THE STEP STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION PROGRAMME: SUMMARY, COMMENTS AND SOME LESSONS LEARNED

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1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE STEP PROJECT

What is STEP ?
STEP is a Medium-Sized Project of the Global Environment Facility, implemented by the World Bank, and managed by the Terrestrial Ecology Research Unit at the University of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Co-financing is provided by the University of Port Elizabeth, National Research Foundation, Department of Arts, Culture, Science & Technology, South African National Parks, Western Cape Nature Conservation Board, Department of Economic Affairs, Environment & Tourism (Eastern Cape) and the Amatole, Cacadu and Eden District Municipalities.

This bioregional planning project commenced in July 2000 and was scheduled to end in June 2003. The life of the project was subsequently extended to June 2004.

The STEP project goal is:
to promote the conservation of globally significant biodiversity in the Thicket Biome.

The STEP project aims to:
- conduct, together with key stakeholders, a thorough conservation planning exercise in South Africa's Thicket Biome, and to
- work closely with key stakeholders to ensure the implementation of the outcomes of the planning exercise.

The STEP project objectives are:
- to provide a conservation planning framework and implementation strategy for the conservation of subtropical thicket;
- to suggest and prioritise explicit conservation actions;
- to provide spatial biodiversity information for incorporation into regional, provincial and national land-use planning frameworks;
- to provide a capacity building service in the application of the spatial conservation planning products, especially in the local government sphere;
- to create an awareness of the value and plight of the Thicket Biome.

The main STEP outcomes
- The development and use of a strategic and flexible conservation plan.
- Enhanced capacity among planners in national, provincial and regional land management authorities, in the use of a biodiversity layer.
- An Implementation Framework and Strategy.

The five STEP project activities
1. A GIS-based spatial analysis, at the landscape level, based on extant data and ground-truthing.
2. Compilation of a systematic conservation plan (assessment).
3. Information dissemination.
4. Capacity building
5. Development of a Conservation Planning Framework and Implementation Strategy

Detailed information about the project and its outcomes and products is available at http://cpu.uwc.ac.za

2. THE STEP STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION PROGRAMME

Ongoing consultation with, and involvement by, stakeholders is a cornerstone of the STEP project. This major component, conducted through a focused stakeholder participation programme, includes the following activities:

- identifying stakeholders;
- determining their needs;
- obtaining their inputs on key project activities;
- keeping them informed about the progress and outcomes of the project;
- coaching them in the use of the spatial planning outputs;
- encouraging their future involvement in the implementation phase of the project;
- making pertinent information easily accessible;
- creating and maintaining a general awareness about the project and its aims.

Stakeholder consultation occurred throughout the research and planning phase of the STEP project, commencing with endorsement of the project proposal in the fund-raising stage.

Amanda Younge CC of 53 Hofmeyr Street, Gardens, Cape Town 8001, was contracted to run the STEP public participation programme, which was conducted in close collaboration with project management and other project consultants and specialists. The "Summary" component of this report relied heavily, but not entirely, on the six progress reports provided during the period 2001-2003 by Amanda Younge CC.

2.1 Identification of stakeholders

An electronic stakeholder database was compiled to facilitate communication with the wide range of stakeholders involved in the project. For example, the database was used to select sets of stakeholders, by sector, for the sending of invitations to workshops, focus groups meetings and the project conference. It was also used for the dispatch of project newsletters to all stakeholders and other interested parties.

Stakeholders are defined here as those individuals, groups, organizations or institutions that are considered crucial to the success of the STEP project, those that can directly or indirectly derive benefits from the project, those that wished to participate, and those that could have a role to play in downstream implementation activities.

The database was initially compiled by culling names and addresses relevant to the STEP planning region from a similar database that was constructed for the CAPE (Cape Action for People and the Environment) project that was conducted in the Cape Floristic Region, the planning region of which overlaps extensively with that of the STEP project. As a second step, the STEP project management team provided appropriate entries. Following these initial actions, entries were added to the database on an ongoing basis throughout the life of the project. New entries were received in response to requests in the project newsletters, and in response to a range of media items. The project team also continued to add names as they came to hand.

The number of database entries grew from around 500 to over 1000, representing a wide range of stakeholders, including governmental and non-governmental agencies, organizations, institutes, societies and individuals that have an important impact on land-use and land management, especially in the fields of research, conservation, agriculture, and rural and urban planning.

2.2 Creating an awareness of STEP

Awareness of the project amongst, and buy-in from, stakeholders was promoted via a number of activities.

2.2.1 Branding the project

The project was uniquely branded through a combination of the following actions:

a) The formal title of the project ("The conservation of biodiversity in the Thicket Biome, South Africa") was replaced, for the purposes of everyday use, by the more user-friendly title "Subtropical Thicket Ecosystem Planning project", with its catchy acronym "STEP".
b) A simple but appropriate logo was designed (see cover) and used on all project material, for example reports, maps, posters, newsletters, questionnaires and the website.
c) An attractive two-colour folder was designed and used to hold material at the various stakeholder workshops.
d) The project motto "Keeping people on the land in living landscapes" was compiled and used on products developed during the second half of the project, most notably the implementation framework and strategy.
e) A standard format was used for the six project newsletters.

2.2.2 Brochure and folder

An A4 size colour brochure that provides a concise overview of the project was compiled and 3000 copies were distributed at meetings and workshops, with the first newsletter, and on every other appropriate occasion.

A smart two-colour folder was produced for use at STEP public participation occasions, thereby helping to give the project a "professional" label.

2.2.3 Media campaign

Both the print and broadcast media were used to promote the project and its outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1: Items on STEP in the popular media in the years 2001 to 2004.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Interviews on national radio		2		6		8
Interviews on regional radio		26		2		28
Items on national television		2		2		4
Articles in national newspapers		4				4
Articles in regional newspapers	3	25	1	8		37
Articles in local newspapers		11	6	6	1	24
Articles in popular magazines	2	7	2	8	1	20

2.2.4 Reports and scientific publications from the STEP Project.

A number of scientific reports and publications promoted awareness of the project within the scientific and academic communities (Table 2; see Annex 1 for a complete list of titles).

Table 2: STEP scientific reports and publications produced during the period 2001-2004. See the Annex for the full list.

Type	Year				
	2001	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**Total**
Miscellaneous STEP reports	3	3	1	2	**9**
TERU reports (series)	1	6	6	2	**15**
Published articles		1	1		**2**
Articles featuring STEP			2		**2**
Total	**4**	**10**	**10**	**4**	**28**

The STEP implementation strategy was presented in a high quality colour document to serve as one of the "flagship" STEP products. This important document (Knight *et al*. 2003) was launched at the STEP conference in October 2003 and marked the end the research and planning phase of STEP, and the launch of the implementation phase. The document will guide the implementation phase and serve as a key resource for key stakeholders, and for fund raising activities that will follow.

All the reports are accessible on, and downloadable from, the STEP website (see 2.3.3). An additional STEP/TERU report will be completed in December 2004, and a series of scientific papers are in preparation and will be submitted in the post-June 2004 period.

2.2.5 Presentations

Awareness of the project was promoted through a number (50) of presentations made by members of the project team (including consultants). Groups addressed ranged included the national Parliamentary Portfolio Committee for the Environment Affairs & Tourism, municipal councillors and senior staff of certain local government authorities, special interest groups, development funders, delegates to scientific conferences and university students.

2.3 Communication with stakeholders

Ongoing communication with stakeholders was achieved through the following activities.

2.3.1 Steering Committee

A Steering Committee was established, in response to the requirements of the project funders, and as a vehicle for achieving "buy-in" from the key implementers of the project outcomes. The Committee (see Table 3 for composition) met five times during the full-time phase of the project (July 2000-December 2003).

Table 3: Composition of the STEP Steering Committee

Affiliations of members of the STEP Steering Committee		
Department of Economic Affairs, Environment & Tourism, Eastern Cape Government	Department of Housing & Local Government, Eastern Cape Government	Department of Water Affairs & Forestry, (Eastern Cape)
Department of Agriculture, Eastern Cape Government	Amatole, Cacadu and Eden District Municipalities	Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism
South African National Parks	National Botanical Institute	

Whilst all members of the Committee gave their full support for the project at all times, they provided relatively little input and guidance on specific issues, for example on the draft

implementation strategy. Overall, their attention to mainstreaming the outcomes of the project within their individual institutions was disappointing.

2.3.2 Project newsletters

Aside from the direct communication achieved with stakeholders through meetings and workshops etc, the main form of communication was through six project newsletters, produced in April and October 2001; April and October 2002; and May and September 2003.

The newsletters served to introduce the project to a wide range of identified stakeholders, invite active participation by them, increase awareness of the project and its aims, request inputs on specific products (e.g. the implementation strategy), provide news of recent and forthcoming events, and draw attention to specialist reports that were made available on the project website as they were completed.

2.3.3 Project websites

A project website was designed by project management and activated on the University of Port Elizabeth server. During the course of the project this website provided background information on the project and was regularly updated as final specialist reports, newsletters and other relevant documents became available. It proved to be an excellent tool for answering the many queries received about the project and its outcomes and products, and it provided a time-saving service for the project management team.

The UPE STEP website was discontinued in June 2004 and replaced by the professionally curated STEP site on the Conservation Planning Unit (CPU) website, maintained by the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board and housed at the Kirstenbosch Research Centre, National Botanical (Biodiversity) Institute, Cape Town. This website (http://cpu.uwc.ac.za) provides free access to all the STEP products (downloadable reports and GIS files).

2.3.4 Questionnaires

A series of stakeholder questionnaires was used to assess the impact of some of the STEP outcomes (Table 4).

Table 4: Information on questionnaires sent to STEP stakeholders.

No	Date sent	Aim	Target audience	No. sent	No. returned	Main outcomes
1st	October 2002	Test impacts of STEP	All stakeholders	982	83 (8.5%)	Majority consider that STEP is being successful.
2nd	May 2003	Request comment on the STEP implementation strategy	All stakeholders	1021	21 (2%)	Low % return; precludes statistical analysis. >80% support for STEP/strategy.
3rd	May 2004	Assess the perceived level of utility of the Conservation Priority Map by specific users	Training workshop attendees	97	Returns still being received	Awaited.

2.3.5 Stakeholder workshops

A series of workshops, addressing a range of issues, was held with STEP stakeholders (Table 5).

Table 5: Information pertaining to the STEP stakeholder workshops.

Place & Date	Aims	Target group	No. of delegates	Notes
Port Elizabeth March 2001	To introduce the project to a wide range of stakeholders and to consult them on the identification of further stakeholders, the composition of the Steering Committee, the information sources that STEP should use, the identification and prioritization of key issues, and suggestions for implementation.	All stakeholders on the project stakeholder database.	73	The aims of the workshop were broadly achieved.
Shamwari Private Nature Reserve February 2002	To consult stakeholders on: a) the project's role in promoting sustainable commercial land use and biodiversity conservation; b) the role of private landowners as custodians of the natural resources; c) ways to improve rural livelihoods through conservation-friendly land-use practices; d) economic development, job creation and conservation through wildlife-based ventures.	The private sector.	58	Relatively few delegates from the target group attended. There was good representation of non-target stakeholders, especially government agencies, NGOs and academics, resulting from a misdirected invitation process. The workshop evolved into a general planning session.
Port Elizabeth April 2003	To develop the Implementation Strategy by obtaining from stakeholders: a) a vision of sustainable land management; b) key components of the Implementation strategy; c) a clear vision for the future of the project (see box); d) continuing ownership and support; e) volunteers to review the draft Implementation Strategy	Land-use decision makers.	56	The aims of the workshop were successfully achieved. Eight reviewers were appointed to review the draft strategy document – only two provided comments. Nine individuals volunteered to act as STEP "champions" in the implementation phase.

At the workshop held in April 2003 a **vision** for the STEP project was compiled by delegates:

The people of the Thicket Biome take custodianship of their unique living landscapes and work together to conserve, enhance and use their natural resources to ensure sustainable ecological processes and livelihoods, now and in the future.

(This Vision statement was translated, by the stakeholders at the workshop, into Xhosa and Afrikaans, the other two languages in use in the STEP planning region).

2.3.6 Focus group meetings

A series of focus group meetings, each with a specific theme, was held with stakeholders (Table 6).

Table 6: Information on the STEP focus group workshops.

Place & Date	Aims	Target group	No. of delegates	Notes
Grahams-town August 2001	Establishing the potential for conservation actions in communal areas.	Individuals, organizations and institutions with knowledge of, or representing, this group	13	Aims of the workshop successfully achieved. There is potential for the implementation of conservation actions in communal areas. This contrasts with the findings of Younge & Magadlela (2001)*.
Port Elizabeth August 2001	To determine the requirements of local government planning authorities.	Land-use planners and decision makers in local and provincial government.	17	Aims of the workshop successfully achieved, through high quality inputs.
East London August 2001	To determine the requirements of local government planning authorities.	Land-use planners and decision makers in local and provincial government.	4	Workshop poorly attended but useful inputs, that largely corroborated those made at the Port Elizabeth focus group meeting, were made.

*** Social analysis in the communal areas**

A review, based on personal interviews and literature sources, of the socio-economic and institutional factors affecting the potential for thicket conservation in the communal areas of the planning region was conducted by STEP consultants in February 2001 (Younge & Magadlela 2001). This study concluded that, on the whole, conditions were (at the time) not conducive to effective, sustainable natural resource conservation in communal areas. Prior to contemplating such actions, further consultation and study of feasibility, on an area specific basis, would be required.

2.3.7 Capacity building workshops

A number of capacity building workshops were held to introduce the STEP conservation plan to user groups, obtain information regarding their requirements, and to coach them (where necessary) in the use of these products (Table 7).

Table 7: Details of the STEP capacity building workshops.

Place & Date	Aims	Target group	No. of delegates	Notes
Port Elizabeth September 2002	Consult stakeholders in the field of land-use decision making to (a) gain further insights into the capacity building (training) needs for the use of the STEP products, and (b) help design the STEP outputs in a form suitable for identified user groups.	Land-use planning practitioners from all government and non-government sectors.	56	Aims of the workshop successfully achieved.
East London June 2003	To introduce user groups to the STEP spatial planning outputs and to coach them in their use.	Land-use planners from government, parastatals, NGOs and the private sector.	31	Aims of the workshop generally achieved**.
Port Elizabeth June 2003	To introduce user groups to the STEP spatial planning outputs and to coach them in their use.	Land-use planners from government, parastatals, NGOs and the private sector.	43	Aims of the workshop generally achieved**.
George June 2003	To introduce user groups to the STEP spatial planning outputs and to coach them in their use.	Land-use planners from government, parastatals, NGOs and the private sector.	23	Aims of the workshop generally achieved**.

****Evaluation of the capacity building workshops held during June 2003.**
The majority of the participants reported that they had a good understanding of the STEP Conservation Priority Map and how to use the information that it contained, and considered that, generally, the information on the map was presented in a user-friendly way. However, some participants suggested that the colours depicting the various categories on the map could be improved, and that the map would re useful at a larger size; both of these suggestions were subsequently incorporated into the final version. Suggestions were made for improving the format of, and local municipality representation at, future capacity building workshops. Overall, the response of the users was highly positive. Notwithstanding this, the workshops provided a number of important lessons for future, similar activities.

2.3.8 Local government handbook

Local government authorities in South Africa are required by law to address environmental issues in the compilation of their Integrated Development Plans. Each IDP must include a Spatial Development Framework that is underpinned by a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The main product from the STEP conservation assessment, the Conservation Priority Map, forms a good basis for these SEAs but the capacity within local government to apply the information on the map is extremely low. In view of this, a Local Government Handbook (Pierce 2003) was compiled for use at the capacity building workshops, and

beyond. It was also provided to the Municipal Mentoring Programme (MMP) and/or Planning and Implementation Management Support System (PIMSS) that operates in the central and eastern parts of the planning region. Dr. Shirley M. Pierce of PO Box 364, St. Francis Bay, 6312 was contracted by the STEP Project to compile the handbook, with co-financing from the Development Bank of South Africa.

The handbook supports capacity building in local government by guiding decision-makers to make wise land-use choices. It serves as a textbook for training courses and as a reference book for use in local government. End-users are informed about the value of the green environment and its provision of natural services, such as clean water. Non-technical explanations of relevant environmental legislation are used. The importance of international, national and provincial agreements about the conservation of biodiversity are covered. In particular, the handbook describes to local government decision-makers how to apply the spatial recommendations of the STEP conservation planning activity.

Owing to unforeseen technical delays, the final handbook was not available for use and distribution at the three capacity-building (training) workshops held during June 2003. A draft copy was, however, available at these workshops. This delay had a positive spin-off in that the workshops provided a good opportunity for users to test the draft version and identify issues that could be incorporated in the final version by the handbook compiler. However, the delay resulted in users at the workshops not having the final product (handbook and mapbook) to take back with them to their organizations, for immediate use. To address this problem, project management met, in November 2003, with senior officials representing the three main District Municipalities (DM) in the planning region, namely a PIMSS manager (Amatole DM), an MMP official (Cacadu DM) and an IDP manager (Eden DM), as well as with the NBI's Eastern Cape Bioregional Programme Co-ordinator (EC-BPC). This approach was taken since it was considered that "in house" distribution would be more effective than distribution by project staff. In addition, the ADM and CDM representatives were already involved in municipal training activities. The three municipal officials agreed to arrange for the distribution of the handbooks and mapbooks to all the Local Municipalities (LM) within their respective DM regions, accompanied by an awareness action and a request for compliance in the compilation of the SDFs. Based on feedback received in March 2004, this was successfully achieved in the Amatole and Eden DMs but not in the Cacadu DM (owing to the resignation of the MMP official). After consultation with the EC-BPC, who will co-ordinate the implementation phase of the STEP project, it was agreed that it would not be wise to distribute the handbook material to the Cacadu DM and LMs without a capacity assessment and a focused training programme. The EC-BPC has undertaken to include these activities in a funding proposal to the Development Bank of South Africa (in preparation in June 2004).

2.3.9 STEP Conference

A relatively high profile conference was held to mark the end of the research and planning phase of the project, and to launch the implementation phase (Table 8).

Table 8: Information relating to the STEP Conference.

Place & Date	Aims	Target group	No. of delegates
Port Elizabeth October 2003	a) To publicise the project outcomes. b) To publicly launch the implementation strategy. c) To seek support for implementation initiatives.	Opinion leaders, decision makers, implementers, potential "champions", other key stakeholders.	120

2.3.10 Thicket Forum

The STEP Implementation Strategy (Knight *et al*. 2003), compiled in close association with stakeholders, identified the need for the holding of an annual Thicket Forum that "guides, encourages, aligns and integrates key research and industry institutions conducting research into ecologically, economically and socially sustainable natural resource use, in consultation with non-academic partners". The inaugural meeting of this Forum was held at the Zuurberg Mountain Inn, Addo District, on 26 and 27 May 2004 and its aims were:

1) to present a series of selected research highlights and activities associated with the Thicket Biome, through a number of invited presentations. Speakers were chosen to broadly represent the wide range of sectors that are involved with thicket in one way or another, for example, academics, conservation planners and managers, agriculturalists, land-use planners and decision-makers, social scientists, land managers and resource economist. The nature and content of the presentations reflected this aim, and
2) to discuss and reach consensus on the future format and content of the Thicket Forum, by way of a dedicated workshop session.

The conference was attended by 62 people, representing a wide range of target stakeholders and including university researchers and educators, implementing agency officials, conservation managers and scientists, social scientists, environmental consultants, agricultural extension officers and a tourism expert.

At the Forum the Wildlife & Environmental Society of South Africa's Biodiversity Conservation Unit volunteered to convene and organize the 2005 Forum. A small committee, representing some key participating institutions, was elected to support WESSA-BCU in this endeavour.

2.4 Comments of the effectiveness of the stakeholder participation programme

2.4.1 Awareness of the project

The awareness component was largely successful, with STEP achieving and maintaining a relatively high profile amongst key stakeholders, at national, provincial, regional and local levels, and within government and non-government spheres. Given this situation, it can be safely stated that the project has resulted in increased awareness of the importance and value of biodiversity within the Subtropical Thicket Biome, and the urgent need to implement meaningful conservation actions to ensure its persistence into the future. However, this aspect was less successful at grassroot/local level and this is attributed to the fact that the project was not designed to operate at this level.

The project has received widespread and ongoing support, and at no time has its relevance and approach been questioned. Criticisms offered have been few and mild, and always in a constructive and positive context.

The project has strong political support in the Eastern Cape. For example, it was twice referred to in the public address by the Member of the Executive Council for Economic Affairs, Environment & Tourism (Eastern Cape Provincial Government) on World Environment Day, 4 June 2004.

2.4.2 Mainstreaming the spatial planning guidelines

The mainstreaming of the main STEP spatial output – principally in the form of the Conservation Priority Map – is considered, overall, to have been successful. However, problems were encountered at some levels (see later).

Use of STEP spatial information by national government and parastatals.

The National Biodiversity and Action Plan (NBSAP) initiative of the national Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism has committed itself to using the STEP outputs. NBSAP will provide a foundation for the implementation of the new Protected Areas and Biodiversity bills, and for the National Environmental Management Act. The STEP information formed a key resource for the State of the Environment Report compiled in 2003 by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research for the Eastern Cape Province.

The National Botanical (Biodiversity) Institute, through its Directorate of Policy and Planning, has fully endorsed the outcomes and products of STEP, and has undertaken to play a major role in the implementation phase of the project. This role will essentially be one of co-ordination, catalyzation and facilitation. Evidence of the NBI's commitment is provided by its institutional support for the establishment, in August 2003, of the post of Eastern Cape Bioregional Programme Co-ordinator, based in Port Elizabeth - at the centre of the STEP planning region. Co-ordination of the implementation of the STEP implementation strategy is a key responsibility of this person.

Conservation planners from South African National Parks are using the STEP information in spatial planning exercises related to the expansion of the Addo Elephant and Mountain Zebra national parks.

Officials in the Department of Water Affairs & Forestry offices in the western and eastern sectors of the STEP planning region, and in Head Office in Pretoria, requested the STEP information - to assist their planning activities.

Eskom, South Africa's power utility company, is using the STEP data to inform its planning for the siting of a new 400kv powerline from KwaZulu-Natal Province to the Coega Industrial Development Zone near Port Elizabeth.

Use of STEP spatial information by provincial governments, and associates

Conservation planners are using the STEP information to inform spatial planning exercises being co-ordinated by the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board (WCNCB) (Southern Region) for the creation of the Gouritz megareserve in the Western Cape Province, and by the Wilderness Foundation for the Baviaanskloof megareserve north-west of Port Elizabeth (as part of the CAPE programme), respectively. The WCNCB head office in Cape Town requested a copy of the STEP handbook.

The Development Planning arm of the Western Cape's Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP) has endorsed the use of the STEP spatial products and plans to make compliance with the STEP Conservation Priority Map a default for District and Local Municipalities in the compilation of their Spatial Development Frameworks (SDFs).

The Eastern Cape's Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism (DEAET) is using the STEP spatial data for the compilation of a provincial conservation plan. This plan will ultimately inform the next upgrade of the this province's Provincial Growth and Development Plan, which in turn will provide a spatial plan to be followed by all provincial departments.

The STEP information was extensively used in the compilation of a *Strategic Assessment of Biodiversity in the Eastern Cape* for DEAET in 2003, and some of the information was used in the compilation (by the CSIR) of the Eastern Cape's *State of the Environment Report* in 2004.

Very little success was achieved in engaging the formal agriculture sector, especially at provincial government level, even though a senior manager from the Eastern Cape's Department of Agriculture served on the Steering Committee. Restructuring, loss of expertise and lack of capacity are considered to be partly responsible for this situation. However, and perhaps of more concern, is the view held by some government officials that agriculture is entirely production oriented and, as such, does not necessarily have a role to play in the conservation of biodiversity. Clearly this requires addressing in the project's implementation phase.

Use of STEP spatial information at local government level.

The STEP planning region includes parts of five District Municipality (DM) areas, each incorporating in turn a number of Local Municipality (LM) areas (29 in total). Three of these, the Amatole, Cacadu and Eden DMs, incorporate over 90% of the subtropical thicket that occurs in the planning region, and the mainstreaming programme was therefore focused on them. The STEP information was provided to these DMs in March 2003, albeit in an unpolished and somewhat preliminary format. This was done in order to meet the 2003 IDP/SDF deadline of March. Officials and planners from all three municipalities, and their consultants from the private sector, recognized the value of the information, and it has subsequently been used in the IDP/SDF process, but less comprehensively in the Cacadu DM, owing to capacity constraints, than in the Amatole and Eden DMs.

The planning region has one Metropolitan Municipality, the Nelson Mandela MM, and it follows a systematic conservation assessment undertaken at a finer scale, but broadly based on, the STEP plan. Planners from the NMMM were closely involved with the STEP plan on an ongoing basis.

The mainstreaming of the STEP planning outcomes was largely unsuccessful at Local Municipality level. This is ascribed to the very low capacity that exists in environmental and land-use planning at this level of local government. Contributing factors are a general lack of expertise and experience, compounded by ongoing restructuring and aggressive affirmative action employment policies, lack of training opportunities and budgetary constraints. The absence of staff dedicated solely to environmental affairs is also a contributing factor.

While it is known that the mainstreaming of the STEP planning guidelines at LM level achieved very limited success in the Amatole and Cacadu DMs, the use of this information at LM level is considered to be widespread. The reason for this is that with three possible exceptions (Kouga, Makana and Buffalo City LMs), the LMs in these two DMs contract land-use planning consultants from the private sector to compile the SDFs for their IDPs. The Cacadu LM SDFs are all dealt with by two private firms, namely Setplan and Urban Dynamics, whereas the Amatole LM SDFs are largely dealt with by three firms, namely Carter, Avis & Logie, Coastal and Environmental Services and the CEN IEM Unit. Similarly, Setplan and Dennis Moss & Associates have been contracted to compile the SDFs for the Amatole and Eden DMs, respectively. All the named firms have requested, and apparently rely heavily on, the STEP planning guidelines. The Amatole and Eden DMs have formally requested the LMs within their respective regions to comply with the STEP planning guidelines in the compilation of their SDFs. However, the use of the STEP information by the DMs and LMs needs to be properly monitored and evaluated and it is recommended that this be done as a dedicated exercise during the implementation phase of the STEP project.

The Development Bank of South Africa provides institutional and other support to local government authorities in part of the STEP region. The DBSA has made compliance with the STEP conservation plan mandatory for applications to it for loans and grants.

Levels of government

Land-use policy and planning is, as far as could be ascertained, supposed to operate on a "bottom-up" and "top-down" basis. In other words, local plans should inform regional plans, which should inform provincial plans, which should inform national plans, and the other way around. By all anecdotal accounts, this system is not functioning as effectively it should and the different levels of government appear to be developing their respective plans largely in isolation. For this reason it was decided to focus the STEP mainstreaming on all four levels of government.

Use of STEP spatial information in the private sector

The compilation of the STEP Conservation Priority Map has been generally well received by Integrated Environmental Management practitioners from the private sector, as evidenced by an ongoing demand for copies of this STEP product.

Non-governmental organizations

The Botanical Society and the Wildlife and Environment Society, two of South Africa's leading conservation NGOs, have fully endorsed the outcomes and products of STEP.

2.4.3 Stakeholder inputs

The reasons for the low levels of input from the Steering Committee on project documents, and from the persons who agreed to review the implementation strategy, is difficult to explain. It could be due to one or a combination of the following:

a) They have extremely busy work schedules and could not find the time to respond.
b) The contents of the documents were too technical, or dealt with unfamiliar topics.
c) They are generally satisfied with the contents of the documents and consider that a response is therefore not warranted.

2.4.4 Stakeholder "burnout"

It is possible that stakeholder "burnout" may have affected attendance of some workshops. Some stakeholders mentioned that, given the high demands on their time by a plethora of workshops, in general, it was not possible for them to attend all the STEP stakeholder workshops (A T Knight, in litt., May 2004). No attempt was made to quantify this phenomenon in the STEP project.

2.4.5 Support for the implementation phase

The project appeared to lay a good foundation for the implementation phase, through sensitizing stakeholders to the opportunities provided by the Megaconservancy Network concept, and the existence of a blueprint – the Implementation Strategy. Ready support for the implementation phase was shown by the enthusiastic and spontaneous response to a call for "champions" to take the initiative forward. Notwithstanding this, the serious lack of capacity at local government level, and especially in the Local Municipalities in the central and eastern parts of the planning region, provides much cause for concern, and will remain a major constraint to mainstreaming the STEP products in the short- to medium-term.

2.5 Some lessons learned

1. If at all possible, a stakeholder participation consultant that resides within the planning region and is familiar with its landscapes, institutions, politics and people should be contracted to run this crucially important component. The benefits of doing this may outweigh some of the costs (if any).

2. It is vital that complex and technical conservation planning products be interpreted in a way that facilitates their use by all land-use planners and decision-makers at local government level. The local government planner's handbook commissioned by the STEP project was an essential in achieving this goal.

3. In its haste to meet the 2003 IDP/SDF deadlines (in March of that year), the project released products to local government planners and their consultants that were unpolished and that were not accompanied by adequate interpretative material (here user guidelines for the Conservation Priority Map). Similarly, the capacity building (training) workshops were conducted with preliminary products, as the final handbook was not yet available and only appeared three months after the workshops, owing to an unforeseen delay in the finalisation of the conservation assessment. The project website was advertised during these workshops but, largely because of this delay, did not become operational until three months after the workshops.

Thus, the project created an awareness of, and interest in, the products, and expectations of their availability, but could not deliver them until after the training workshops. This frustrated some potential users and caused some of the momentum of the project to be lost in the post-capacity building workshop stage.

The main lesson learned here is that products should not be advertised and released until they are in their final form, and are fully and easily accessible to all.

4. Planners, and their consultants, at local government level have had little or no exposure to, or experience with, biodiversity information, especially with regard to incorporating it as a layer in spatial planning frameworks. Therefore, for the mainstreaming of environmental planning products, such as those provided by STEP, to have a chance of success at local government level, it would hugely beneficial if “in house” environmental specialists (= champions) were employed on a full-time basis, at least by the District Municipalities. Their role could be one of engaging with the providers of STEP-type information, with the IDP/SDF process, with DM and LM planners via ongoing training programmes, and with provincial and national planners and policy makers to, inter alia, integrate biodiversity information into the SDFs of IDPs, and into IEM procedures.

5. The capacity for land-use planning at Local Municipality level is generally extremely poor, with only a very small number of the LMs in the planning region having a resident planner. A further problem that was encountered relates to the general lack of institutional memory, caused mainly by high staff and councillor turnover. Consequently, the mainstreaming effort was also directed at the private consultants that are widely engaged by the LMs (and DMs) to compile the SDFs for their respective municipalities.

6. The attendance levels at the capacity building workshops by local government councillors and officials were very low indeed, especially insofar as LMs were concerned. With hindsight, it would probably have been more effective to employ a trainer (or small team of trainers) to visit each local and district municipality and run a one or two day workshop with appropriate municipal councillors and officials (but see point 7 below).

7. Local government is still, 10 years after the epochal 1994 elections, in a state of flux and ongoing political struggle, especially in the rural areas. It would appear that this is one of the reasons contributing to the high turnover of municipal staff and councillors. As a consequence, any future training programme will most likely need to be of an ongoing nature.

8. The greater the institutional capacity, and political stability, of the agencies that will implement the outcomes of the conservation assessment, the greater the likelihood that actions to mainstream these outcomes within these agencies will succeed.

9. A website is an ideal tool for making the products of a bioregional planning project accessible to interested parties.

10. The fact that three bioregional planning projects, namely STEP, SKEP (Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Planning project) and CAPE (Cape Action for People and the Environment), with overlapping planning regions and with similar objectives, *modus operandi* and outcomes, were operating at the same time, created confusion amongst many stakeholders. The close similarity in the names STEP and SKEP exacerbated this. The lesson learned here is that projects should have, as far as possible, their own unique identity and that pro-active steps should be taken to prevent confusion between similar projects.

2.6 Acknowledgements

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ANNEX

LIST OF REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS FROM THE STEP PROJECT

As at: 30 June 2004

TERU = Terrestrial Ecology Research Unit, University of Port Elizabeth, South Africa

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2005

One manual and four scientific papers currently in preparation.