IUCN Management Response to the Mid-Term Review of MERECP

Overview

IUCN appreciates the efforts of the review team and agrees largely with the recommendations outlined in the report. IUCN looks forward to the redesign of MERECP, with an aim to make it more cost-effective with greater impact on the ground. To this end, IUCN wishes to assure partners that it will: proactively support the reformulation of objectives, outputs and activities; assist in the review of institutions; review implementing costs with an aim to rationalize and reduce administrative costs; and implement the IUCN exit strategy, including the shift of programme administration to LVBC and redefinition of IUCN's role in MERECP to building capacity for the ecosystem approach and TBNRM.

1) Design of Programme

Summary of issues

The objectives are not logical, activities are duplicated across objectives and the objectives do not reflect ecosystem approach and the trans-boundary nature of the programme as of MERECP's Vision and Goal. In particular, with respect to the legal framework for MERECP, the relevancy and potency of laws in the actual context of MERECP should be considered. For example, are they conducive to the ecosystem approach and trans-boundary natural resource management of shared ecosystems, and what would need to be changed to make them more conducive? The LVBC under the EAC are in position to influence this while emphasizing that it is the partner states which must take action to make the laws. Other considerations for project design include increased involvement of local communities in ecotourism. Finally, the re-designed programme should be developed with a longer time frame in mind including a catalytic "kick off" and testing period but a longer term vision for the full project. The review suggests 15-20 years are more realistic for good results and sustainability and donors should be prepared for this.

Management response

    a. IUCN agrees with the proposal to redesign the objectives but would like to make a clarification regarding the original 4th objective *MERECP implemented effectively as a regional trans-boundary programme.* While we agree that objectives arise from problem analysis, the exercise to treat this operational objective as an ecosystem problem is perhaps a bit pedantic. Most projects across IUCN's global portfolio (and others such as LVEMP in EAC) have both ecosystem management objectives (such as the original 1-3 objectives) as well as operational objectives (such as the original 4th objective). This is because, in IUCN's experience, it is more difficult to evaluate partner participation and satisfaction with the process if this is included or somehow lumped into the ecosystem management objectives. Especially in trans-boundary projects,

process is important and benchmarks for measuring progress on such processes are also important. Often the necessary expenses for facilitating processes and ensuring participation and partner satisfaction (e.g. staff costs, national and regional meetings, forums, reviews etc) are neglected or overlooked if they are forced into the ecosystem management objectives. In order to ensure that such processes take place and that partner satisfaction is measured, IUCN typically includes an operational objective in its project log-frames so that these important processes are explicitly integrated into work plans and budgets and measured and monitored. In our experience, most environmental donors also recognize the utility of such operational objectives.

b. IUCN agrees that re-design of the objectives (and consequently activities and M&E framework) is important, though in doing so, emphasizes the need to somehow incorporate the operational or process aspects.

c. The new proposed objectives and issues raised will be addressed and subject to broader partner consultation during the MERECP re-design exercise expected during the 3rd-4th quarter 2008. The outcome of this exercise will feed into the 2009 work planning process so that necessary changes are implemented in 2009.

2) Institutions

Summary of issues – MERECP is a complex program with too many institutions involved in implementation which can create obstacles, for example, to harmonization and dilute its impact.

Management response
a. IUCN agrees with the review's analysis and recommendation to streamline and sharpen the focus of the project by reducing the number of participating institutions.

b. IUCN notes the importance of sharing this recommendation before implementation, developing criteria for considering partners participation, and implementing this recommendation with participation from national partners in both countries.

c. Any changes to institutional arrangements should be undertaken after the MERECP project has been redesigned/refocused so that appropriate institutional landscape can be mapped out. It is envisaged that the process will aim at distinguishing implementing institutions from participating institutions. The former would refer to institutions will management and accounting responsibility.

3) Improvement of Livelihoods

Summary of issues – Funding into improving livelihoods of people adjacent to the park as opposed to people not near the park needs to be increased, MERECP should be more proactive in guiding the districts on this. The CBD, especially articles on access and benefit sharing, should be used to strengthen livelihood aspects of the programme.

Management response
a. IUCN agrees with the review's analysis and recommendation for MERECP to be more proactively involved in the selection of communities by districts and the need to strengthen the links to CBD, especially access and benefit sharing.

b. IUCN notes, as did the review team, that the systems for access and benefit sharing from protected areas are different between Kenya and Uganda and governed by legal statues, so may not be easy to change within the remainder of the project.

c. However, IUCN agrees that this is an important priority to pursue and would like to point out that as a result of the its restructuring, IUCN will have senior expertise on staff in protected area management and in forestry and that these 2 positions are expected to contribute to strengthening the access and benefit sharing components of the project.

4) Effectiveness and Efficiency

Summary of issues – Effectiveness and efficiency are low owing to: complexity of program and bureaucratic procedures of institutions, capacity constraints, high turn-over of staff among implementing institutions, low political buy-in in some cases, weak environmental agencies.

Management response
a. IUCN believes that in the short term, differences in institutional policies and practices will remain since the legal and policy basis are differ between the two countries and among the institutions. However, MERECP's objective is to facilitate these institutions to develop and own processes that would bring them to work together as institutions responsible for managing the shared resource and IUCN agrees that much more can be done here.
b. A needs assessment for capacity building and participation activities for the identified institutions and communities should be a fundamental part of the project revision
c. The re-design of the project will focus on institutionalizing MERECP supported activities so that staff turnover changes are cushioned by the institutional ownership.
d. MERECP cannot ignore political pressures and processes but will work to facilitate dialogues to address these issues.

5) IUCN facilitation and coordination roles, and exit strategy

Summary of issues – During the re-design of the project, there is a need to incorporate the phasing out of IUCN's facilitation/coordination role with a handover to LVBC, which is positioned to take this forward in the longer term. The elements of an IUCN exit strategy are listed and will need to be elaborated during the re-design of the project. The challenges of this transition are noted, as is the need for capacity building and continued technical backstopping from IUCN.

Management response
a. IUCN wishes to emphasize that it is fundamentally a conservation organization and the level of bureaucratic complexity (e.g. administering about 17 MOUs per country) of MERECP is challenging. IUCN is happy to hand over these responsibilities to LVBC and to refocus its role on technical input into MERECP in e.g. the ecosystem approach, access and benefit-sharing, protected area management, among others. IUCN notes that its restructuring should position it well to provide these services.
b. IUCN agrees with the review's analysis and recommendation and the proposed process for preparing and implementing the exit strategy.
c. The exit strategy will be further elaborated in the coming months so that likely changes are entrenched within the follow on phases of this programme.

6) Impact monitoring and documentation and gender issues

Summary of issues – Though the project is involving women in its activities, impact monitoring of the programme and documentation on outcomes and gender impacts is weak. The capacities of partners to capture such information should be strengthened.

Management response
   a. IUCN agrees with the review team's analysis and notes that as a result of the restructuring, IUCN will have the capacity in-house to provide training on impact monitoring to partners.
   b. IUCN notes that gender and M&E expertise should be co-opted during the redesign of the project

7) Policy and Legal Framework

Summary of issues – Though law-making is ultimately a national responsibility, much can be done to strengthen the policy and legal framework and the climate for ecosystem approach and transboundary natural resources management by for example, invoking existing frameworks and developing subsidiary regulations through respective national legislation.

Management response
   a. IUCN agrees with the review team's analysis and notes that as a result of its restructuring, IUCN will have an environmental law and governance expert on staff who should be in a position to facilitate the relevant institutions and legal experts in Kenya and Uganda to strengthen the policy and legal framework for TBNRM and the ecosystem approach.

8) Lesson learning

Summary of issues - MERECP must convey lessons learned about achievements and constraints to other like-minded programmes and stakeholders but the current communications, especially web-based, are not conducive to this information transfer. In turn, MERECP can learn and benefit from other ecosystem approach oriented programmes in Africa, e.g. CAMPFIRE, LIRDP/ SLAMU, LIFE etc as well as the work of IUCN Commissions. As regards the livelihood aspect, MERECP can learn lessons on livelihood improvement through conservation and development activities including the SIDA funded Lake Victoria Environmental Education Programme.

Management response
   a. MERECP agrees that web-based communications would be enhanced through links to MERECP from IUCN-HQ's home page and an update of the home page and links to related programmes and publications is a priority.
   b. IUCN notes that in addition to web-based communications, two new positions that it is currently recruiting for (Regional Coordinator for Forests and Regional

Coordinator for Protected Areas) will position MERECP to expand it linkages and exchange both regionally and internationally with other like-minded programmes as well as the IUCN commissions.

9) Ecotourism

Summary of issues - MERECP should pursue opportunities for local communities to participate more actively in eco-tourism schemes, such as overnight facilities on the Uganda side and game viewing platforms on the Kenyan side.

Management response
    a. IUCN will assist MERECP to consult partners and explore such opportunities.

10) Enhanced participation of local communities in management

Summary of issues – Decentralization processes should be supported and the project as much as possible should assist communities in developing and strengthening their own institutions and encouraging their participation in sustainable natural resources management and stewardship. The project should engage the lowest administrative structures as opposed to concentrating at the district level which is not in touch with communities. Awareness-raising on the project should be enhanced.

Management response
    a. IUCN will assist MERECP to raise awareness on the project through input from the communications team.
    b. IUCN cautions that it would be dangerous for implementing institutions to engage directly with communities, bypassing the districts altogether. Disgruntled or disaffected district staff have the potential to seriously undermine project impacts. Also, it is ultimately districts who are charged with replicating successful demonstrations in other communities. Recognizing their important role in replication, IUCN recommends that MERECP simultaneously engage communities and districts in project activities and capacity building initiatives.
    c. The way to go about engaging districts and communities can be further elaborated during the re-design of the project.

11) Research and monitoring

Summary of issues – On-going research in the Mt. Elgon ecosystem by students should be proactively engaged by MERECP. MERECP should identify and describe research needs to be outsources as MSc or PhD thesis topics at selected universities. The project should not pay for such research, but may provided limited technical assistance when needed.

Management response
    a. IUCN agrees with the recommendation.

12) Duration of the programme

Summary of issues – Four years is not a realistic time-frame for project impacts, but rather should be regarded as a catalytic kick-off ad testing period. 15-20 years is a more realistic time frame for good results and sustainability. Donors should be prepared for this.

Management response
   a. IUCN agrees with the analysis of the review team. In other IUCN field projects, significant outcomes and impacts are typically evidenced after 10 or 15 years of intervention.
   b. The redesign of the project should plan in detail the remainder of this phase of the project and also note the kinds of interventions and outcomes expected in the future.

12) Administrative Costs

Summary of issues – The program has high administration costs, ranging near 50% of the budget and this may reduce the impact on the ground among target stakeholders.

Management response
   a. In light of the changing role envisioned for IUCN in the re-design phase, shifting much of the administrative responsibilities to LVBC and engaging with the project more in technical areas such as the ecosystem approach and TBNRM, IUCN agrees to review the administrative and coordination costs and to work with partners to significantly reduce these costs.

13) IUCN's restructuring

Summary of issues – In section 2.2 the review team analyzes IUCN's role in MERECP and notes that IUCN is in the middle of restructuring itself, and that stakeholders have raised questions about whether IUCN is in a position to support such a complicated project. The review notes that the role of IUCN has to be revised and that IUCN has not effectively engaged IUCN's larger network of Commissions and specialist groups.

Management response
   a. IUCN takes issue with the statement *"In any case the restructured IUCN may no longer have a structure conducive to its present role in MERECP which assumed presence of a country office in Uganda (to be eliminated in the new structure)"p.23.* As expressed in comments on the draft report, IUCN believes that its restructuring will allow it to better engage with MERECP in a way that is more satisfactory to partners. IUCN will continue to have a presence in Kampala, but this will be a "Programme Office" rather than a "Country Office" and as such, staffed with a country programme coordinator rather than a country director. These changes are designed to position IUCN more strongly in program development and implementation, rather than representation. At the same time, the restructured IUCN Eastern and Southern Africa region will include strengthened technical capacity, with senior in-house skills in forestry management, protected area management and environmental law and governance. IUCN believes that these skill sets will strengthen its technical support to MERECP on ecosystem approach and TBNRM and allow MERECP to effectively engage with IUCN's larger network of Commissions and specialist groups.
   b. IUCN agrees with the recommendation that its role be revised. As noted earlier, IUCN agrees to shift much of the administrative responsibilities of the program to

LVBC. In the re-design of the project, IUCN would wish that it's role be strengthened in terms of technical back-stopping on ecosystem approach and notes that it will soon have the capacity to better fulfill this role.