest area within the Corridor under at least temporary protection through participation in the Government sponsored programme for payment for environmental services. During project implementation, 4539 ha were included in the programme with the help of CBTC. This represents 56% of the total area included in the programme during this same period. CBTC expects to assist in the inclusion of another 4,500 ha over the next year.
- Although still a problem, impunity associated with illegal timber extraction has decreased as a direct result of the project. In the 3 years before the project no cases were prosecuted, whereas in the 3 years of the project, there are five cases in process. This is due in large part to the support the project has given to the capable and dedicated *fiscales* in Bribri within the *Ministerio Publico*, and to a lesser extent, to the local police. As in the case of ACLAC, there is a genuine commitment on the part of the *fiscales* interviewed to improve the environmental impunity situation which has existed until present. Additional future support by donors interested in addressing the issue of environmental justice is deemed highly appropriate, especially given the committed individuals involved at present in the system.
- Although not yet finalized and not yet operational, the basis of a model of sustainable forest management that assures conservation of biodiversity as well as sustainable extraction of timber has been developed. The forest model is being developed on 117 ha of private land. The model considers variables not previously used in timber extraction planning in Costa Rica, such as reproductive biology, endemism, abundance, species ecology, and commercial demand. An index to determine vulnerability of timber extraction was also developed.

Weaknesses

- The project was to have developed a sustainable forestry model that could be applied to forests within the Corridor. With two weeks left in the project at the time of the evaluation, no working model existed. Although the inventory of the area has been done, and most trees have been marked, no timber has yet been extracted. Indeed, the forest management plan was only submitted to ACLAC for approval one month prior to project end. The plan has not yet been approved by ACLAC. Average approval time takes six months. Furthermore, it is uncertain that, once complete, the “model” will indeed serve as a model. As part of this project activity, a comparative economic analysis was done comparing the amount that both the forest landowner as well as the logger would gain in the conventional as opposed to the biodiversity-friendly model. The analysis shows that timber extraction using the model is economically viable, but not nearly as economically attractive as conventional timber extraction. The model approach represents a reduction in the total gains to the logger of 40% and an overall reduction in gain to the landowner of 30%. Thus, for the model to be adopted by private landowners, it is essential to find additional sources of income to offset the reduced gain. It is not realistic to assume that just because the model is economically viable it will

be accepted, the more relevant consideration from the perspective of the landowner and the logger is total profit. The project did not sufficiently address this issue.

The landowner is losing patience with the initiative as the activity is running behind schedule. An estimated 45 days was invested by the project in doing the inventory and marking the trees. This is far more time than what is normally invested by a *regente forestal*, and this alone may make the “model” unworkable. Furthermore, the capacity of regentes forestales to undertake an effort comparable to that undertaken in the model is currently limited, and there are no concrete plans to provide training for them to enable them to conduct such inventories. It should be noted that the project provided some forestry training for rangers and for the CLF, but not for the regentes forestales because they did not want the training.

- In addition to payment for environmental services, other options to promote conservation on private lands, including permanent conservation easements, might have been usefully pursued by the project.
- Information dissemination was insufficient. Much of the information gained during the project exists only in project reports not easily accessible by potentially interested parties.

Critical Barriers

- The legal definition of forests in Costa Rica is arbitrary. This has led to many abuses of the forests such as, for example, clearing of forest understory immediately prior to seeking logging permits so as to avoid classification of the forest as forest (thus allowing for logging).
- The existing system in which *regentes forestales* have *fe publica* in Costa Rica. This is especially dangerous as there is no check and balance in the system. The *Colegio de Ingenieros Agronomos*, which one might expect to provide oversight, does not do so, and there is no process mechanism for withdrawing the *fe publica* from those *regentes forestales* who are not performing their functions well. It is widely known that the capacity of most *regentes forestales* is very limited, corruption is widespread, and practices related to preparation of forest management plans, and inspection of these have been lax (although, as noted previously, the situation is improving).
- Financial constraints resulting in large part from the inability to collect taxes on timber due to a legal question which has not yet been resolved after five years in the courts. The *Fondo Forestal* is critically important to forest conservation efforts and quick resolution of this matter is of utmost importance.
- Insufficient funds available for the Government programme for payment for environmental services. These funds come from FONAFIFO, a government fund established with revenues collected from taxes on gasoline and oil. Greater government interest in this popular programme would alleviate this constraint.
- Conflict in policies between IDA and MINAE which negatively affects the payment for environmental services programme.

5.3 *Specific Objective 3*

Specific Objective 3:

“Protect biodiversity through the development, management, and marketing of sustainable local and regional ecotourism, thereby achieving an increase in income by local populations.”

Cost: US\$ 114,000

Successes

Communities living in the Corridor are benefiting in a real and concrete sense from ecotourism initiatives supported by the project. Most of these initiatives began long before this project. Participation in most community groups involved in ecotourism continues to increase every year, thus a greater number of people within any given community are benefiting. As a group, women are especially benefiting, and are, at the same time bringing valuable expertise to the initiative. Twenty communities are now involved in the ecotourism network established by the project. One indigenous group from Yorkin which began with six women now consists of 25 women and men who are deriving real benefits from conservation. There appears to be a genuine interest in conserving nearby forests, although this has not always translated down to the species level. Hunting pressures in these areas remain strong, and, as most communities mentioned decreased sightings of wildlife species, probably unsustainable. As the evaluation mission met only with those involved in the ecotourism initiatives and did not meet with community members outside these groups, it is impossible to know if the pressures on the forest have been reduced significantly or not. Others not involved in the groups may continue destructive activities. Even those in the groups may, in addition to participating in ecotourism, continue with other destructive activities on those days in which they are not involved in ecotourism. It is simply not possible to assess this given the constraints associated with this evaluation mission. The general sense of the evaluation mission, however, is that ecotourism is working to protect the forests.

There is enhanced solidarity between members of the ecotourism network, and a growing interest in deriving group benefits.

Although none of the ecotourism initiatives are self-sustaining at present, there has been a steady increase in incomes received by all participating groups over the project life. CBTC and ANAI currently pay part of the recurrent costs associated with the ecotourism initiatives. Tourism revenues pay the remainder. This system will continue until entities become self-sustaining. I

The project has helped to enhance the capacity of the various community associations involved in ecotourism initiatives. These associations appear to be managing ecotourism quite well, both in terms of receiving guests as well as managing the benefits they receive (equitable distribution of benefits, some reinvestment in infrastructure).

The project developed an accreditation system for local guides. Eighty local guides from the participating communities in the network are now accredited by MINAE.

The project is opening possibilities for local guides to participate in the *Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje* (INA) and become accredited by the Costa Rican Institute for Tourism (ICT). The project worked with INA to develop the criteria for accreditation for local guides and also the courses to be offered. To become a “national guide”, trainees must complete 1 and 1/2 years at INA. A high school degree is required for entry into INA. Most local guides do not have a high school degree. The project worked with INA to modify these requirements so that local guides would have access to training. In this and other ways, the project helped to even out competition between local guides and national guides, resulting in greater benefits to local communities.

The project developed the first course ever in Costa Rica for training local guides.

Visitor interest regarding local culture and biodiversity has resulted in enhanced interest by locals in maintaining their traditional culture and resources.

Environmental awareness in participating communities has significantly increased over the project life.

Whereas before the GEF project, no promotion materials existed for the various associations, materials including brochures, posters and maps have been produced and are being distributed within the Talamanca region.

A functional ecotourism network, (*Red de Ecoturismo Talamanca*) in which 20 community-based organizations participate has been established. The network meets regularly (once every month). Existence of the Network has created a space for discussion of policy (regarding standardization, best practices, comparative advantages). The Network promotes and facilitates interchange of knowledge and experience between Network members. Most members of the network have visited other network sites and exchanged experiences.

The Network agreed to establish a *Fondo de la Red de Talamanca* to cover costs of meetings, production of promotion materials, and participation in fairs. The Fund currently has a deficit because of monies spent preparing for the upcoming EXPOTOUR. The fund was very recently established and agreement now exists within the network on how much each member should contribute.

The project has generated interest in several other communities who would also like to participate. This indicates word is getting out and that there is a general sense of success with the initiative.

Weaknesses

As the project has not undertaken adequate efforts to identify or monitor biological/ecological indicators, it is impossible to know if the benefits derived by the communities involved have actually translated into decreased pressures on the biodiversity of the area and resulted in conserving biodiversity.

Although the Network has discussed adoption of standards for Network members, according to the admittedly limited experience of the evaluation mission, the lodges vary quite a lot in both quality and price, thus there is little standardization as of yet.

Preliminary efforts have been made to ensure that tourism does not negatively affect indigenous and other communities, but this effort needs to be strengthened.

Marketing efforts (including production of specific materials, visits to target audiences) could be stronger and more strategic and more highly focused on specific target audiences. For example, several lodges depend primarily on visits by groups of foreign (mostly American) university students, yet little is being done to capture a greater audience within the academic network. The current number of visitors may not suffice to ensure viability of the effort, thus proactive marketing is essential.

Ecotourism materials developed by the project are O.K. but not superior. None of the brochures produced with project funds display the UNDP/GEF logo.

The “catalog” describing the various options available through the Ecotourism Network has not yet been published but a simple black and white paper copy is expected in time to be used at the upcoming fair, “EXPOTOUR”. If the Network intends to convince ICT and major tour operators that they are just as professional as the big operators, they need to have quality materials available in time for strategic events.

The project might have had greater impact if funds had been more strategically targeted at certain community associations instead of equitably distributing project resources between participating associations in the Network. A more strategic targeting may have resulted in greater impact, but less overall interest in the Network as some associations would not have benefited.

Critical Barriers

The government certification system managed by ICT, the “*Certificado de Sostenibilidad Turística* (CST)”, applies only to hotels and not to tour operators or lodges. The project is working with TNC and the Rainforest Alliance on lobbying the ICT to include tour operators and lodges in the certification system. The certification would include environmental and cultural criteria.

5.3 *Specific Objective 4*

Specific Objective 4: “Strengthen local organizations and ACLAC.”

Cost: US\$ 206,354

Comités Zonales

Limited project support was extended to the *comités zonales*, the entities involved in co-management of the PAs together with ACLAC. This support appears to have been helpful in the case of the Manzanillo-Gandoca Wildlife Reserve. The evaluation mission did not visit the other PA in the Corridor, Cahuita National Park.

MINAE/ACLAC

Project support to ACLAC was very effective and represents one of the biggest successes of the project. Even greater emphasis could have been placed on this aspect of the project.

APPTA

Project support to APPTA was effective but, in the opinion of this evaluation mission, not strategic. Although APPTA's efforts to enhance cacao production appear to be very worthwhile in terms of enhancing benefits to local producers, the evaluation mission is not convinced of the appropriateness of the importance the project placed on cacao production as a means of conserving biodiversity of global significance. Both the CBTC and APPTA are convinced that cacao is critically important to biodiversity conservation, but even the most basic information pertaining to percent of the Corridor under cacao, or connectivity between forest patches with and without cacao, could not be provided by either the CBTC or APPTA. If these institutions wish to convince donors interested in conserving biodiversity of global significance of the importance of focusing on cacao, they must be prepared to present better information, especially now after three years of project support.

It would have been best to relegate the cacao aspects of this project to the World Bank/GEF project which is in the same region (and was under design at the same time as this project), thereby allowing this project to focus more funds and attention on forests, ecotourism, and other biodiversity conservation activities. Separating out the capacity building aspect of the cacao project, and placing this in the UNDP/GEF project was not helpful.

Miscellaneous notes: Cacao is produced organically by all producers involved in the region and always has been, even before the project started. In addition, cacao has traditionally been produced under shade and in conjunction with banana or in secondary forests and not as a monoculture. The evaluation team noticed that "cleaning" of the cacao area, i.e., removing of all undergrowth, was promoted because this enhances production of cacao, whereas it may detract from benefits to species of both flora and fauna utilizing these areas. Average size of cacao production areas is only 1 ha. It is difficult to draw conclusions about the importance of these areas in terms of biodiversity conservation.

6. Lessons

In addition to the lessons that might be learned from this project described below, others are highlighted in blue throughout the text of this document.

- Project development funds or PDFs are available through the GEF. These funds (up to US\$ 25,000 for MSPs) can be very useful in ensuring that the project design is well thought out and the project document well done. PDF A resources should have been pursued in designing this project.
- GEF funds should not be used to pay ongoing operational (personnel) costs of organizations involved in GEF projects.

- All GEF projects should have a Project Steering Committee and the UNDP CO should be represented on this committee. This is especially critical in cases of testing new modalities of project execution, such as NGO execution.
- UNDP should provide more training to Junior Programme Officers (JPOs) responsible for GEF projects. Although JPOs are normally very capable, hard working, dedicated individuals, they are just getting to know UNDP as an institution, have rarely ever served on any project steering committees, have little in-country experience, are low down on the totem pole and thus may not have necessary access to decision makers in government.
- In part due to limited experience by UNDP staff responsible for GEF projects, Project Steering Committees often do not function as they should (TOR for them are sometimes inappropriate, or they simply don't function effectively). This is serious because design of many GEF projects, especially older ones, is inadequate, and a strong PSC must be in place to suggest and oversee modifications as and when necessary.
- In the event that a project is both executed and implemented by the same entity, a functional Project Steering Committee is indispensable.
- Good indicators greatly facilitate project evaluation. Lack of such indicators makes it difficult to monitor or evaluate a project.
- Project objectives should be impact-oriented rather than task-oriented to ensure the project works toward having an impact, not merely undertaking project activities.
- Impact-oriented indicators and time-bound benchmarks for monitoring their progress throughout the project life should be defined in the project document. Clear consequences for not achieving these benchmarks, including reallocation of resources, should also be outlined.
- Counterpart funds for a project are project funds just as are GEF core funds. Both should be monitored with equal vigilance.
- GEF funds are made available in part based on the amount of co-financing secured for a proposed project. The project budget should include both the GEF funds as well as the co-financing, indicating specifically how all funds will be used. In addition, a letter of commitment of co-financing should be secured before GEF funds are released. The influence of the media is often greater than that exerted by a project. Reserve a small amount of project funds to allow for a group of media representatives to tour project areas both at the mid-term and toward the end of a project and report on the good and the bad. This is a good way of keeping a project on track, sharing lessons learned, and, finally, provides an additional incentive to strive for impact not just achievement of project activities.
- Evaluation mission length should depend on complexity of project and not on funding amount. Evaluations that focus on impact and not merely on delivery of goods and services usually require more time.

- UNDP should ensure that sufficient funds are reserved for project evaluation purposes. At a minimum, the evaluation team should consist of both an international and a national consultant.
- Mid-term and final evaluation reports of all UNDP/GEF projects should be distributed by email to all other relevant ongoing projects in UNDP's portfolio, e.g., evaluations of ecotourism projects should be sent to all other projects with similar components. This is a simple way of sharing lessons and avoiding repeat of mistakes.
- Field site visits to be made during a project evaluation must be very carefully planned to ensure that the evaluation mission gains exposure to representative project experiences.
- Although project staff may sometimes accompany the evaluation mission on field sites and interviews, their participation must be very carefully considered so as not to affect interviews in undesirable ways.

Annex 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Project Evaluation

Talamanca-Caribbean Biological Corridor

Project number: COS/99/G35
Project Name: Conservation of Biodiversity in the Talamanca- Caribbean Biological Corridor

Background

GEF supported a US\$ 1,269,930 Medium size project executed by the NGO *The Association of the Talamanca Caribbean Biological Corridor (CBTC)* with a total amount of US\$ 750,000. The Association of CBTC is composed by many diverse associations and organizations, including indigenous groups and community development associations. The main objective of the project is the conservation, protection and sustainable use of the globally significant biodiversity of the Talamanca Caribbean Biological Corridor. As stated in the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor project document, the Talamanca Caribbean Biological Corridor represents the participation of local communities in planning and implementing the concept of biological corridor, given that its strategy is based on building alliance with the main stakeholders present in the area, as well as in the information dissemination, awareness development and strengthening of local organizations. Specific objectives of the project are.

1. Protect, preserve and restore the ecotypes present in the corridor
2. Adopt and apply improved and sustainable forest management practices
3. Protect biodiversity through development and marketing of local and regional ecotourism projects.
4. Strengthen local grass root organizations and the Conservation Area Office, through the development of a co-management model for the protected areas and the Corridor project.

The project started operation in March 2000, and underwent a TPR review in May 24, 2001 and in November 14, 2002. The project duration is scheduled to finish in May 31, 2003.

Objectives

The objective of the present contract is to provide a synthetic and objective evaluation concerning the following:

Project design

- ✓ Review of 'project concept and design: Whether project meets GEF mandate and Governments priorities, whether problems were clearly identified, immediate objectives properly defined and approaches to address them appropriate.
- ✓ Whether project beneficiaries were properly identified;

- ✓ Whether the objectives and outputs of the project were stated explicitly with verifiable terms and observable success indicators;
- ✓ Whether the relation between objectives, outputs and inputs are articulated in a logical way and whether the objectives were achievable;
- ✓ Whether the project started with a well-prepared work plan and whether the work plan was subsequently revised in a timely manner in the light of project implementation.

Implementation

With reference to the project document and in particular the logframe and work-plan, the evaluator will examine the quality and timeliness with regards to:

- ✓ Timely and good delivery of inputs by each stakeholders;
- ✓ The scheduling and actual implementation of activities;
- ✓ The fulfilling of success criteria as outlined in the project document;
- ✓ The responsiveness of project management to significant changes in the environment in which the project functions;
- ✓ The monitoring and backstopping of the project as expected by the government and UNDP.

In terms of institutional arrangements, efficiency of operational management and institutional framework and in particular advantages and inconveniences of NGO execution and synergy with related projects in the Talamanca Caribbean Area will also be examined.

Project outputs and achievements

The evaluation team is expected to:

- ✓ Identify the factors that have facilitated or impeded the progress of the project to attaining the stated outputs (networking, partnership with other projects or other institutions, political and institutional environment, etc.);
- ✓ Comment on the adequacy, effectiveness, timeliness and cost-effectiveness in the production of outputs;
- ✓ Evaluate the achievements of the CBTC project with respect to initial objectives and in particular relation to the project logframe.
- ✓ Review undertaken activities bearing in mind project objectives in terms of organization, cost-effectiveness and sustainability;
- ✓ Evaluate level of participation of the beneficiaries, communities, etc.;
- ✓ Evaluate project impact in terms of Conservation of Biodiversity and how the CBTC represents the participation of local communities in planning and implementing the concept of biological corridor.

Sustainability

- ✓ Whether the project is relevant to the development priorities of the country and the Talamanca Caribbean region and whether the project has obtained sufficient support from government in particular traduced by integration in national priorities;
- ✓ Given the objectives of the project, whether appropriate institutions were assisted and whether the project have a positive impact on concerned institutions;

Tasks to be performed

The consultants will be required to perform the following:

- ✓ Review of all documentation related to the project that is provided to the mission;
- ✓ Propose a methodology for evaluation, and implement this methodology upon formal approval by UNDP-GEF;
- ✓ Meeting with representatives from relevant public institutions
- ✓ Meeting with project executing agency including several of the members that associations that forms the Association of CBCT, TNC and other relevant organization working in close partnership with CBCT;
- ✓ Meeting with beneficiaries including at least 3 communities;
- ✓ Site visit of at least 5 project sites;
- ✓ Elaborate a report including the following sections:
 - Executive summary
 - Project concept
 - Project implementation
 - Project results
 - Findings
 - Recommendations
 - Lessons learned useful for other projects

Support to the Evaluation

UNDP-GEF Regional Coordinator will supervise the evaluation process and provide guidance as needed in the course of the evaluation. In particular, an initial briefing will be organized and the UNDP Country Office in San Jose, Costa Rica to ensure that consultant receives a substantive and extensive briefing about project status and provide him/her with relevant documentation (Please see guidelines on Evaluation Missions. The purpose of the briefing is much more than simply to provide relevant documentation.)

The UNDP country offices will be supporting the consultant, together with the project executing agency, specifically with regards to office space and travel and agenda arrangements.

Reporting

The evaluator will report to the UNDP country office as well as to the UNDP-GEF regional coordinator who will be responsible for coordinating and supervising the evaluation process as detailed in the corresponding section.

The following will be produced:

- ✓ A short inception report including proposed methodology for evaluation and a work- plan including missions contemplated not later than 2 weeks after evaluation start;

- ✓ A draft report no later than 5 weeks after evaluation start circulated to UNDP-GEF regional coordinator, Costa Rica UNDP office, and New York based Director for Monitoring and Evaluation;
- ✓ A Final report not longer than 30 pages plus annexes including comments from the executing agency, no later than 6 weeks after evaluation starts.

All documents will be prepared in English under Word 2000 format and handed in 3 hard copies and an electronic copy. A debriefing will be organized at a location to be determined at a later stage, for main findings presentation.

Consultant's profile

The consultant would have to fulfill the following:

- ✓ A post-graduate degree in Natural Sciences with specialization in Biodiversity.
- ✓ Have at least ten years of experience in Conservation of Biodiversity or related fields
- ✓ Fluent spoken and written English and Spanish.

The following would be considered as a plus:

- ✓ Having already performed projects monitoring and evaluation
- ✓ Be familiar with GEF strategy, procedures, and eligibility criteria
- ✓ Knowledge of the Central American region and especially Costa Rica.

Dates and duration

The mission is foreseen to take place between May 3 and June 18, 2003.

The consultant will complete her/his mission no later than 6 weeks after the evaluation start. Starting date is the date of official approval by UNDP.

Budget and time allocation

The consultant will be required to dedicate a total of 20 working days within the 6 weeks of project execution.

Maximum budget of the present evaluation is 9.000 US\$ plus DSA and terminal costs.

Relevant contact persons

Lita Paparoni
Regional Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean
Biodiversity and International Waters
UNDP-GEF
Presidente Mazarik, 29m
Colonia Chapultepec Morales,

Mexico DF
Tel +52 5 263 98 14
Fax + 525 250 25 24
e-mail lita.paparoni@undp.org

Kasper Koefoed-Hansen
UNDP country Office
Officentro la Virgen 2,
San Jose
Costa Rica
Tel +506 296 15 44
Fax +506 296 15 45
e-mail Kasper.Koefoed@undp.org

Annex 2

Agenda for the Project Evaluation Mission

Annex 3

Participants in the Evaluation Mission Debriefing

1. Luis Rojas, Enlace Nacional, Corredor Biológico Mesoamericano, SINAC
2. Gabriela Calderon, UNDP/GEF Small Grants Programme
3. Maria Arantxa Guereño, UNDP/GEF Small Grants Programme
4. Luis Javier Montero, Equator Initiative
5. Diego Lynch, ANAI
6. Jan Jilles van der Hoeven, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP/Costa Rica
7. Kasper Koefoed-Hansen, Programme Officer, UNDP/Costa Rica
8. Rosa Bustillo, Project Director
9. Oscar Valverde, Coordinator of Forest Component
10. Farit Davillo, Coordinator of Environmental Education Component
11. Erick Castro, Coordinator of Mapping
12. Virginia Ravndal, UNDP/RBLAC/GEF Consultant/Project Evaluator

Annex 4

Comments on the Draft Evaluation Report

Comments by CBTC

1. En cuanto al señalamiento que hace la Evaluadora sobre que el director y varios encargados del proyecto proceden de la capital, y que hubiese sido mejor que residieran en la zona, es importante aclarar, primero que en la region de Talamanca no se encuentra personal calificado, por lo que se tiene que contratar profesionales de afuera, si bien es cierto residen en San José, los técnicos pasaban la mayor parte del tiempo en la region de Talamanca, y en San José, únicamente para efectos de gestión. No se puede pretender desarraigar a la gente que se contrata y decirles que tienen que trasladar su domicilio a la zona, pues eso también tiene un costo y alto, que en todo caso el proyecto no tenía contemplado cubrir.
2. En cuanto a las observaciones sobre el monitoreo de fauna debe quedar muy claro y fue aclarado así en la evaluación, que no existían recursos del GEF ni de ningún proyecto de contraparte para hacer biomonitoreo de fauna terrestre, no entiendo como pretendía la evaluadora que esto se realizara, los esfuerzos que se hicieron no tenían rigurosidad científica, y eso fue advertido en los informes respectivos. Únicamente se realizó el biomonitoreo de cursos de agua dulce que sí tenía un contenido presupuestario.
3. En cuanto a la modificación del objetivo 4, discrepo con la evaluación en cuanto a que considero que la modificación de dicho objetivo, lo hizo mas adecuado a las actividades que estaban proyectadas, en base a compromisos que se habían establecido como parte de la coordinación con el proyecto del Banco Mundial, cacao, el cual se encargaba de la mejora de la productividad, mientras que con fondos del proyecto GEF-PNUD, se fortalecía la capacidad institucional de APPTA y de los comités locales. Este objetivo no se circunscribía únicamente a fortalecimiento del ACLAC.