

ATTACHMENT 1 - RESPONSE TO GEF COUNCIL COMMENTS ON CUBA: STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PROTECTED AREAS

Comments were received from one Council member (Switzerland). These have been summarized below in thematic groups together with the relevant responses and cross references to revised sections in the Project Document. While relevant project sections have been made clearer, the overall design has been maintained as the responses illustrate that the recommendations¹ provided by the Swiss Council member can be effectively addressed under the current design and the established time-frame.

Main Concerns of Swiss Member	Responses
<p>1. Project Cycle: The three years project cycle is too short to meet the overly ambitious and very complex project goals.</p>	<p>Due consideration was given to the project cycle length during formulation. Phase 1 of the intervention, whilst producing specific global benefits, is the inception of a ten year national programme and will focus on up-grading core capacities to implement an already established, but incipient, protected areas system. Once this sounder basis is established, complementary and longer phases would address more complex issues related to the entire protected areas system including a more in-depth treatment of landscape conservation approaches (this is discussed in more detail below in item 3). A short first phase was considered to be important to enable a more adaptive approach to the whole ten-year programme. Counting with the stronger core capacities of CNAP constituencies and the models based on four pilot areas, the programme will be reviewed and fine tuned at the end of Phase 1 of the GEF project. In order to reduce the complexity of the first phase of this project, and thus ensure that results can be obtained in the estimated duration, several decisions were made during project design. One of these was to focus on only one protected area management category in phase 1 - that of national parks. This will reduce the variables that need to be considered when developing unified approaches to management plans given that land-use restrictions are more defined for this category and that this is the category with most experience in Cuba, thereby delivering greater protection to biodiversity values. In addition, Cuba has experience - in the Caribbean context - in managing national parks as core areas of biosphere reserves. The first phase of three years is considered to be sufficient time to develop a unified approach to protected area management amongst the CNAP constituents, determine effective co-ordination mechanisms, up-grade operations in four national parks and to determine funding mechanisms for the system. Specific concerns of the project cycle related to the management plans and the demonstration models are addressed in items 2 and 3 below.</p>
<p>2. Protected Area Management Plans: a) Participation: The proposal does not show how the support zone communities</p>	<p>a) Participation: Cuba has long established and clear mechanisms for participatory planning and consultations. Despite the fact that these have not been geared to participatory formulation of protected areas management plans per se, they form a solid basis on which to build on. These mechanisms and specific</p>

¹ **Conclusions and Recommendations Of Comments from Swiss Council Member** The reviewer underlines the importance of providing support to Cuba, however, concern is expressed that the project would not be able to deliver what it promises because of the short project cycle for over ambitious results. The reviewer points out that project failure would be counterproductive and may foreclose future options for donor assistance in this important area. He/ She recommends: i) a revision and downscaling of the project, giving particular importance to landscape level approaches to protected area planning and the importance of community participation in the process of planning and management; (ii) to confine the project to the creation of proper legal/policy and institutional framework conditions that can be more conducive to a truly participatory approach to management planning and governance of protected areas; (iii) to focus on one area (instead of four areas) regarding the elaboration of a model management plan.

<p>and the people living inside the selected pilot areas will be incorporated into PA management and the decision-making process (if this has been described in Annex I, the Annex was not available for comment).</p> <p>b) Timing Concern that “considering the local lack of experience & expertise in management planning for protected areas and the lack of familiarity with a participatory approach, management plans can not be expected to be available before the second project year and this will effect the demonstration projects”.</p> <p>c) Process Four management plans are expected to be elaborated but it remains unclear by whom and how. Local expertise for state-of-the-art protected area planning is obviously not available. Also the four areas fall under different jurisdiction which creates additional problems. How are these problems to be resolved? What are “standardized methods” that supposedly guide the formulation of the management plans?</p>	<p>activities to increase local stakeholder participation were described in Annex 1. Annex 1 clearly describes the project-supported establishment of coordination councils at the regional level, and the invitation of active involvement of municipal environment committees in PA decision-making. Committee members (elected by local residents) are targeted for training and education to strengthen their contributions to the PA management and coordination processes. For those municipalities without an environment committee, their creation will be supported by the project. The participation of these local representatives in the various coordination councils and local development interest will be critical to representing local interests at the table. In addition, it was decided to further support this through the financing and participation of UNDP’s Program of Human Development at the Local Level, as a mechanism especially devoted to guarantee local involvement.</p> <p>b) Relevant sections of this are pasted in footnote 2 below for easy reference.</p> <p>c) Timing: The development of management plans will start only once the general guidelines (see item c below) are ready. This is expected to be by the end of year one leaving two complete years to finalize them. Furthermore, the process will not start from scratch. Pilot protected areas in the moist and dry ecoregions have management plans under preparation and these process will be adjusted and completed using the guidelines for participation and conflict resolution. The pilot areas from the Wetlands and Pine forests have management plans through the year 2001 and these will be up-dated using the guidelines. As such there is sufficient time to produce participatory and up-dated management plans for the areas by the end of the first phase. It is important to clarify that the management plans are not required before the start up of demonstration pilot projects. These demonstration projects <i>are not dependant on the management plans and their locations have already been determined</i>. As indicated in the Project Work Plan (Annex 1.2 of Section 1 and Annex H of Section 2 –Brief-Optional Annexes) these demonstration projects will start at the beginning of the project and continue for all three years. Each of the four protected areas was selected as the demonstration of a specific threat that in the future could exert significant pressure on that parks if effective management action is not identified and applied within an appropriate timeframe. The demonstration projects will precisely define what kind of approach is effective for each threat. By maintaining four parks in the project, <i>demonstrations will be achieved for the most urgent threats and these can be replicated in a timely manner to other protected areas in future phases</i>. Furthermore, as each park harbors biodiversity from different globally significant ecoregions, the demonstration projects will afford threat removal to the broadest range of globally significant biodiversity. <i>If the number of parks to be targeted was reduced to one, the number of threats to be addressed would be substantially reduced, with a concomitant reduction in replicability value, and also overall global benefits would be drastically lowered</i>. The results of the demonstration projects will be incorporated into the management plans of the corresponding park overtime as these are regularly up-dated through adaptive management approaches. Thus, <i>the timing of the management plans will not effect the demonstration projects</i>.</p> <p>d) Process. One of the main issues identified in PA planning and management in Cuba is the lack of standardized procedures. Different agencies apply different planning and management procedures, and different PAs are at different levels of capacity. As a result, there is little overall coherence at the national level. Though PA management in Cuba generally benefits from the support of experienced and knowledgeable professionals,</p>
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	<p>overall, there is little consistency and no opportunity to benefit from experiences beyond Cuba. As a result, effective planning and management of a national system of protected areas to meet national and international biodiversity conservation objectives is compromised. The project calls for an initial application of international expertise to define common PA planning and management guidelines which are in turn to be applied to all PA planning and management initiatives in the SNAP. These guidelines will be based on the latest approaches developed in other parts of the world, with input from Cuban experts and will require detailed guidelines on how to ensure local stakeholder participation in the Cuban setting. The PA planning and management guideline development process will solicit the participation of local stakeholders through existing mechanisms – local development sector representatives, municipal environment committees and regional coordination councils. These guidelines will be adopted by CNAP for the SNAP (all management plans of PAs need to be approved by the CNAP) and this will apply to all parks regardless of under which institutions’ jurisdiction they may fall. These standardized guidelines are precisely one instrument that will help ensure common approaches to management amongst the different institutional constituents of the SNAP. Key staff members from each of the institutions with jurisdiction over protected areas targeted in this project will be trained in the use of these methodological guidelines. As mentioned above these individuals will then lead the process of developing management plans with the participation from institutional actors and representatives from local communities. Participation processes defined in the guidelines would build on the existing structures and types of participation and consultation mechanisms and structures in Cuba and would adapt these to protected area management incorporating state-of-the-art approaches within the social and political context of the country.</p>
<p>3. Landscape Conservation. The Cuban approach to sustainable biodiversity conservation at current appears to be fully dependent on protected areas. A well designed network of protected areas may only be achieved through landscape level planning, that allows for the establishment of ecological corridors with land use options that are compatible with conservation management. In this context insufficient attention is given to the importance of support zones of the four protected areas that should form an integral part of the conservation units and the proposed management plans.</p>	<p>There appears to be some confusion over the Cuban approach to sustainable biodiversity conservation and the role that the project plays within the role of protected areas systems in landscape conservation. The project forms part of a ten year national program that will develop a National Protected Areas System. This programme is <i>firmly based on landscape conservation approaches</i>. The protected area system <i>will provide a wide range of management categories with differential land use restrictions ranging from core areas for strict conservation with no land use, to much broader lands-use areas under different management categories</i>. Indeed Cuba has already identified several areas in which sustainable development approaches will be emphasized with land-use options that are compatible with conservation management. Whilst landscape conservation is the underlying principle of the SNAP, the first phase of the project focuses on national parks to reduce complexity until SNAP constituents capacity is strengthened and also to provide better protection to the most pristine of Cuba’s biodiversity at a time when threats are low. Subsequent phases will include a broader range of management categories gradually increasing the complexity of the SNAP and developing management of bioregional clusters of protected areas. However, as indicated in paragraph 41 of the Brief, the pilot area in the case of Moist Forest will be located in a multi-use region and will be slightly more complex precisely to provide the first move towards PA management from a bio-regional and landscape standpoint. Furthermore, the management plans of all four areas will include actions for their buffer zones gradually, working outwards to eventually establish clusters of protected areas that provide an archipelago of wildland areas of appropriate sizes and shapes and sufficient connectivity in the landscape to ensure migration and dispersal. Finally, during phase</p>

	<p>1, activity 1.9 will evaluate the design of SNAP and propose clustering strategies, including biological corridors, for facilitating PA' management from a bio-regional level perspective and providing more effective conservation at the landscape level. The result of this evaluation will feed into the design of phase 2.</p>
<p>4. Project Implementation It is very unlikely that a multi-sectoral body as suggested in the proposal could effectively execute the project. The process appears extremely bureaucratized involving five different bodies to be created by the project. It appears that this would hamper rather than enhance project implementation. Under given institutional constraints it appears doubtful that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment will be able to efficiently execute the project.</p>	<p>Again there seems to be some confusion. The project will not create five different committees or bodies for project implementation. There will be a Steering Committee and an Executive Secretariat, a project director and his or her administrative support staff -all needed for any project of this magnitude. The Technical Committee is <i>ad hoc</i> and would only be convened on specific instances when the technical input required is not available in the Executive Secretariat. As one of the underlying barriers for implementing the new SNAP is the high number of institutional constituents, it was considered imperative to have representations from these in the Executive Secretariat. By meeting to review the projects workplans and progress not only will the project ownership be increased in each institution but also a cost effective way of internalising lessons learnt during the course of the project will be achieved. At the operational level the implementation will fall under the responsibility of the project director. Finally the implementing arrangements have been based on previous successful in-country approaches for implementation of a wide range of UNDP projects including GEF funded ones. These have proved to be effective within the contextual background of the country and as such will be maintained in the present project as an application of best practices. Annual evaluations of the project will include implementation arrangements and in the event of any unexpected problems with these, revisions could be made as considered necessary.</p>
<p>5. Demonstration Projects. Numerous challenging activities and sub-programs are proposed in para 44 without sufficient technical detail on how to tackle the formidable tasks. ... it will be impossible to gauge any results of the introduction and implementation of proposed management strategies.. particularly as detailed work programs for these activities will be the result of management plans that first have to be elaborated in a participatory manner</p>	<p>As explained in item 2 (b) the demonstration projects will not be the result of the management plans, rather the results of the demonstrations will be used to fine-tune management plans in subsequent phases of the project once results have been evaluated. The location of each demonstration project was based on a detailed evaluation of the relative importance of the threats in each protected areas This is outlined in Annex G which was not apparently available to the Council Members, as it is an optional annex. Whilst the location and general approach of each demonstration is already defined, the scope and technical details will be finalized during the first few months of project implementation (see page 11 of section 1 of the Prodoc- Project Inception Workshop and Report) and detailed in the first annual workplan.</p>

<p>6. Tourism Development The proposed tourism development plans are very ambitious without giving sufficient consideration to the market. A market analysis and a demand study appear appropriate prior to commencing the ambitious capacity and infrastructure development program. It may prove not to be as easy to attract visitors as it appears.</p>	<p>The FFEM will carry out in its project component addressing market analysis and tourist product commercialization and presented in a separate document. The FFEM will support the creation of the corporate identity of each park and for the whole system designing and implementing a strategy for dissemination and marketing. In addition, interpretive infrastructures and public use facilities will be strengthened. In this moment there is an unsatisfied demand of a proper tourist use of some PAs since all of them are very well known as World Heritage Sites, and/or Ramsar Sites and/or core areas of Biosphere Reserves. However, there is not a proper eco-tourism product and infrastructure development.</p>
<p>7. Sustainability of the project. Although the proposal suggests that two of the selected areas are expected to reach financial self-sufficiency at the end of the three-year project cycle, the arguments that this can be achieved are not convincing. It also remains unclear how sustainable all other project outputs will be.</p>	<p>The GoC has committed to cover the recurrent costs of the improvements in the four protected areas targeted by the phase 1. In addition Activity 1.11 will evaluate additional potential mechanisms and sources for self-sustained funding of SNAP and define the legal requirements for their implementation and adoption providing further inputs to sustainability. In the case of Viñales and Guanahacabibes the FFEM will support the creation of sound and sustainable tourist use which is expected to guarantee an income generation to support the sustainability of the project in these areas, replicable to the others</p>