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ENVIRONMENT

Capitalisation of Experiences of the Swiss Support to Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) in Bulgaria

Markus Giger (CDE)

Dimitrina Boteva, Svetlana Aladjem (EcoLogic Consultancy Ltd)

Heino Meessen (CDE)

Nikola Yordanov

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Editing: Dimka Stantchev (CDE)

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Cover foto: Mountain view near Pirin National Park (Bulgaria). Photo by Markus Giger

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List of acronyms

ABIB	Association of Owners of Rare Indigenous Breeds
BBF	Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation
BD	Biodiversity
BGN	Bulgarian Lev (national currency)
BSBCP	Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme
BSFP	Bulgarian-Swiss Forestry Programme
CapEx	Capitalisation of Experiences
CapEx team	Capitalisation of Experiences team
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EF	Emergency Fund
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geo Information Systems
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MFFP	Multi-Functional Forest Planning
MoAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MoEW	Ministry of Environment and Water
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NFB	National Forestry Board
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NTEF	National Trust Eco-Fund
OA	Organic Agriculture
PA	Protected Area
RIB	Rare Indigenous Breeds
RIBP	Rare Indigenous Breeds Project
SAPARD	EU Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
SCO	Swiss Cooperation Office
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SECO	Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SMNR	Sustainable Management of Natural Resources
SOAP	Support to Organic Agriculture Partnership
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Abstract

Following the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, Bulgaria has undergone dramatic political, economic and social transformations. The transition process of the past two decades was characterized by several reforms to support democratisation of the political system and the functioning of a free-market economy. Since 1992, Switzerland has been active in Bulgaria providing assistance to the transition process, with support to Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) starting in 1995. The SMNR Capitalisation of Experiences (CapEx) took place between March and September 2007, in the context of SDC phasing out its programmes in Bulgaria by the end of 2007 due to the country's accession to the European Union. The CapEx exercise has culminated in the identification of 17 lessons learned.

In the view of the CapEx team, many of these lessons are relevant for countries that are in the process of joining the EU, facing similar democratisation challenges as Bulgaria. Overall, the Swiss SMNR projects have been effective entry points to support areas that are crucial to democratic transitions, namely participation in public goods management, decentralisation, human capacity development in research and management, and preparation for EU membership. The specificity of the Swiss support stems from an approach that combines a long-term commitment with a clear thematic focus (forestry, biodiversity conservation and organic agriculture). The multistakeholder approach and diversification of support between local, regional and national levels are also important elements that contributed to make a difference in relation to other donors supporting the Bulgarian transition.

At the institutional level, there are a number of challenges where the contribution of SMNR activities was only modest, namely improving the legal framework and creating more transparency and accountability, both of which are time and resource-consuming processes. In addition, the emergence of competent and sustainable non-government organisations (NGOs) is a complex process that requires support to membership based organisations, a challenge that was hardly met in the case of SMNR. Finally, reform of government institutions involved in management of natural resources is difficult to achieve via project support only, as it requires leverage and commitment at the level of policy dialogue. At the programme management level, the CapEx team notes that corruption was not systematically addressed in SMNR projects, indicating that more attention should be given to this issue at the outset of any new project.

Summary

Since 1990, Bulgaria has undergone dramatic changes from a communist regime and centrally planned economy to its EU accession in 2007. The so-called transition, originally thought to be a fast process, proved to be much more complex and challenging than what most observers anticipated. In reality, during this period Bulgaria experienced a profound economic crisis and fundamental political and institutional changes.

The initial Swiss assistance in Bulgaria consisted of a number of scattered technical assistance projects, where direct Swiss involvement was coupled with a programme of financial aid. In 1996, this approach evolved towards a more coherent programme, with Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) as one of the priority domains of intervention¹.

The Capitalisation of Experiences (CapEx) of the Swiss Support to SMNR in Bulgaria was undertaken by a team of external consultants upon request of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The purpose of this exercise was to capitalise on the experiences made during the thirteen years of Swiss transition assistance in the SMNR domain in Bulgaria. It focussed on five projects in the fields of forestry, biodiversity conservation and organic agriculture. All the projects under review, except for one, were launched between 1994 and 1997.

As SDC is phasing out all of its programmes in Bulgaria by the end of 2007, due to the country's EU accession, the CapEx team expects the lessons learned to be relevant for programmes planned and/or implemented by SDC in countries undergoing similar EU pre-accession or transition processes (e.g. Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia).

The main target audience of the CapEx are SDC and its partner organisations in Bulgaria and Switzerland. The methodology is based on desk studies, formulation of initial hypotheses², interviews with SMNR projects' partners, stakeholders, beneficiaries and independent observers, as well as two capitalisation workshops with project partners in Bulgaria and Switzerland.

In the course of the CapEx, a total of 17 lessons learned were formulated, discussed and validated in the context of two stakeholders' workshops. Some lessons learned are specific to the SMNR sector, but many are also relevant for other domains of cooperation.

Main lessons learned specific to the SMNR domain:

Citizen participation: In the transition context, SMNR proved to be an effective tool to support the process of democratisation because it deepened people's participation in governance (decision-making and management) of public goods. Several key outputs of the projects were instrumental in effectively increasing the participation of non-state actors in management of natural resources. Through these projects, room for public discussion has been created and social learning processes have been initiated.

On the challenging side, success in influencing the government is limited by the fact that the majority of civil society organisations and coalitions do not have a strong membership base. In addition, bringing government and civil society together is difficult and time-consuming. Yet, there has been successful involvement of non-government organisations (NGOs) in the deliberation of laws and by-laws of specific SMNR legislation (organic agriculture, biodiversity conservation and, to a certain extent, forestry), which demonstrates that this type of support can deliver expected results

¹Note that the Swiss support was originally not managed by SDC, but through the Bureau for Cooperation with Eastern Europe.

² See Annex 7 for the list of working hypotheses.

Role of international frameworks: International conventions, agreements and standards, as well as the EU framework policies, proved to be important entry points to support the development of national policy frameworks and legislation. Against this background it has been effective to invest efforts in the development of tools (e.g. management plans for protected territories) for which the legislative basis exists, as well as to contribute to the establishment of new legislation (namely organic agriculture and forestry).

Local (municipal) and regional planning: Working at the municipal level has contributed to support the decentralisation process - a key challenge of the transition. Selected municipalities and communities gained awareness of, and in some cases used, best Swiss practices of multi-functional forest planning and protected area management, including citizen participation for local and regional planning processes. However, coherent planning at these levels needs to be reinforced. Thus, SMNR experiences can be of high value in the near future. At the national and regional (oblast) levels, stakeholders are not yet prepared for such integrated planning approaches and apply mostly clustered sector planning patterns.

Potential within the EU framework: SMNR approaches and tools present a considerable potential for Bulgarian state and non-state bodies to effectively work with EU structural and cohesion instruments in the next 2-3 years. Among these are the LEADER programme, the NATURA 2000 Strategy (incl. LIFE+) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (in particular AXIS II)³.

Potential to influence programmes in other countries: SMNR experiences gained in Bulgaria present a good potential to influence programmes in countries undergoing similar processes of transition and EU accession, especially in the Balkans.

Main lessons learned relevant to domains besides SMNR :

Multistakeholder approach: Working with a broad and diversified circle of local partners (state and non-state actors) is an effective way to maximize and secure sustainability of project impact (not all the projects have followed this approach, notably the forestry project which focused on state partners). Not all organisations created during the lifetime of a project may survive, but where a broad circle of partners exists, prospects of sustainability are best. This approach enables to link technical and field-level experiences with institutional and legal framework development.

“Bulgarisation” (the process of handing over responsibilities in project management from Swiss to local constituencies): Bulgarisation has been successful, however it does not happen by itself. It took place when it was planned properly, when decisions were taken, clearly communicated and followed-up by the donor. The donor has a very important role in piloting this process. The CapEx team also notes that in some cases it was best when some level of influence or control was retained by the donor, as not all Bulgarian institutions are fully transparent and accountable.

Cultural differences: Cultural differences were underestimated, at least in the beginning of the cooperation, probably because Bulgaria was regarded as a European country and the Swiss considered it to be close in terms of cultural specificities. Yet, experience has shown that cross-cultural orientation is required at the outset of collaboration work.

Corruption: SDC has trained SCO staff on the issue of corruption. However Swiss intermediaries and projects managers could also benefit from such training, in order to raise awareness and support the development of management instruments to deal with corruption practices at the local and higher levels. Competencies to deal with corruption should be built up at the early stage of project implementation.

³ See p. 42 for details on EU framework programmes.

Policy dialogue is crucial for project/programme impact and should be included in all future bilateral projects. In order to make it effective, SDC and the Swiss implementing partners should provide special attention to the design and process of policy dialogue.

CapEx team observations on institutional development and sustainability:

SMNR projects have contributed to reform the legal framework, which will help to sustain and multiply the project results. Hence, SMNR projects were not isolated islands but part of a broader institutional dynamic. Contributions to the institutional development of a number of state and non-state actors have been made. These actors will continue to support the development of the SMNR domain.

The topics that were identified ten years ago (or even longer) are still relevant today. SDC's support to SMNR in Bulgaria focussed successfully not on short-term objectives, but on longer-term goals that are still of high importance today, in the new EU context. Considering the very rapid changes Bulgaria has undergone, this is remarkable.

The formulation of lessons learned has enabled the CapEx team to identify a number of shortcomings at the project level:

- In the forestry project, the results at the level of the legal framework have so far not materialised, and the overall level of citizen participation, transparency, accountability and dissemination of benefits throughout the sector is still very low.
- In the case of the pollution monitoring project, despite high investments, the results of the monitoring programme are far less significant than what was planned. The original partner of the project proved to be poorly selected and the project had to be transferred to another institution.
- In the case of organic farming, the first phase was focused on the wrong target group and did not have the right institutional partners.

Finally, the CapEx team also identifies the following shortcomings at the more general level regarding SDC's SMNR approach:

- SDC did not manage to build up significant synergies between the projects in the SMNR domain.⁴
- The potential to create an added value for the future by bringing together the legacy of the projects could have been supported with more emphasis by SDC. The need to contribute to the EU accession was not incorporated in all the projects in a consequent manner⁵, which would have helped to orient activities toward this important perspective.

Overall, the CapEx team concludes that the SMNR projects contributed to Bulgaria's transition objectives. The lessons learned discussed in the report shed light on a number of contributions, such as the enhancement of citizen participation, upgrading human capacity, the introduction and application of internationally recognised tools and instruments, the support to the development of the regulative framework and Bulgaria's accession to the EU.

⁴ Although there exist some synergies between SMNR domain and the support to citizen participation through the forum process, another area of intervention of the Swiss programme.

⁵ Notably not in the case of the forestry project

1. Introduction

Bulgaria is a country well endowed with natural resources. Forests cover about one third of the country and a rich biodiversity exists. Strictly protected areas cover about 5 % of the country⁶, and a wide range of valuable ecosystems also exist outside these areas.

Rural areas represent an important source of income for the Bulgarian population. In 2003, predominately and intermediate rural areas generated about 70% of the Bulgarian GDP and contributed to nearly 80% of the employment in Bulgaria⁷. In 2004, the Agriculture sector still accounted for 10.8 % of Gross Value Added and was employing 24.5% of the population⁸.

Like many other Eastern European countries, Bulgaria faces important environmental pollution and destruction of natural resources, which constitute a threat to human well-being and sustainable development prospects.

Sustainable use of natural resources has been one of SDC's four lines of cooperation in Bulgaria, with biodiversity, soils and water as priority areas of action. Additional areas of SDC's interventions are: agricultural production and environment, protection from pollution, energy efficiency, mountain ecosystems and desertification.

Switzerland has been among the most active bilateral donors in the SMNR domain in Bulgaria with an annual package exceeding CHF 1 million. This position has been reinforced by the withdrawal of most bilateral donors formerly present in Bulgaria.

In January 2007, Bulgaria became an EU member and Switzerland launched the phasing-out of its transition cooperation programme in Bulgaria, to be completed by December 2007. Sustainable management of natural resources and its economic dimensions are among the strategic priorities of the Swiss contribution to the EU cohesion. In this view, the Bulgarian experiences in agriculture, forestry and biodiversity are important sources of information and institutional knowledge to be captured by the CapEx of the Swiss Support to SMNR in Bulgaria.

1.1 Objectives of the Capitalisation of Experiences

According to the TOR, the **purpose** of the CapEx is the following:

“The present mandate is intended to contribute to the process of the capitalisation of experiences acquired during 10 years of Swiss transition assistance in the domain of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) in Bulgaria. Central aims of the mandate are to provide information in the form of lessons learned to SDC employees working in the field of SMNR and to develop suggestions for future perspectives for Bulgarian partner organisations”.

The **overall objective** of the mandate is to extract and communicate lessons learned based on the assessment of the existing project portfolio in the SMNR domain. The mandate is designed as an end of commitment capitalisation exercise based on the review of key project documents and the minutes of the project steering committees, and as a synthesis and critical review of self-assessments by key stakeholders within the projects, SDC (including the cooperation office) and its partner institutions in Switzerland and Bulgaria.

⁶ This includes 2 World Heritage Sites, 17 biosphere reserves, and 10 Ramsar locations (Republic of Bulgaria, 2006: NATIONAL STRATEGY PLAN FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT (2007 –2013).

⁷ Republic of Bulgaria, 2006, p.4.

⁸ Republic of Bulgaria, 2006., p.4

The TOR make a clear distinction between this Capitalisation of Experiences exercise and that of an evaluation process:

“It is underlined that this current assignment is not designed to *evaluate*, in the proper sense of the word, the individual projects under consideration, but to critically assess the 10 years experience of Swiss transition assistance in the Bulgarian SMNR sector in order to distil lessons learned and best practices for other SDC projects’ in this field.”

In addition to the present exercise, two SMNR projects have undertaken their own capitalisation processes⁹.

1.2 Target audience

The CapEx has two main target audiences (i) SDC and (ii) its partner organisations in Bulgaria and Switzerland. Some findings will also be disseminated to a wider audience in the form of a leaflet or other visual support (brochure, etc.).

1.3 Methodology

The CapEx methodology is based on initial screening of documents, elaboration of hypotheses and a questionnaire, conducting interviews in Bulgaria (31) and Switzerland (16) with project partners, beneficiaries as well as relevant stakeholders who were not direct project partners (Bulgarian journalists, exponents from National Trust Eco-Fund, UNDP and USAID staff).¹⁰ Two half-day workshops with key project partners in Sofia and Berne have taken place to give room to self-assessment of key local actors directly involved in project implementation and combine hearings on preliminary results with discussions on matters of high interest. Four case studies are included in the final report.

The working hypotheses, elaborated by SDC and the CapEx team, deal with six topics:

- i) Citizens’ involvement
- ii) Development of partner organisations
- iii) Human capital and the contribution of Swiss and international expertise
- iv) Relevance of instruments and approaches developed
- v) Planning, management and steering
- vi) Transition context and EU accession

For each topic, one or more hypotheses were formulated to help structure the interviews and the discussions at the stakeholders’ workshops¹¹.

1.4 The concept of lesson learned

A “lesson learned” refers to some knowledge or understanding acquired by experiences. These experiences can reflect successes or failures. They should be significant, valid and applicable.¹² Lessons learned include decisions and processes that can be used in the future to increase the chances of a project’s success and diminish risks of failure

⁹ The BSFP project has produced a substantial documentation of the activities and results of the project and BBF capitalisation project on biodiversity was in course at the time of formulating the CapEx report.

¹⁰ See Annex 4 for list of interlocutors

¹¹ See appendix 7 for the full list of hypotheses.

¹² Based on material from Thomas Cowles at:

<http://www.dtic.mil/ndia/2004cmmi/CMMIT2Tue/LessonsLearnedtc3.pdf>

1.5 The concept of transition¹³

The early transition objectives in the years that directly followed the fall of the communist system were based on a rather formal understanding of liberalisation and were related to processes of democratisation, market economy and support to alignment with the international legal frameworks and conventions. As more experience was gained in the field of “transition”, the concept evolved to embrace a larger agenda which included an institutionalisation of the reform in the political and economic spheres.

Transition as it is broadly understood nowadays refers to the development of sustainable institutions which are supported by the political, economic and social conditions of a country. Transition also refers to the capacity of institutions to reform and innovate continuously.

The following assumptions were commonly held at the beginning of the Bulgarian-Swiss cooperation by many actors directly involved, but also by a wide range of other donors and actors in countries undergoing similar processes¹⁴:

- Transition was held to be a process that would last for a relatively short period of time and be a matter of a few years only. This assumption proved to be wrong in the Bulgarian context and explains to some extent the lack of clear timeframes and long-term planning which were prevalent in the early phases.
- The infusion of funds plus some support coupled with scientific and technical expertise were seen as the major ingredients needed for transition assistance. Transition was envisaged to be a process very different from development cooperation¹⁵. This explains why, compared with other areas where Switzerland is involved in development work, different and (less stringent methodologies in planning) were initially applied.
- The level of education prevalent in Bulgaria was believed to be a good one, an assumption which held true. However, the capacity to apply multi-disciplinary approaches, as well as the management capacities and inter-institutional communication skills of Bulgarian actors/partners were overestimated.
- In order to strengthen civil society as a counterweight to the dominant power of the state, the creation of NGOs and strengthening their role were regarded as priorities. Enhanced participation in decision-making and management processes were key objectives. In this view, the state would not need direct support to allow for a more pluralistic society to emerge and to support the decentralisation process. Thus, it was initially not foreseen that the state could actually be weakened to the point that it may nearly collapse. These assumptions were held by many and have influenced the original set-up of the biodiversity and organic farming projects.¹⁶
- Citizen involvement was an important objective of the Swiss cooperation in Bulgaria. In the earlier years of cooperation, SDC financed a community development programme, which evolved towards support to municipalities and the promotion of democratic discussion platforms at the local level. The SDC country Programme 2001-2006 for Bulgaria (PPP) extended the concept of citizen

¹³ This definition is based on: Botschaft zum Bundesgesetz über die Zusammenarbeit mit den Staaten Osteuropas vom 31. März 2004 p.9. (Message to the Parliament).

¹⁴ This section is based on results of interviews with SDC staff at HQ and from the experiences of the CapEx Bulgarian team members.

¹⁵ It is worth reminding that SDC changed its name to include development AND cooperation instead of development cooperation (in 95/96). In German: from „Direktion für Entwicklungszusammenarbeit und Humanitäre Hilfe (DEH)“ zu „DEZA (Direktion für Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit)“

¹⁶ Yet, it must be noted that in the case of forestry the state was the main partner throughout the project lifetime. Therefore, this assumption was not an assumption held unanimously in the donors' community.

- participation to all of SDC's sectors of activities and declared it a cross-cutting objective for all its undertakings.¹⁷
- Cultural distance was not seen as a very significant barrier to successful cooperation, Bulgaria being a European country. However, given that differences between neighbouring countries can be quite important (Switzerland and Italy, for instance), the gap can be even larger with a country that is located at an intersection of cultures and emerging from an experience of communism and central planning.

1.6 Projects included in the Capitalisation of Experiences¹⁸

Most of the projects in the SMNR domain originated in the mid-nineties and are currently in their 4th or 5th phase. In line with the planned withdrawal of the Swiss cooperation from Bulgaria and Romania, all programmes and projects in these countries have to be phased out by the end of 2007. The following 5 projects are subject to this exercise:

1. Bulgarian - Swiss Forestry Programme (BSFP)
2. Monitoring of Trans-boundary Air Pollution Affecting the Forests
3. Rare Indigenous Breeds Project (RIBP)
4. Support to Organic Agriculture Partnership (SOAP)
5. Bulgarian - Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme (BSBCP), which transformed itself into "Pro-Biodiversity Partnerships: Nature Beyond Conservation" – support to Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF) project¹⁹

Two additional projects in the SMNR domain - but implemented by SECO - are mentioned in this exercise, as they contribute to the "lessons learned". However it must be noted that these projects have not been systematically reviewed and were not part of the list of projects in the TOR:

- National Trust EcoFund (NTEF), a facility created with the objective to manage funds provided under debt-for-nature and debt-for-environment swaps
- BalkanBiocert, a national inspection and certification body for organic agriculture.

17 SDC, 2003: Bulgaria. Co-operation Approaches and Strategy in the domain of Citizens and Democracy. Concept paper. Roland Python. Deputy Country Director SDC Sofia. http://162.23.39.120/dezaweb/ressources/resource_en_24165.doc

¹⁸ See Annex 3 for a description of SMNR projects.

¹⁹ The project and BBF are heirs of the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme (BSBCP).

2. Swiss support to Bulgaria in SMNR (1992 – 2007)²⁰

Switzerland has supported the transition process in Bulgaria since 1992 in accordance with the 23rd of September 1991 “Message” and the additional 1st of July 1992 “Message” on the continuation of enhanced co-operation with Eastern Europe and the countries of the CIS. From the outset, the Swiss programme included technical co-operation measures implemented by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) as well as measures involving financial co-operation and the promotion of trade and investment implemented by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

Support to the transition process in Eastern Europe has received special attention since 1994, with even more emphasis on South-Eastern Europe with the introduction of the third “Frame Credit” in 1998. In addition to accompanying the transition process, Swiss Co-operation focused on the stabilisation of the region and the prevention of regional conflicts. After 1994, Bulgaria became a priority country for the Swiss Co-operation in Central and Eastern Europe.

In 2005, due to legal requirements prohibiting the use of development/transition aid monies for EU member countries, SDC had to announce the phasing-out of its programme in Bulgaria by the end of 2007. Therefore, SDC focused its activities in 2006 and 2007 on securing the sustainability of partner organisations and projects’ results, as well as on the capitalisation of experiences gained during more than ten years of transition assistance in Bulgaria.

2.1 Evolution of the technical co-operation provided by SDC²¹

Between 1992 and 1995, there was no global vision of the technical assistance programme in Bulgaria, as most of the projects were initiated by Swiss non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The projects did not constitute a coherent programme but were designed to meet specific needs identified by the Swiss operators on the basis of the above mentioned assumptions.

Initially, the Swiss cooperation with Bulgaria was handled by the Swiss embassy and there was no Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO) in place until 1996. Projects were not managed by SDC, but by the Bureau for Cooperation with Eastern Europe, which was endowed with relatively few staff members.

Since 1996, a number of significant changes have taken place:

- Technical assistance was refocused to include coherent programmes with specific areas of actions. New projects were designed to meet demands identified with, and by, local partners (as opposed to being unilateral initiatives of Swiss organisations).
- The administration of most of the projects has been handed over to the local partners. The role of Swiss experts is increasingly limited to specific support to enable the partners to gain skills and handle projects on their own.
- The projects are seen as part of a medium and long-term transformation process.

Since 1997, cooperation activities have been coordinated locally by the SCO. SDC/SECO priorities for the period 2001 - 2006 are described in the Country Programme (PPP) for Bulgaria, where SMNR is identified as one of four priority areas of development assistance.

²⁰ The description of SDC country programme is extracted from the Country Programme Bulgaria 2001 – 2006 (SDC/SECO) and the TOR.

²¹ This definition is based on: Botschaft zum Bundesgesetz über die Zusammenarbeit mit den Staaten Osteuropas vom 31. März 2004 p.9. (Message to the Parliament).

Within the SMNR area, Swiss Cooperation focused on:

- Biodiversity and nature conservation
- Organic agriculture
- Multifunctional and close-to-nature forest management
- Environmental infrastructure (SECO)

In 2001 the objectives of SDC-SECO in Bulgaria were formulated as follows:

<u>Aim of the programme:</u>	<i>Swiss Co-operation shall help to create in Bulgaria the conditions to provide the citizens with a decent standard of living, to open up individual and collective prospects for the future and to ensure that Bulgaria has the respect of its neighbors and the international community</i>
<u>Cross-sectoral objective:</u>	<i>Promoting participatory decision-making processes through the creation of new dialogue platforms</i>
<u>Objective in the area of sustainable management of the natural resources</u>	<i>Promoting responsible and sustainable use of natural resources</i>

The specific strategy of the Swiss cooperation in the field of environment was the following:

“As one of the main donors in the field of the environment, Switzerland participates in most of the activities in this sector.

Priority should be given to projects with a measurable and visible impact.

- Political dialogue can be established in several sub-sectors (renewable energy sources, water management, nature conservation, etc.) with the government and the donor community. It is very important in this field to maintain relationships with the authorities (both national and local).
- The Swiss cooperation places emphasis on projects that ensure more effective and sustainable use of natural resources. These projects must be beneficial to nature conservation while improving the living conditions of the population”.

2.2 SMNR in the Bulgarian context (1989 – 2007)

After 1989, Bulgaria's economy contracted as a result of the dissolution of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), to which the Bulgarian economy had been closely tied. Real GDP fell by approximately 40% between 1989 and 1997 and regained pre-1990 levels only in June 2004. The standard of living of the population underwent a corresponding strong decline and a slow recovery in the same periods.

In 1992, Bulgaria became a member of the Council of Europe (its 28th member) and started the first round of negotiations for EU membership. The socialist one-party government (namely the unreformed former Communist party) tried to reintroduce the state economy, pumping money in ineffective state-owned sectors.

In 1996, a major financial crisis hit the country as a result of the hyperinflation. The medium monthly salary at the time amounted to around \$80.

Agriculture: Mass privatization was introduced in 1994 and 1995 (but not implemented). The process of land restitution, which had been launched in 1991, slowed down after 1995 as the socialist government was in power.

Following the de-collectivisation and privatisation of the huge agro-industrial complexes that had previously dominated the Bulgarian agriculture, thousands of small-scale private farmers reappeared. This resulted in a situation where many small inherited plots of land became vacant, as credits or subsidies for farmers were nearly inexistent.

Forestry: In 1997, the Act for the restitution of ownership in forests and forest lands was adopted. Until that time, forests had been state-owned, and their management was heavily centralised, non-transparent and led by forestry governmental institutions operating in a closed fashion. Forests were regarded merely as economic resources and the other functions they provided (especially biodiversity conservation) were neglected.

From 1997 onwards, a process of reorganisation was undertaken in the forestry sector, which included restitution of the forests to their owners as well as privatisation of wood extraction and wood processing businesses in the sector. The Forests Act was adopted in 1997, regulating the ownership, management, regeneration and use and conservation of forests in Bulgaria.

Ineffective control coupled with high dependence on the central government (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry through the National Forestry Board) led to the creation of a well-functioning system of corruption and to neglect forest management (as supported by data indicating a huge amount of illegal logging).

Biodiversity : Between 1991 and 1996, a relatively responsive Ministry of Environment and pro-active National Nature Protection Service, as well as a set of enthusiastic and technically competent NGOs existed in the field of biodiversity. Bulgaria was a signatory of a couple of biodiversity conventions, but was not implementing them.

During this period, several achievements were realised in the natural resources conservation subsector in terms of development of the legislation. In 1998, the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy was adopted and in 1999, it was followed by the approval of the National Biological Diversity Conservation Plan.

The Protected Areas Act adopted in 1998 provides the legislative basis for categories of protected areas, their purpose, regimes of protection and conservation, designation procedures, and regulates their management.

The management of protected areas is divided between institutions in Bulgaria such as the MoEW and the MoAF. This makes the coordination of actions and overall management of the field difficult.

Since 1997, Bulgaria has been on the path to recovery, with GDP growing at 4 to 5 % per year. By 2001, the macroeconomic situation became more stable, though incomes remained low. Strong regional disparities were prevalent and the vulnerability of unprivileged segments of the population was increasing. The high unemployment level was not significantly decreasing, although different programmes of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for vocational training were being implemented. The bulk of the unemployment was due to the restructuring of the economy and the closing down or “downsizing” of big industrial enterprises.

Some pensioners or workers who were made redundant went back to their villages to establish self-sustained (subsistence) farms and get involved in vegetable and fruit production. The local livelihoods of many mountainous and semi-mountainous regions were almost entirely dependant on the region’s natural resources - wood harvesting, wood

processing, large-scale collection of non-timber natural resources, and, to some degree, on agriculture. Livestock farming and mountain pasturing supplemented these patterns of resource use. Between 1997 and 2001, delivery of, and access to, social services did not improve.

In 2002, the Biodiversity Act was adopted, regulating the activities of the state, municipalities, legal and physical persons on the conservation and sustainable use of the biodiversity in Bulgaria. The Biodiversity Act aimed at harmonizing the Bulgarian legislation with that of the EU, and introduced the requirements of Birds and Habitats Directives and the Natura 2000 network development in Bulgaria.

In 2004, 73% of the total agricultural land was already private, 22% was municipal and 5% was state-owned. Land restitution created a significant fragmentation of land ownership in Bulgaria. The average size of the agricultural plots is 0.6 ha. The fragmentation of land ownership is a significant barrier to long-term investments in agriculture, land improvements and efficient use of agricultural machinery.

In 2006, the announced amendments in the forestry legislation still had to be treated by the parliament and the National Forestry Board was under pressure of explaining irregularities in the land property exchanges that were reported in the national press. Furthermore, forest land property in remote areas has often been the object of official exchange for very valuable land for construction at the black sea side or other lucrative mountainous regions.

In 2007, Bulgaria is a member of NATO (since 2004) and the EU (since 1 January 2007). Macroeconomic performance is good: debt to GDP ratio is already less than 30%, and the budget deficit is well contained thanks to strict policies. The average Bulgarian incomes are about 1/3 of the EU average. GDP growth is stable, and unemployment is down to under 7,5%. At least one million Bulgarians work abroad. Corruption remains high and strong regional disparities still persist. The pace of reforms has slowed down, and decentralisation is not being implemented. The justice sector has not yet been reformed and has a bad reputation. Political mobilisation is overall weak: civil society is active in advocating certain causes, but lacks a broad public support in order to influence decisions of the government. The media are not independent enough and they lack professionalism. There were significant delays in the delivery of the Natura 2000 sites list, and the ruling coalition kneeled under the pressure of businesses, small land owners and municipalities to leave some valuable sites outside the list. The major part of all forests in Bulgaria is still state-owned with 78.1% of the total forested area, whereas non-state-owned forests account for 21.9%. Due to the ongoing restitution of former state-owned forests, the share of non-state-owned forests will increase.

3. Presentation of the main “Lessons learned”

3.1 Citizen participation

Support to citizen participation was an objective of the 2001-2006 SDC Bulgarian Country Programme, together with the promotion of participatory decision-making through the creation of dialogue platforms as a cross-sector objective.

Accordingly, the CapEx and the SCO teams have jointly formulated two working hypotheses, which are part of the ToR:

Hypothesis 3.1.1

SDC’s strategic approach in promoting debates and platforms of shared decision-making has contributed to the democratisation of natural resource management in Bulgaria.

Hypothesis 3.1.2

The abovementioned approach has fostered the creation of networks and coalitions contributing to the development of a vibrant civil society.

Lesson learned 1

Citizen participation in natural resource management:

In a transition context, SMNR proves to be an effective tool to support the democratisation process, because it increases participation in the management of public goods. Civil society’s increasing participation in natural resource management is linked to various Swiss funded projects activities and outputs that contribute (directly or indirectly) to create room for public discussions and social learning process.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.1.1

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 1:

✓ The following projects activities and outputs have contributed, at various levels and with various degrees, to support citizen participation in SMNR:

- **Planning instruments:**

Multi-Functional Forest Planning has proved to be an effective approach and tool to increase state and non-state actors’ participation at local and regional levels: the process of formulating a joint plan has contributed to increase transparency of the planning and decision-making procedures. This also fostered a certain level of accountability and public control regarding forest management²².

It must be noted that there are also some voices (press articles, personal statements by Swiss and Bulgarian NGOs staff members, etc.) which indicate that economic interests may in practice prevail over the implementation of such plans. At the end of the day, sharing the benefits of forestry is a very sensitive issue that remains difficult to address. There is no evidence indicating that illegal logging could so far be effectively reduced²³.

²²By mid-2007, 16 municipalities had developed such plans, and there were some indications that more municipalities were interested in following such a methodology.

²³Income and expenditures from forestry are not accounted in a transparent way: the annual reporting for 2004 gives only aggregated figures on income from forestry operations, but no detailed profit and

Management plans that are developed for major national and nature parks, as well as a number of smaller protected areas, represent instruments which specifically aim at including stakeholders in the management of protected areas.

- The CapEx team draws the attention of the reader on the fact that this type of achievement is being threatened by the existence of rival economic interests for the exploitation of these areas, namely in the field of economic development and tourism. The Swiss support in Bulgaria has nevertheless contributed to develop some management plans at a time when economic pressures appeared to be weaker than what could be observed at the time of writing this report.
- **Projects:**
SMNR projects have contributed to stakeholders involvement in reforming the legal framework and by-laws²⁴:

For **SOAP and BSBCP/BBF**, a range of actors linked to the projects (such as NGOs, Universities and consultancies) have been invited by the Ministries involved (MoAF, Ministry of Environment and Waters) to contribute to the reform process of the legal framework. These reforms have been adopted by the Parliament (Protected Areas Act, 1998; Biodiversity Act, 2002; Law on organic Agriculture, 2007).

In the case of **BSFP and RIB**, contribution to the reform of the legal framework has mostly taken place at the technical level, via the provision of some projects experts²⁵.

- **Organisations:**

The formation of specific organisations or associations has in some cases supported the voicing of concerns from marginalised groups:

Marginal mountain farmers have for instance gained self-confidence in expressing a voice in the public sphere as a result of the creation of the association of owners of rare indigenous breeds (ABIB).

The **organic farmers' organisations**, which have been established with SDC support, have actively contributed to the development of the national legislation, mostly with respect to organic farming issues.

Concluding remarks by the CapEx team on Lesson learned 1:

- Overall, the **quality of the participation process** described above is regarded as good, both by the project partners and by independent observers. In some cases marginalised people have also been included, most notably in the cases of rare indigenous breeds and organic agriculture projects.
- In the **forestry sector**, some Swiss NGOs' voices have suggested that more attention could have been devoted to the inclusion of ethnic minority groups (an important part of the labour force in this sector) and women (whose contribution to collecting secondary forest products, like berries and mushrooms, is deemed

loss statements are provided. Illegal logging takes place on a large scale, and environmentalists attribute this to corruption and a lack of institutional capacity (WWF, 2005: illegal logging in Bulgaria.p.4).

²⁴ It must be noted that the reform process of the Bulgarian legal framework had not been finalised as of mid-2007.

²⁵ In this context, it can be spelt out that the project of forest air pollution monitoring was exclusively technical and scientific in nature. It therefore never aimed at being used as a contribution to the legal framework reform.

important). Yet, in spite of its focus on local population participation, the forestry project has not paid particular attention to these issues.

- The **emphasis put on participatory approaches** can be regarded as one of the **specificities of the Swiss contribution** in the Bulgarian context, where Swiss partners were among the first ones to enter the SMNR sector with a strong willingness to involve the relevant stakeholders.
- From a more critical perspective, the **Swiss approach has sometimes been regarded as “slow”**, referring to the amount of time necessary to build a programme based on extended stakeholder participation. This approach contrasts with other donors practices whose focus is on short-term results, rather than on the quality of the process and sustainability.²⁶
- **Democratisation and citizen participation:** the use of instruments and approaches (e.g. NGOs’ participation, multi-functional forestry and management plans, etc.) has contributed to implement citizen participation as a cross-cutting theme and democratisation as an objective of the country programme, even though these themes were not necessarily understood as explicit objectives to be pursued by the SMNR projects. Thus for example in the forestry project, “democratisation” was never mentioned as an objective in the project documents, but many activities have contributed to support the democratisation process.²⁷

Lesson learned 2

Support to NGOs and government accountability:

Support to NGOs that are not membership based is of limited relevance as far as civil society development is concerned because only strong membership based organisations or coalitions have the potential to hold the government accountable or directly influence political decision-making.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.1.2

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 2:

- ✓ In the case of **biodiversity conservation and organic agriculture**, the Swiss support has focused on NGOs creation and strengthening, rather than engaging in reinforcing the few already existing, membership based organisations (nature conservationists, farmers, organised mountaineers, family hotel owners, etc.)²⁸.
- ✓ NGOs in the above mentioned sectors function in reality as **consultancies with technical or management expertise**. These and other NGOs in Bulgaria are often endowed with thematic expertise in biodiversity or agriculture, as well as certain capacity in advocacy

²⁶ This does not imply that the Swiss projects were planned less well, or did not have clear objectives and expected results, spelt out in annual plans.

²⁷ It must be noted that “democratisation” has been at certain times regarded as a very sensitive issue that could not be tackled within the National Forestry Board.

²⁸ The existing large membership organisations – unions of professionals (engineers, architects, etc.), individual tourists, drivers, etc. – still carry the legacy of a centralised socialist society and do not play a broader and active role in public life. Existing groups of SMNR users, land owners and tourism service providers are still relatively small and not interested in public debates beyond their immediate interests. They are also often afraid of confronting the authorities.

- ✓ However, these NGOs are **not able to hold the government accountable**, largely because they cannot mobilise or represent large communities of interest. Thus, unless large groups of Bulgarian citizens are ready to take action in order to protect the biodiversity or equitable forest management, the conservation of natural resources will continue to depend solely on external pressures such as the EU, WWF, IUCN, etc.
- ✓ This argument can be illustrated by the example of **Natura 2000**. In the case of Natura 2000, the biodiversity conservation community (NGOs, academics, business, etc.) has failed to use effectively its own resources to launch a public awareness campaign to explain the benefits of Natura 2000 network. In addition, the biodiversity conservation community has been waiting on the MoEW to fulfil its duties and conduct the campaign for too long. As a result, due to pressure from various interest groups, significant gaps currently exist in the Natura 2000 sites proposal that has been submitted by the Bulgarian government to the EU²⁹. This raises serious concerns regarding the sustainability of some results achieved in the context of Swiss supported initiatives (e.g. Strandja Nature Park³⁰).
- ✓ Another factor stressing the importance of supporting the development of organisations that have the potential to hold the Bulgarian government accountable has to do with the **overall political climate in the field of biodiversity conservation** under the last Government's mandate: after a period of 7-8 years of steady progress with an increase in public awareness and the involvement of the local communities in the field of SMNR, there are strong voices denouncing the lack of commitment by the current Bulgarian Government³¹. Therefore, the biodiversity community poses the lack of citizen involvement and short-comings in the democratisation process as a serious source of concern for SMNR.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 2:

- In view of the evidence presented above, it can be argued that SDC has reached only **limited success in creating strong networks** to hold the government accountable.
- Therefore, as part of its effort in supporting strong and effective citizen participation, the Swiss cooperation programme should aim at **involving broad and indigenous based membership organisations**. These could be land or forestry owners, natural resources users or beneficiaries of SMNR (farmers, tourism organisations, organised tourist associations, etc.).
- However, it must be noted that one can put as **debatable the question of support to membership based organisations** by a governmental agency such as SDC: to what extent can a donor agency support specific interests groups or associations? Although it is beyond the scope of this work to address this issue in details, it is

²⁹ A letter from the European Commission's Environment Directorate General (DG) to Minister Chakurov dated 25 May 2007 addresses this concern.

³⁰ Strandja Nature Park is a good illustration of a case in which local business interests are trying to use the legal loopholes which have been created by the delayed adoption of Natura 2000 Network to change the status of the protected territories. Strandja Nature Park is probably not a unique case of this kind of practice.

³¹ The conservation community is deeply disappointed by the behavior of Minister Chakurov (MoEW) and his political cabinet as they are ignoring the requirements of the EU on NATURA 2000. They seem to have turned their backs on the achievements of the sector. The MoEW has not made enough efforts to respond to the society's right of access to information in the last few years. It has been implementing a restrictive approach to the dissemination of information and has set up such heavy rules in the whole structure of the Ministry to the point that government employees have given up talking to media.

noteworthy to highlight it as relevant regarding any support process that involves holding government accountable.

Lesson learned 3

Thematic focus and civil society support:

Thematic issues such as SMNR and nature conservation are good entry points to support civil society's strengthening: this approach enables civil society coalitions to develop their work around common issues of interest, making them more effective.

Cf. hypothesis 3.1.2

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 3:

- ✓ In the field of NGOs strengthening, the **Swiss contribution can be regarded as specific** in the sense that it has coupled NGOs' capacity building with a specific thematic focus. In this way, NGOs have been "learning by doing", which is a very effective way of building capacity for advocacy.

This approach contrasts with that of others donors whose support to NGOs has taken the form of "general" capacity building, including advocacy, without necessarily having in mind what exactly would be advocated by NGOs.

- ✓ A **thematic focus** has also contributed to improve communication, work relationships and networks among the Bulgarian actors involved in SMNR or biodiversity at various levels (government, local authorities, academic and education institutions, NGOs and local communities).³²

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 3:

- **Attribution:** It is clear that improvements in Bulgarian networking and communication cannot be attributed to the Swiss support only. The assessment of the exact extent to which the Swiss supported projects have enhanced civil society development and networking is a challenging task which is beyond the scope of this work.
- **Room to extend and deepen networking and coalitions:** In spite of some important achievements there is still room to deepen and expand the collaboration and networking among the various relevant actors in the SMNR field. This is particularly the case in the forestry sector where networks or coalitions of civil society organisations which systematically deal with forestry issues are practically inexistent³³.

³² For instance between the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, Bioselena, Balkan Biocert and MoA; between the Environmental Executive Agency and the National Forestry Board, Central Balkan Park Directorate and Institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

³³ Indeed, WWF Bulgaria has in its portfolio a separate component working only on forestry issues, but it is a unique example, and no real coalition with other actors has been developed so far.

3.2 Development of local partner organisations

Development of local partner organisations is an important objective of SDC in Bulgaria. The promotion of participatory decision-making processes through the creation of dialogue platforms is a cross-sector objective of the 2001-2006 Bulgarian Country Programme.

Accordingly, the following **working hypotheses** have been formulated by the CapEx team:

Hypothesis 3.2.1

The early transfer of responsibilities and “Bulgarisation”³⁴ of the project management have contributed to integrate the SMNR projects into local processes and promoted project sustainability.

Hypothesis 3.2.2

SMNR projects have successfully strengthened Bulgarian counterparts and contributed to guarantee the continuation of key activities after phasing-out of the Swiss support.

Hypothesis 3.2.3

Counterpart organisations are in the position to play important roles in the EU context. However, the sustainability of key activities following the project phasing-out, as well as the direct counterparts themselves, still depend substantially on external financing (EU and/or other international sources).

Lesson learned 4

“Bulgarisation” - the process of handing over responsibilities in management and project conduct from Swiss to local constituencies:

Bulgarisation is regarded mostly as a positive phenomenon contributing to sustainability. However, it only takes place provided it has been properly planned, clearly communicated and supported by the donor agency.

Cf. .Hypothesis 3.2.1

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 4:

- ✓ Although there is a certain diversity in the Bulgarisation of SMNR projects, overall, **Bulgarisation has only occurred in cases where SDC has played a strong leadership role in the process.** In the cases that have been reviewed by the CapEx team, neither the Swiss intermediaries, nor the Bulgarian partners have been playing a leading role in the process. In the case of Bulgarian partners, although some may have wished for Bulgarisation to happen, they have not built the necessary competencies and organisational structure early enough.
- ✓ In the case of **BBF**, Bulgarisation occurred on-time, whereas in the case of **OA and RIBP**, Bulgarisation has taken longer to happen. However, in none of these cases has Bulgarisation incurred any significant delays or problems in reporting and management.

³⁴ The term is used by the SCO and its Bulgarian partners alike. The CapEx team understands it as “the process of handing over responsibilities in management and project conduct from Swiss to local constituencies”.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 4:

- The CapEx team notes that there are some **critical voices coming from Bulgarian partners** who point at the possible drawbacks of Bulgarisation. In this view, it is regarded as a positive matter when “a full Bulgarisation” has not taken place. This scenario is well illustrated by the National Trust Eco-Fund: the fact that the Swiss donor has maintained a steady presence in the steering of the fund is regarded as positive as it never allowed any Bulgarian officials to affect the independent and transparent functioning of the Fund.
- On the **potential negative effects of Bulgarisation**, the case is illustrated by the example of the Central Balkan National Park region, where Bulgarisation has resulted in a decline in information sharing between the projects implementers and beneficiaries. In this case, even the “good Swiss influence” did not succeed in making them form working partnerships.
- Overall, “Bulgarisation” - when it happened - has contributed to **develop local partners’ capacities**, which in turn increased their chances of surviving once the project support phased out (e.g. BBF, Bioselena, ABIB).

The CapEx team concludes that, when requested by SDC, “Bulgarisation” has happened in a relatively quick and straightforward fashion, and to a great extent successfully³⁵.

Lesson learned 5

Multistakeholder approach and sustainability of project impact:

In the case of SMNR, a multistakeholder approach that includes a broad and diverse circle of local partners (state institutions and civil society organisations) proves to be a good way to secure a project steady implementation and sustainability of impact.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.2.2

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 5:

- ✓ A **multistakeholder approach** implies that relevant state institutions or civil society organisations **contribute to, and benefit from, a project even though** the MoU (or any other agreement) has been signed by another state institution.
- ✓ In the case of SMNR, having many partners involved in project implementation has meant that if any organisation or institution decided to change its mission, staff or operational plans and to leave the project’s implementation, other stakeholder would still remain “on board” to pursue the project implementation. Overall, this approach has contributed to **secure the sustainability of the project impact**.
- ✓ A good illustration of this approach is the **Partnership for Organic Agriculture**, in which several partners (Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Agricultural University in Plovdiv, NGOs experienced in extension services and a farmers cooperative) have been working under a common agreement. In this case, even when two of these partners ceased to contribute to the project implementation (one failed and another left the

³⁵ See Case Study 3 for more details.

Partnership - and simultaneously two new partner organisations joined), the momentum could nevertheless be maintained.³⁶

✓ **Other examples of partner diversity illustrate the importance of finding a right mix between support provided to government and civil society :**

The CapEx team notes that insights into a number of projects show that the right mix between support to civil society and government has, at times, been difficult to find.

The biodiversity project has gone into a crisis in its second phase, partly because government institutions were feeling at a disadvantage in comparison with NGOs regarding project support and under too much pressure.

The organic farming project has been built up with few initial links with the government structures, which reduced its relevance in the first two phases.

The forestry project did not have any civil society component throughout the whole project duration. This strong government focus has excluded the work with other relevant stakeholder such as professional associations or environmental groups.³⁷

✓ **Regarding support to the forestry sector**, an open question is whether the strong state actors (NFB, Forestry University) have effectively been developed through the project. BSFP had an important capacity development component. Most of the know-how gained will go back and will remain in these institutions. Most of the stakeholders believed that there is a critical mass of professionals trained and motivated who will continue to work on MFFP as part of their career in their institutions³⁸. However, the forest institutions are also commonly believed to be very conservative, closely linked to the old, ex-communist networks and resistant to change. Within the life-time of the project, the political leadership changed several times, which included important shifts in the approach taken regarding the future of the forestry sector in Bulgaria, especially with regard to the importance of multi-functional and near-to-nature forestry. The extent to which the expertise brought in by the Swiss will really be able to exert its influence within the state structures remains an open question³⁹.

✓ **An open question is whether a private NGO or foundation could in the future have its place in the forestry sector.** With a different project set-up, based on a multistakeholder approach, it may have been possible to create and develop independent organisations active in forestry. For instance, there may have been scope to develop a certification agency working in the forestry sector (similar to Balkan Biocert), even though the legal framework is poor.

³⁶ It must be noted that this Partnership has been characterised by a number of frictions and competition among partners, which has not facilitated the project implementation.

³⁷ It can be noted that, although the creation of an NGO named “Sylvica Foundation” happened, it was only created with the intention to facilitate the management of the project (transferring money, hiring of staff) and not as a “real” NGO. The Foundation, created by Intercooperation, originally for the purpose of easing project implementation, was closed in early 2007. The project partners came to the conclusion that there was no viable future for this organisation. Thus, in the case of forestry, there will be no legacy of an independent organisation created by the project.

³⁸ The capitalisation team could not thoroughly assess this issue; a detailed study of all the people trained in the project and their current functions within and outside the MoAF would be necessary.

³⁹ A rather negative indication is the MoAF annual report 2005, which does not mention MFFP (work on which started in 2004), or any other type of innovative inputs by the BSFP. For instance, only three type of forest cutting (renewable, clear-cutting and sanitary) are mentioned, which does not reflect the inputs provided by the ETH in the first phases of the project (MoAF, 2005; Dürr, 2007, pers. Comm.). There is also only very cursory mentioning of the Swiss project, as opposed to projects of other donors. On the other hand, Prof. Schütz, going back to Bulgaria in 2007 on behalf of a European Forestry NGO, a few years after having last visited the country, was very positively impressed by the changes he observed in the rhetoric and discourse of NFB officials. These improvements could be related to the concepts and know-how brought in by the BSFP (Schütz, 2007, pers.Comm.).

- ✓ **Regarding the sustainability of project impact**, experience has shown that strong state institutions, including universities, constitute important repositories and multipliers of know-how. In this vein, **one of the strengths of the Forestry and Organic farming projects stem from their collaboration with universities**. By contrast, in the **biodiversity sector**, the links with universities have not been institutionalised and proved to be weak.
- ✓ Linked to the question of sustainability of project impact is of course the question of **sustainability of SMNR organisations in Bulgaria**:

The CapEx Team notes that **out of seven NGOs which have received Swiss support, only a limited number appear to have good chances of survival in the medium-term** (on the basis of an internal assessment). Furthermore, the question of sustainability of an organisation is not directly related to “Bulgarisation”. It is rather a matter of finding sustainable sources of funds, which is independent of the Swiss participation in management.

The table below presents the findings of the CapEx team assessment.

Overview of sustainability prospects of Swiss supported organisations in Bulgaria:

Organisation	Comment	Prospects for sustainability ⁴⁰
• BBF	• Funded with support from SDC	• Moderate to good
• ABIB	• Funded with support from SDC	• Good
• Bioselena	• Funded with support from SDC	• Moderate
• Biobulgaria	• Funded with support from SDC	• Failed
• Sylvica	• Funded with support from SDC	• Closed down (was instrumental for project implementation, not designed to become sustainable)
• Ecofarm	• Supported by SDC	• Relatively good
• University Plovdiv	• Support for capacity building	• Stable institution
• National Forestry Board	• Support for capacity building	• Stable institution
• Forest University and Forest Professional Schools	• Capacity building	• Stable institutions
• National and Nature Parks Directorates (Central Balkan, Pirin, Strandja)	• Support for capacity building, management plans development	• Stable institutions • Strandja: note that its status as a nature park is currently under threat
• Balkan Biocert	• Funded with support from SECO (not part of this CapEx)	• Very good
• National Trust Eco-Fund	• Funded with support from SDC (not part of CapEx)	• Planned phase out by the end of 2007

⁴⁰ Based on the CapEx team assessment.

- ✓ Overall, it is clear that **more NGO networks and coalitions exist in 2007 than 12 years ago**. At times Switzerland has supported this movement with different means (support to www.bluelink.net, and others). OA and BD have also explicitly supported networking and partnerships between NGOs. However, the main contribution of Switzerland is probably its support to the **professional development of a large number of Bulgarian experts**, who now contribute, because trained staff is available, to give credibility and know-how to a number of organisations.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 5:

- The CapEx team notes that the **prospects of project impact sustainability** are greater in cases where a wide range of partners exists.
- In addition, a multistakeholder approach that includes a mix of partners at various levels gives the opportunity to **link the experiences gathered at the technical and field levels with the development of governing institutions and legal frameworks at a more central level**.
- It is clear that there is **no guarantee regarding the continuation of activities** (and impact sustainability) once the Swiss support is phased out. If activities are implemented by NGOs, they are dependent on the successful access to funding sources, and if they are implemented by state institutions, they are subject to institutional and political risks, as well as resistance to institutional changes.
- In addition, **two fundamental constraints regarding a multistakeholder approach** must be raised. The first one has to do with the **availability of partners**, in particular NGOs. Indeed, in the early 90s there were only very few local NGOs with a positive track record of more than 2 or 3 years of existence. A number of issues linked to organisational growth (clear definition of missions and strategies, internal organisation, fundraising and outreaching capacities) have in some cases prevented Bulgarian NGOs from being reliable and effective partners. The second one has to do with **high political turn-over**: project implementation has been overall slowed down by government institutional reforms which were coupled with important ministerial and political changes in the past 18 years⁴¹.

⁴¹ Thus, since 1989 there has been no less than eleven governments: 1. Lukanov 1 - 1989 (December); 2. Lukanov 2 - 1990 (June or July); 3. Popov - 1990 (end of the year); 4. Dimitrov - 1991 (July); 5. Berov 1992/3; 6. Indzhova (caretaker) 1994; 7. Videnov – 1995; 8. Sofijanski 1997 (caretaker) February; 9. Kostov - 1997 (July); 10. Sax-Koburggota – 2001 (July); 11. Stanishev – 2005 (September).

Lesson learned 6

Exit strategy:

A clear exit strategy is crucial and must be planned at an early stage so that the project teams can develop fund-raising and project management capacities to become sustainable.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.2.2

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 6:

- ✓ In the case of **BBF**, phasing out of the Swiss support has been clearly signalled during the last phase of the project, which led to positive results. This contrasts with other cases where phasing out has not been signalled early enough or has not received enough attention (in the case of OA project).
- ✓ A **clear timeframe including an exit strategy has been missing for all the projects**. However, there is no consensus amongst the consulted stakeholders regarding the optimal duration of donor support.
- ✓ It is clear that the **achievement of tangible impact** when introducing models of sustainable use of natural resources requires a long-term commitment by a wide range of stakeholders.
- ✓ However, there are **diverging views on the merits of the Swiss long-term involvement**: most people interviewed believed that this long-term commitment has made the contribution more relevant and distinguished it from that of other donors (“the longer you stay, the more impact you have”). However, many stakeholders and project leaders are also of the opinion that the lack of a clear project lifetime has refrained the project managers from thinking about the “after-project” period and on ways to ensure the sustainability of project impact. In some cases, it seems that a clear timeframe and exit strategy would have been beneficial and could have speeded up the process of fostering partners sustainability. In addition, more clarity on the results to be achieved in each phase could have kept up the motivation of the actors involved.
- ✓ A conclusion that can be drawn from the various experiences is that **in cases where such a timeframe exist, it must be handled in a flexible manner**. Indeed, the context in the Bulgarian transition changed very rapidly and assessing the project progress at the beginning of the implementation was therefore very difficult.
- ✓ **SDC has often handled timeframes in a flexible way**, adjusting and making additional investment in order to secure positive outcomes when necessary. Such practices were positively assessed by many stakeholders.
- ✓ It must be noted that even with a well-planned exit strategy, the **financial sustainability** of an organisation operating in a market with only restricted funding opportunities remains difficult to achieve.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 6:

- A **clear exit strategy is important** and should be communicated early enough so as to enable partners to be motivated to secure alternative funds and become independent from the Swiss support.

- It is however not possible to indicate a **general timeframe for such an exit strategy**, as it depends on the characteristics of specific cases.
- In order to contribute to the **successful phasing out and sustainability of a project**, the CapEx team recommends the following (being aware that it can often be difficult to achieve!): i) donors contribution in the last phase of a project should carefully balance support and delegation of responsibilities to local partners ii) each partner should be working towards jointly negotiated objectives, and not just to fulfil the donors requirements (i.e. implementing the action plan) to access funds iii) in order to be “real partners”, local organisations should mobilise their own resources to achieve the jointly negotiated objectives and be able to face most of the challenges, including the risk of failure iv) donors should provide some funding but not its totality; they should facilitate communication among partners but not manage or control it; they should contribute to policy dialogue, but leave a lot of room for communication among stakeholders (e.g. non-state actors should in general directly communicate with state institutions).

3.3 Human capital and the contribution of national and international expertise

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the concept of support to “transition” has evolved from the early transition objectives of liberalisation of the system in the years that directly followed the fall of the communist regime towards a larger agenda which included institutionalisation of the reform in the political and economic spheres.

Human capital development can be regarded as a fundamental component of the support provided by the Swiss cooperation programmes to develop the capacity of Bulgarian institutions to reform and innovate continuously.

Accordingly, the following **working hypotheses** have been formulated by the CapEx team:

Hypothesis 3.3.1

The project has trained competent persons in the different domains of activity. These persons could valorise the acquired skills in the respective fields in their professional life or voluntary activities. Fluctuations of partners and managers created bottlenecks at certain points of time, but also contributed to a broader impact, because ideas, concepts and experiences were circulated outside of the projects direct influence.

Hypothesis 3.3.2

In the process of development of the projects instruments and approaches, the transfer of knowledge (from Switzerland and from other origins) played an important role, but local scientific and non-scientific knowledge also contributed substantially to the results.

Lesson learned 7

Human Capital development:

In a context that was previously characterised by central planning culture (with human capacity concentrated in narrow scientific disciplines and no concept of stakeholder participation), investing in human capital development represents an important contribution to the transition process: i) it broadens the field of competence in key SMNR sectors, and ii) it contributes to the sustainability of results by integrating new generations in projects development.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.3.1

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 7:

- ✓ All the SMNR projects have **invested substantially in the development of human capital**. This includes managerial, technical and professional training at different levels, formal education (PhD dissertations in the forestry project), on-the-job training and fostering exposure to other contexts and situations through exchanges, participation at international seminars, conferences and field visits.
- ✓ **Support to human capital development is generally regarded as very positive** and an important contribution to the transition, because it accelerated the exposure to new ideas and concepts: Bulgarian experts need to be exposed to European countries experiences as they come from a background of central planning which is characterised by a great lack of stakeholder participation and training is mostly based on narrow scientific disciplines.
- ✓ **Training has often taken place “on-the-job”**, and its link with practical project work can be regarded as a positive factor: the turn-over of trained staff has not been very high, and many people have taken up responsibilities by fulfilling positions within the SMNR sector.
- ✓ **Capacity development has also taken place via study tours**: A significant number of Bulgarian experts (including mayors and teachers from professional schools) have travelled to Switzerland to share experiences and be confronted to new forest management practices (such as multifunctional planning and citizen participation in planning at community level). Being exposed to new practices has enabled participants to discuss some innovatory projects practices.
- ✓ Regarding the **mainstreaming of newly acquired international knowledge into Bulgarian education institutions**, the situation varies depending on the sectors. For the **organic agriculture and forestry sectors**, part of the newly acquired knowledge has been integrated into universities and forestry schools practices. This has not been the case for **biodiversity conservation**. So far, the relevant university departments (geography, biology) have not systematically incorporated the newly gained knowledge into their curricula. Thus, there is scope for further development of such curricula and some training courses that would articulate the Bulgarian experience and knowledge with the support from international centres of competence.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 7:

- **Training, particularly for young people, can be regarded as a precondition to change the whole conservation context and contribute to sustainability.** In this vein, development of professional expertise⁴², including a better understanding of the value of real participation of non-state actors, has been regarded by many respondents as a major contribution to the transition process.

It seems that the majority of people who have been involved with the Swiss supported projects, especially young professionals, tend to stay in the thematic area and continue to work in Bulgaria, occupying various functions and responsibilities. This contrasts with the tendency of many young people to emigrate to other countries to seek work opportunities. There is in 2007 much more human capital with experience in SMNR than 15 years ago in Bulgaria, which is a great asset in the new EU context.

⁴² This includes: PhD education in forestry PhD, training on GIS (Geo Information Systems) in forestry and creation of GIS platform, organic farming on-the-job training and curriculum development on at Agricultural University Plovdiv, mobile training units for forestry workers and others.

Lesson learned 8

Continuous backstopping expertise:

Non-resident expatriate experts who have a long-term commitment with a project are more appropriate than experts with one-off short-term assignments.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.3.2

Evidence supporting Lesson learned 8:

- ✓ A number of experts have had a **long-term role as backstoppers** and made several visits per year over a long period of time. This model seems to be effective as the interviewed Bulgarian partners are generally positive about the role of Swiss experts, provided these are experts who come to Bulgaria frequently and long enough to get familiar with the context and develop personal relationships.
- ✓ Some critical opinions have been expressed by Bulgarian partners in cases where projects have been exposed with **insufficient time and on a one-off basis** to the appraisal of several experts: such examples can be found with the SOAP project, biodiversity and forestry projects.
- ✓ Critical voices have also been raised by project partners in cases where Swiss experts have **ignored or underestimated the local knowledge that already existed** in the forestry, biodiversity and organic agriculture sectors.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 8:

- Arrangements with **non-resident backstoppers who have long-term commitments** with the project seem to be the most appropriate and can be recommended. This was notably the case of **RIB**, where the arrangement with a visiting backstopper has proved to work well.
- It must be noted that the CapEx team does not have sufficient evidence to systematically compare the **effectiveness and cost-efficiency of a resident expert with a non-resident expert**⁴³. However, it can be argued that one clear advantage presented by visiting experts⁴⁴ is that a **broader range of expertise** can be tapped than would be the case with a single resident expert.

⁴³ The views of the project partners regarding this issue are conflicting: the cost effectiveness of posting a resident international expert in Sofia, as was the case in the forestry sector, was questioned. This decision can however be explained by the fact that the project was in a very difficult situation during its second phase, which required a very close follow-up.

⁴⁴ Four experts have been involved in the Biodiversity Project with regular visits, so the costs can be compared with a resident expert.

Lesson learned 9

Cross-cultural familiarisation:

Cross-cultural familiarisation to maximise synergies of knowledge and expertise should take place before project implementation is launched.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.3.2

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 9:

- ✓ Overall, **the use of Swiss expertise and the exchange of experiences** are regarded as very positive. Clearly, the Swiss expertise (which was often also “international”) has played an important role in helping Bulgaria to rapidly embark on the transition within the SMNR domain.
- ✓ However, **cultural differences** have been underestimated, in particular at the beginning of the Swiss-Bulgarian collaboration, probably because Bulgaria was regarded as a European country, with a culture relatively close to the Swiss one.
- ✓ Illustrations of **poor cross-cultural familiarisation** can be found in the case of Swiss consultants who had little knowledge about Bulgaria in general and the state of Bulgarian knowledge in particular, who were trying to teach Bulgarian professors the “ABC” of organic agriculture. This approach has clearly offended Bulgarian partners and created tensions and frustrations. In addition, as a result of the lack of knowledge of the Bulgarian context, some consultants have provided advice that was not appropriate to the local reality.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 9:

- The CapEx team notes that despite some initial obstacles in the Swiss-Bulgarian collaboration, in many cases the process of exchange developed into a fruitful one where SMNR projects have been able to build on **solid scientific and professional expertise** available in the country.
- Overall, cooperation programmes are good instruments to **bring Bulgarian and Swiss expertise together** and use it to create something innovative.
- Clearly, **familiarisation of Swiss experts with the specificities** (political, social, historical, and natural) of the country of intervention is a crucial precondition for successful collaboration. This should be coupled with good insights regarding business, negotiation and communication culture.
- **A better preparation of Bulgarian and Swiss partners** regarding the above mentioned aspects could have contributed to avoid some cultural misunderstandings and frustrations.

3.4 Relevance of SMNR instruments and approaches

One of the underlying ideas of the 2001-2006 Bulgarian Country Programme is that the know-how of Switzerland and other countries, with some adaptations in line with the specificities of the context, could be of relevance in the Bulgarian transition process.

Accordingly, the following **working hypotheses** have been formulated by the CapEx team:

Hypothesis 3.4.1

The developed instruments (protected territories management plans, multifunctional forest planning) are appropriate to the local context and adapted to Bulgarian requirements.

Hypothesis 3.4.2

Projects in the field of SMNR proved to be successful entry points to address key challenges in the transition process (democratisation, structural and social reforms, good governance and income development).

Lesson learned 10

Relevance of SMNR instruments and approaches:

SMNR instruments and approaches are generally regarded as appropriate for the transition context and its requirements, even if there are a number of areas (legislative framework, market creation, transparency) in which the Swiss approaches and instruments are not capable of fully addressing the institutional challenges in SMNR.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.4.1

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 10:

- ✓ Overall, the **instruments and approaches are assessed as “very appropriate”** by the majority of the people interviewed (SMNR projects stakeholder and observers).

This **positive assessment** refers mostly to the following instruments and approaches:

- Multi-functional forest plans (MFFP) and mobile training units for forestry workers
- Adjustment of the legal framework (for which support has been given by all projects)
- Biodiversity conservation management plans (including methods and approaches)⁴⁵
- Preservation of rare breeds (made possible through the identification and description of rare breeds and herd-books)
- Technical expertise (documented and disseminated)
- Strengthening of state and non-state institutions⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The biological and socio-economic scientific studies are important elements of the protected area management planning and forest management. Of particular importance are the preliminary studies of the traditional economic practices for natural resources use in the region and their proper reflection in the planning documents. Conservationists tend to underestimate and often forget to include the socio-economic aspects into the development process of management plans. This threatens the quality of the plans and their approval by the Government.

- Involvement of the Consultative Committees (and other similar structures for management of protected areas and forests) not only during the planning process, but also for the implementation of the plans⁴⁷.
- ✓ **On the more critical side, a few observers note some weaknesses** regarding the following approaches:
- **Organic Agriculture:** During the first phase, the "Swiss model" for OA in Bulgaria consisted of training small to medium-size farmers who barely had any familiarity with market orientation. A lot of effort has been spent teaching the "philosophy" of OA without formulating feasible plans to sell their production at a profitable price. In addition, there was hardly any demand as markets for organic products were not developed, and the legislative foundation and government support for their establishment was lacking. A last critique has to do with the intentional exclusion of bigger farmers from the project target group.
 - **Forestry:** The lack of transparency in the sector and the high level of illegal logging still prevailing indicate that the relevance of the results achieved can be doubtful. These doubts are further reinforced by the fact that the reform process of the whole sector is lagging. The value of the MFFP is therefore questioned by a number of observers, including SDC's staff.
 - The **monitoring of transboundary air pollution** affecting forests project is only partly delivering the results it was expected to⁴⁸. The costly equipment delivered by the Swiss is not fully used for its initial purpose. There was also some duplication of existing facilities.
 - **ABIB:** The role of the breeding association has never really been accepted by the State bodies, which are responsible for the breeders quality control. There is therefore a situation of competition of the breeding association with the State bodies to access funds to proceed to quality control. In turn, this could threaten the survival of the institution as much as the lack of finance provided by the State.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 10:

- **Overall, SMNR projects have contributed effectively to the overall goals of legal, institutional, societal and economic transition.** All interviewees agreed that the projects contributed to the transition objectives and confirmed that the Swiss assistance had made a considerable contribution to each of the objectives. The lessons learned discussed in this report shed light on a number of contributions, for instance the enhancement of citizen participation, capacity building, regulative framework development and EU integration.

⁴⁶ See Annex 3 for a summary of main results.

⁴⁷ The creation of Consultative Committees with representatives of different institutions and stakeholders in the process of developing management documents has helped to raise the sense of ownership of the institutions and led to a better acceptance of the plans. Business companies, forest and land owners, municipal administrations, regional forestry boards, forestry departments, regional inspectorates of environment and waters, dams and cascades directorates, road maintenance directorates, professional forestry high schools, NGOs were involved in the working groups formed for the development of forests' management plans. The Consultative Committees can work successfully if they are gathered around a particular agenda. There should be a clear reason to gather and move forward. Motivation is enhanced when results are quickly achieved by the Committees working together.

⁴⁸ Note that there exist some contradictory views on this issue between Swiss and Bulgarian partners.

- **Additionally the CapEx team developed a list of more specific objectives for each area** (biodiversity protection, forestry management and organic agriculture). The purpose was to translate the overall transition objectives (based on the early definition of transition)⁴⁹ into more specific objectives to which the stakeholders can relate.

The table below shows the ratings, based on the results of the CapEx team analysis.

List of specific transition objectives as used in the CapEx:

	Contribution - 1=low, - 2=medium - 3=high	Examples of contributions by project and comments
Biodiversity: transition objectives		
- Identification of valuable assets according world standards	2-3	- Identification of 11 new protected sites - Natura 2000 - Green Belt
- Effective participatory management (management plans)	2-3	- Pirin, Stranja, and others (11 in total) - Action Plans for preservation of species (11)
- Harmonisation of Bulgarian laws with international standards	2	- Support to Bulgaria's National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and specific laws such as the Biodiversity Act
Organic agriculture: transition objectives		
- "Modernisation" (technical expertise)	2-3	- Organic farming in academic curriculum - Extension service
- Promotion of market-oriented agriculture	1-2	- Focus on subsistence (except 3 rd phase)
- Establishment of a diverse network of specialist organisations	2	- Last phase focused on partnership
- Development of a supportive regulatory framework	3	- Bylaws of SAPPARD - Ordonnance on OA
Forestry: transition objectives		
- "Modernisation" (technical expertise)	2-3	- PhD dissertations - Trainings, exchanges, seminars
- Supportive regulatory framework	1-2	- Limited progress, lack of transparency
- Dealing with market influences	1-2	- Issue of state forest enterprise not resolved
- Involvement of stakeholders	2	- MFFP
- Equitable distribution of benefits	1-2	- Unchecked illegal logging

Explanatory note: The list of specific objectives was exposed to the relevant stakeholders. After validating it, experts were asked to state if the Swiss assistance contributed to the achievement of these objectives. They confirmed the Swiss contribution, and the majority gave medium to high grades (moderate to important contribution of Swiss assistance to the specific transition objectives). This assessment is confirmed by the CapEx team overall rating, based on a qualitative analysis of interviews and documents.

⁴⁹ See the chapter on transition in the Introduction.

- Although there are mixed views regarding the relevance of Swiss instruments and approaches in SMNR, it must be noted that the **Swiss have been the first ones to introduce a multidisciplinary approach** in the natural resource management sector in Bulgaria: in the case of **biodiversity and forestry projects**, teams of specialists of the relevant natural and social fields have been working together, which enabled the comparison and integration of various viewpoints.
- The **profile of the Swiss assistance in Bulgaria** has been raised by the use of universally recognised instruments, long-term commitment and a flexible approach. Thus even if the Swiss contribution is smaller than the one of large donors such as USAID and UNDP, it can be recognised as “**making a difference**” as a pioneer in SMNR approaches and by identifying niches (protected areas management plans, husbandry for rare indigenous breeds and multi-functional forest planning)⁵⁰.

Lesson learned 11

Development of management tools in line with the national and international legal frameworks:

The process of developing relevant management tools (e.g. management plans for conservation) is greatly facilitated when they are in line with the existing legal framework and guidelines. National legislation and implementation processes are in turn facilitated when there is support from the international frameworks of conventions, agreements and SMNR standards, as well as the existence of EU instruments.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.4.1

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 11:

- ✓ **BSBCP, OA and RIBP** have greatly benefited from the **international legal framework** provided by conventions and agreements.
- ✓ At the technical level, these projects have in turn contributed to the **formulation of legal frameworks**. Such processes have been facilitated by the fact that Bulgaria had signed international agreements (such as the Biodiversity Convention, Ramsar Convention etc.).
- ✓ The **Swiss contribution is of greater relevance** when projects (such as BD and OA projects) are well integrated within international standards and contribute to supporting them.
- ✓ The **application of management tools** in line with international frameworks has been crucial to the success of the SMNR projects as they have provided clear guidelines (e.g. how a management plan should look like) and expectations (there should be a law to regulate the use of management plans).
- ✓ **Flexibility** in the application of these management tools has been another important factor in successful project implementation (e.g. the size of protected areas in Bulgaria could be different/smaller than the ones in USA or Sweden).

⁵⁰ Altogether USAID and UNDP have invested more in protected areas management plans than SDC. UNDP and WB also had multi-million dollar projects in forestry. Yet, the Swiss assistance has a distinct mark and a very good legacy in Bulgarian SMNR. This appreciation has been confirmed not only by project stakeholders, but also by independent observers (interlocutors from USAID, researchers and Bulgarian journalists).

- ✓ It must be noted that in general the SMNR projects have **not supported the development of brand new tools**, but knowledge and skills for the application of existing tools have been transferred from Switzerland and other places to Bulgaria. Thus, even if some tools are new for Bulgaria, they are not new on a global scale.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 11:

- In addition to developing management tools at the project level, the Swiss support has in some cases contributed indirectly to **develop legislation at the national level**.
- Hence, in the case of **the organic farming sector**, in addition to contributing to the acceptance of the organic farming project by the Government (as a result of the good relationships between the MoAF and SDC since 1995), the Swiss support has greatly contributed to the formulation of strategic documents (such as legislation, National OA Plan 2007-13, Measure 1.3 under SAPARD and the National Agri-environment Programme (NAEP)).⁵¹
- In the **forestry sector**, there is no similar convention as the one prevailing in the organic farming sector and the impact of the EU adhesion is very limited. Indeed, the Rural Development Fund from the EU is not going to have a great impact on the Bulgarian Forestry sector because it can only be applied to private forest owners, which includes only a marginal portion of all Bulgarian forests.⁵²
- **A potential alternative to better manage the forestry sector** is based on an initiative applied in the USA and other countries, which has been publicised in the Bulgarian media. This initiative consists of establishing “Forestry Real Estate Investment Trusts”, which are registered at the stock exchange and open for public scrutiny and accountability. Unfortunately, in view of the lack of political will to reform the forestry sector, it seems that this is merely an interesting idea in the Bulgarian context.
- To conclude, the CapEx team considers that it is as a **positive fact when Swiss supported projects happen to be linked to international standards and frameworks**, especially the EU. Projects experiences gained at the field level can therefore be linked to processes at the political level, which increases their relevance and prospects for multiplication and sustainability.

⁵¹ It can be noted that the new law on OA and the specialised institutions developed with the Swiss support are important results that are of great relevance in the new EU context, as important funds will be made available for agri-environmental measures, including OA.

⁵² Oral communication from Andras Demeter, DG Environment, Brussels on 29.7. 2007

Lesson learned 12

Relevance of SMNR instruments and tools to support the decentralisation process:

SMNR instruments and tools can contribute to support the decentralisation process at the municipal level as they can effectively be combined with local and regional planning.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.4.2

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 12:

- ✓ **Selected municipalities have applied innovative approaches of MFFP and protected area management**, including community participation in local and regional planning.
- ✓ There is a great need to monitor closely such achievements and support their successful implementation. There is also a need for **more integrative planning at the municipal level in other locations**, and the experiences gained in the selected municipalities can be of great value in the near future⁵³.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 12:

- **Municipalities start to be active in regional planning**, using the best practices of MFFP and PA management. This approach contrasts with governmental planning at the national and oblast-/regional levels where institutions are not prepared for an integrated planning approach.
- Indeed, at the **national and regional (oblast) levels**, many actors are not ready for such integrated planning approaches, and they mostly apply sectoral planning frameworks.
- **Regarding the EU integration**, many municipalities will in the future become users of many of the SMNR concepts and tools that were developed with the Swiss support (e.g. MFFP, PA management plans, integrated planning on the municipality and oblast levels).

⁵³MIG: Bulgarian acronym for “local initiative groups” (“mestny iniciativny gruppy” in Bulgarian) and EU LEADER instruments are initiatives that give the possibility for participatory approaches in municipal development planning.

3.5 Planning, management and steering

Planning, management and steering are crucial components of the assistance programme to a country. They include a range of tools and approaches that can be applied at various levels (from project management to policy dialogue). Their appropriate application is a crucial factor for projects and programmes success.

Hypothesis 3.5.1

The tools applied by the projects (planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation) were appropriate to assess their relevance, impacts and sustainability. The planning tools applied were appropriate to maintain the strategic orientation over time.

Lesson learned 13

Policy dialogue:

Policy dialogue is crucial for project/ programme impact and should be included in all future bilateral projects. In order to make it effective, SDC and the Swiss implementing partners must pay special attention to the design and process of policy-dialogue.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.5.1

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 13:

- ✓ There is general agreement on the fact that a **change of policy framework was not only crucial for the projects achievements, but also Bulgaria's preparedness for EU membership.**
- ✓ The **Swiss contribution to policy dialogue was considered crucial**, especially in OA/RIB and forestry, but also to a great extent in biodiversity.
- ✓ **Responsibilities for policy dialogue in most projects were not clear** at the outset of the projects implementation, but significantly improved in the last phase (except for BSFP and RIBP).
- ✓ The CapEx team draws the attention of the reader on the fact that there are **different views on how policy dialogue should be organised:**

A view held by many (including the SCO) is that the SCO (together with the Embassy) should address policy issues regarding the overall implementation of the SMNR domain at a high government-to-government level. Although SMNR project implementers should contribute to prepare the facts and the questions to be addressed, they should not participate in such a high level dialogue. Preferably, this should be done once or twice a year, with the Minister, and possibly together with other donors.

An alternative view is that the project implementers should directly take part in policy dialogue. However they should have a mandate to do so and possess the relevant competences and know-how and be accepted by the high-level counterparts. It has been argued that the ETH professors in the early stage of BSFP did have access to this level of dialogue.

A third view is that the role of the SCO should not be overestimated. It should keep good relations with the relevant officials. However, emphasis should also be put on promoting

local professional expertise and lobbying networks who could overtime take over a role in influencing government decisions. In this view, activities at different levels with different stakeholders could be an effective way to contribute to expected policy changes.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 13:

- **In order to be effective, policy dialogue should include** high level decision-makers, technical experts, responsible institutions and grass-root beneficiaries and stakeholders.
- **All parties involved should have a certain capacity** (e.g. experience in preparation of positions, negotiation skills, planning experience, etc.) and at least a minimum interest in the outcomes of the dialogue.
- **The role of the policy dialogue, however, should not be overstated.** Not all problems can be addressed through policy dialogue. If the problem lies with one of the key partners in the dialogue (political appointees who are not interested in changing the status quo) then little can be done either by SCO/Swiss partners or local stakeholders. In the case of BSFP, the CapEx team concludes that even a clearer responsibility for policy dialogue might not have led to better results. It would just have avoided some of the bitterness among parties involved.
- **There is no universally good way to organise and conduct policy dialogue.** Depending on the project and the various expected outcomes, interests and capacities involved, SDC/SCO, Swiss implementing partners and local implementing partners should discuss what is the most appropriate way to conduct policy dialogue.

Lesson learned 14

Outcome mapping:

The outcome mapping method should not be presented as something completely new and completely different from other methods (such as logical framework approach and impact monitoring).

Cf. Hypothesis 3.5.1

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 14:

✓ Since 1997, most projects have followed a planning approach based on the logical framework. **Impact monitoring systems** have not been applied in any of the projects.

✓ In 2004, “**Outcome Mapping**” has been introduced as an alternative in the SOAP and as a relatively new method. Experiences with this instrument have not convinced most project partners and SCO staff, even though a respondent from the University of Plovdiv sees it as an interesting tool. The main explanatory factors seem to be:

- i) **Outcome mapping was presented as something completely new**, different from the logical framework approach with its focus on problem trees. This approach has confused partner organisations that had just been familiarised with, and trained to use the logical framework.

- ii) **Lack of follow-up:** One workshop is not enough to establish such a planning methodology. More support in the implementation of this method would have been needed to optimise results.
- iii) Outcome mapping has been presented as something totally **different from impact monitoring** – although modified impact monitoring concepts were already available at that time⁵⁴ and had been elaborated with support from SDC. These concepts also acknowledged the attribution gap, emphasised the impact chain and allowed a focus on outcomes.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 14:

- **Outcome mapping should not be presented as something completely new.** Its strength, the focus on partner organisations that are expected to continue functioning once the project is over, is recognised and valuable.
- Thus, it could be presented as a **specific focus** that can be built into existing concepts.
- It is also important to continue **make a link with the impact level** to assess what has ultimately been achieved by a project.
- A major constraint is that **SDC is in practice often not ready to allocate enough resources** to the elaboration and implementation of outcome and impact monitoring systems – in spite of the emphasis given at higher levels to the need to provide evidence about the impact of international cooperation.
- The CapEx team therefore recommends SDC to **plan for impact and outcome monitoring** from the beginning and allocate the necessary resources to successfully conduct this exercise.

Lesson learned 15

Corruption and the need to address it:

Dealing with corruption must be addressed at the early stages of project planning and implementation and capacity to deal with corruption must be built up with SDC staff as well as Swiss implementers and project managers. The objective of capacity building is to increase awareness and support the development of management instruments to better deal with corruption at the local and higher levels.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.5.1

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 15:

- ✓ A critical point in the Bulgarian SMNR domain is the issue of corruption⁵⁵. **All the projects had to deal with corruption**, but it has never been a specific topic to address in

⁵⁴ Herweg K, Steiner K, 2002. Impact monitoring and assessment. Instruments for use in rural development project with a focus on sustainable land management. Volume I: Procedure. Volume II: Tool Box. Centre for Development and Environment, Berne.

⁵⁵ Transparency International puts Bulgaria in 2006 on rank 57 out of 163 countries, four ranks behind Greece, and four before Turkey (Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2006.) As a comparison, in 1998 Bulgaria scored at rank 66 out of 85, far behind Greece (36) and Turkey (54).

project management and has rather been treated as a “side-effect” or “an element of the context”.

✓ Corruption is one field where the **Swiss organisations were not prepared** at the launch of programme implementation and therefore did not prepare their partners.

✓ There is a clear **lack of systematic application of SDC’s policy** in that matter, which should be addressed in the future.

✓ The **economic issues at stake are in some cases overwhelming** and even an important donor would have very limited leverage on the situation:

- i) It has been estimated that the **illegal logging in Bulgaria** may be worth around 90 Mio Euros a year, whereas the Swiss contribution in Forestry was around 0.5 Mio Euros a year during the second phase of programme implementation⁵⁶.
- ii) In the case of protected areas, **investments in tourist infrastructure** create heavy pressures and competition for the use of these resources, which is often related to corrupt practices.⁵⁷

✓ The question was also raised by some SDC staff whether the **lack of transparency in the forestry sector and the lack of real policy dialogue** on certain issues would not have called for a suspension of the project. However, other respondents held the opinion that given the context, faster results could not have been expected and there was still enough progress made in other areas to support the project continuation.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 15:

- Swiss stakeholders have confirmed that corruption is an issue and has had **negative impacts on the projects effectiveness**. However, their impression is that the projects objectives could still be achieved, even if not as effectively as it could have been if corruption had been addressed at an early stage.
- There is a consensus among consulted Swiss stakeholders that one should be **ready to address corruption**, in the sense of building an awareness of the issue and developing some management instruments to deal with it at local and higher levels.
- The CapEx team draws the attention of the reader on the fact that **dealing with corruption can be regarded as an important component of the overall democratisation process**. This implies that the need to deal with corruption should not be regarded as a surprise, but rather considered as an inevitable factor.

⁵⁶ Legally 4.5 Mio m3 wood can be cut in Bulgaria. It is estimated that almost the the same amount is cut illegally (Source: WWF, 2005: Illegal Logging in Bulgaria). A quick back-of-the-envelope calculation shows the following result (prices are in Euro):

Price per m3	Legally harvested (m3)	Illegally harvested (m3)	Value of legal harvest	Value of illegal harvest	Inclusive illegal logging	GDP Bulgaria 2004	In % of GDP
24	4'500'000	3'700'000	108'000'000	88'800'000	196'800'000	21'400'000'000	0.9%

⁵⁷ A ski resort has been created by a private consortium at the hedge of the Pirin National Park, yet the exact terms of the concession are not publicly known. The economic issues at stakes can be measured by the over 600'000 tourist visits to the resort a year, mainly for skiing. Bansko is one of the fast growing resorts in Europe, and it has been reported that over 180 Mio Euros have been invested in three years (Source: <http://www.banskoinfo.com/news/news2.php> for 2002-2005).

3.6 Overall context, transition process and EU accession

Although EU membership was an important objective for Bulgaria, it was not specifically mentioned as a specific area of support in the 2001-2006 Bulgarian Country Programme. Yet, SMNR projects have the potential to positively contribute to Bulgarian EU accession at various levels.

Hypothesis 3.6.1

Large rural areas in mountainous or marginal areas represent an under-utilized potential for sustainable development, inside and outside protected areas. These areas will be affected by large EU programmes, where the experiences gained in Swiss projects can be valorised by the different stakeholders.

Hypothesis 3.6.2

SMNR and the experiences gained in Bulgaria present some good potential to influence programmes in other countries in the context of the cohesion fund and for countries in the process of transition.

Lesson learned 16

Relevance of SMNR approaches and tools to work within the EU framework:

SMNR approaches and tools present considerable potential for Bulgarian state and non-state actors to work effectively with certain EU instruments within the next 2-3 years regarding access to funds, formulation of the legal framework and development of research programmes. These opportunities exist even though SDC has not planned any specific strategic component for SMNR projects in view of EU accession.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.6.1

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 16:

- ✓ The majority of people interviewed agreed that **SMNR experiences could be directly valorised in the EU context.**
- ✓ One important area of valorisation of SMNR is the **adjustment of the agriculture, forestry and nature conservation legal framework in line with EU requirements.**
- ✓ At **the financial level**, the EU substantial financing in SMNR presents opportunities where the experiences gained in SMNR could be an input for nature and landscape conservations tools. . This is particularly the case of Natura 2000 and LIFE + instruments⁵⁸ targeted to NGOs.
- ✓ Overall, **knowledge of state and non-state institutions about the legal and procedural requirements of EU funds** has increased (development of the legislation and SAPARD measures). Some capacity and experience has been built up for projects development, use of participatory approaches, management of funds and reporting. These competences can be used when applying for operational programmes funds (Axis II rural development fund), Natura 2000 funds and the LEADER programme.

⁵⁸ See p. 42 for more details on EU programmes and instruments.

✓ The **experience gained during the Swiss cooperation programme presents significant potential for EU research and curricula development programmes** for many civil society actors linked to research (universities, technical schools, parc management units, BBF, Bioselena).

✓ **In the view of the CapEx team, the following EU instruments present interesting opportunities for applying the experiences gained in the Bulgarian-Swiss projects:**

Natura 2000:

- Initially established for the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna, especially wild birds conservation
- Supports the establishment and management of Natura 2000 sites under one strong legislative framework (Habitats and Birds Directives) for all EU member states.

LEADER (Liaison Entre les Actions de Développement Rural):

- Supports rural communities to formulate and implement local rural development and pilot projects
- LEADER community based projects are prepared by independent local action groups (LAGs) - in Bulgarian MIGs⁵⁹
- Should lead to integrated territorial rural development strategies
- Closely linked to AXIS 2 (see below).

AXIS 2 (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development):

- Part of the EU Rural Development Strategy 2007 - 2013
- Implemented by DG Agriculture and Rural Development
- Closely linked to LEADER
- Provides opportunities for locally based bottom-up approaches to rural development
- Funds to manage Natura 2000 and for agri-environmental measures.

LIFE+ Programmes:

- Supports the development and implementation of Community environmental policy, legislation and community based activities
- Components: Nature and Biodiversity; Environment policy and Governance; Information and Communication
- Supports NGO active in nature conservation
- BBF established contacts with DG Environment in Brussels.

Non EU-related programmes :

- UNECOOF Biosphere Reserves: supports the establishment of biosphere reserves worldwide
- PAN Parks Initiative : organises protected area twinning in CEE countries.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 16:

- Closer association with the EU accession has never been a component of the Bulgarian-Swiss programmes. It was a strategic decision taken by SDC in 2003 not to change fundamentally the approach of the Swiss contribution.⁶⁰ However, there are a lot of opportunities to link with EU programmes as a result of the competences created by SMNR projects.

⁵⁹ MIG: Bulgarian acronym for "local initiative groups" ("mestny iniciativny gruppy" in Bulgarian).

⁶⁰ SOAP and RIBP project documents make reference to the EU funds whereas the BSFP does not.

Lesson learned 17

Influence of SMNR experiences on other countries:

SMNR experiences gained in Bulgaria present a good potential to influence programmes in other countries in the context of EU harmonisation/cohesion and in countries still in process of transition.

Cf. Hypothesis 3.6.2

Arguments supporting Lesson learned 17:

✓ The following projects have already proceeded to **exchange experiences** with countries within the region:

- Balkan Biocert – expands in Macedonia
- Organic Agriculture – University has contacts with Macedonia and Romania,
- BD with Slovenia
- NTEF shared experience with other countries

✓ The CapEx team identifies **two levels at which there is potential to expand exchange of experiences at the regional level:**

- i) At the **technical level**: great scope for exchanging experiences in SMNR
- ii) At the **process-oriented level**: SMNR civil society support contain lessons which could be useful in other contexts.

✓ A number of proposals regarding **possible entry points to intensify regional exchanges** have been expressed during the “Capitalisation workshop in Berne”⁶¹:

- **Use the Swiss organisations as bridges to access international bodies:** Intensify the relationship between the existing strong Swiss organisations with experiences in SMNR and decentralisation (NGOs, academic institutions, etc.) and international bodies (e.g. pro silva, Bird Life International, IUCN), so that local Bulgarian and Eastern European organisations could use them as “bridges”.
- Swiss NGOs could **advocate issues that relate to cooperative and associative movements in Bulgaria and the region**. This may contribute to strengthen civil society based on the Swiss “Vereins and Genossenschaft” experiences.
- Themes on which there is **long-term experience within Swiss organisations are:** decentralisation, multistakeholder decision-making and sustainable (mountain) tourism development.

Concluding remarks by the Cap Ex team on Lesson learned 17:

- The CapEx team is convinced that **the SMNR experiences of Bulgaria are interesting and valuable** and should be considered in the context of cooperation with Eastern Europe and CIS. Bulgarian partners and Swiss NGOs could transfer specific Swiss concepts and tools to CIS and Central and European states and NGOs.

⁶¹ See Annex 5.

Case study 1:

The Small grants funds of the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation : small actions with large effects

In its last phase the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF) developed and implemented a few ideas of small grants mechanisms. The main goals of these mechanisms were to: help nature conservation NGOs gain skills and experience in project management; support networking between these organisations; develop BBF's capacity for managing grants, monitoring and evaluating projects. One of the foreseen roles for BBF after withdrawal of the Swiss financial support consists of a fundraising mechanism for conservation initiatives in Bulgaria. This is the reason why BBF managed three small grants schemes with different objectives and conditions between 2005 and 2007:

- 1. Local Initiatives Facility – established to support several stakeholders “joint ventures” focusing on the creation of models in the priority BBF regions. A local co-funding was required;*
- 2. Emergency Fund – established to allow BBF to take immediate action against acute threats to Bulgarian biodiversity such as illegal activities in PAs, poaching, etc.; only NGOs were eligible and the average amount of the grant was 2000 BGN, co-funding was not required;*
- 3. Students Fund – provides opportunities for students to work on thesis with experienced scientists. Maximum amount of the grant was 1000 BGN, co-funding was not required.*

Results:

Local Initiatives Fund: Sixteen projects were accomplished in the period 2005 – 2006 period, the average financial volume amounted to 108 744 BGN. More than 250 people from 3 regions (Pirin, Strandja and Dobrudja) were involved in the projects. Most significant outputs are: infrastructure for ecotourism (eco-trails, watchtowers, museums); a visitor centre “Kaliakra”; a “Guide to Strandzha”; tourism products (Rododendron Festival, Pirin Days); registration of a tour operator agency by BBF and its partners -“Greentale“. The agency is to benefit both local partners and help the financial sustainability of BBF.

The Emergency Fund (EF): Over 16 projects amounting to a total of 30 000 BGN were carried out, involving more than 100 people from all over the country. Most significant outputs are: BBF's role as an important partner and facilitator for NGOs is enhanced, attraction of the business donors' attention, who started to donate money to BBF in order to distribute it among NGOs. The EF has given BBF the role of a grant-giving organisation. Concrete examples of projects are the saving of over 1200 tortoises from sites with rapid construction activities along the Northern Black Sea coast; participation of representatives of Bulgarian NGOs in the meeting of Bern Convention in order to present problem cases (Kresna Gorge etc.) The EF gave opportunities to NGOs to alert the general public and governmental institutions of hot issues like the Irakli, Natura 2000, the cyanides problems etc. Support was given to the BSPB - Haskovo for a campaign to save the Harmanlijska River; the Green Balkans Society - Plovdiv for a forest preservation campaign; the Bulgarian Ichthyology Society for activities in Orsoya Protected Site; the Balkani Wildlife Society for a campaign “Save Irakli” and the Center for Environmental Information and Education for Protection of potential Natura 2000 sites. All projects included a lot of voluntary experts work from the NGOs, which made them extremely cost effective as they contributed to significant effects with 30 000 BGN only.

The Students Fund: 31 Diploma and Master thesis were supported, involving more than 30 people from 7 universities in the country. The total amount of the support was 17 500 BGN. Most significant outputs were the deeper involvement of the students and their university in the real conservation problems and the creation of a pool of future collaborators and partners for BBF. The Students Fund and the students' conferences have given BBF the opportunity to start filling the niche for funding universities initiatives, to link science and conservation field work, and develop contacts with young and motivated people. BBF approached the Parks Association to identify priority themes for diploma works and to create a link between the park directorates and universities. Two park administrations have already supported the students' work with logistic. The majority of the students who received support became part of the conservation community of the country and some of them work as BBF volunteers or employees as well as for other conservation NGOs.

Conclusions:

The advantage of Flexible small scale funding instruments can be summed as follows:

- Small funds allowed for the realization of small actions within limited budgets, but with large effects, particularly at the local level.
- Small grants funds provided valuable experience for BBF and project partners in handling project funds and projects management, monitoring and reporting.
- Small grants initiatives promoted visibility of partners at local level and among key target groups.

Rossen Vassilev, September 2007.

Case study 2:

Memorandum of Understanding: Necessary, But Not Enough. Benefits and Restrictions

Switzerland Development Assistance in Bulgaria is governed through the Agreement for Technical Co-operation between the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Government of the Swiss Confederation dated July 18, 1994. (ratified by Law of 23 March 1995, State Gazette No. 31/1995; enforced since 1995). This treaty provides the key principles and constitutes the basis for development projects in all priority sectors mutually agreed by both Governments. In addition, and where the project purview and design covers aspects addressing national scale issues and thus requires particular commitments from the Bulgarian Government, special project-based Memorandums of Understanding were negotiated and signed. To a great extent this was the process followed in almost all projects in the SMNR domain (with the exception of SOAP) where the scope of cooperation, including project document, financing and project steering were part of the overall planning process of each particular project phase. The main purpose of projects MOU is to secure the commitment of both parties and provide legal grounds for the functioning of the project in the recipient country.

Key element of the MOU is the constitution and conduct of Steering Committee sessions (SC). SC are a consultative mechanisms for discussing and agreeing, in a formal manner through signed minutes, on key aspects concerning project implementation – progress, achievements, financing, reporting, open issues etc.

On the Swiss side SC sessions were considered as important stocktaking events addressing issues relevant to project impact (goals) and effectiveness (are we doing the right things) rather than on project monitoring and efficiency (are we doing the things right). Dynamics and modalities in handling MOUs increased substantially with the establishment of SCO and the gradual decentralisation of SDC projects steering.

Historical Review of MOU in SMNR domain by projects

BSBCP/BBF – agreement for settling the program was signed with MOEW at the very beginning in 1994. Project MOU replaced the agreement during the third phase of the programme. MOU was discontinued after the 4th phase of the project due to a lack of commitment of the MOEW and cumbersome administrative procedures.

BSFP - agreement for settling the programme was signed with the then forest authorities back in 1994. MOU governing BSFP implementation after 2001 was negotiated and signed in 2001. The system was maintained until the very end of the project providing sound formal grounds for the execution of the project activities. Steering process between Swiss and Bulgarian representatives was often hampered by formal, reactive attitudes.

RIB – the MOU was negotiated with MOAF as part of the initial project design. It secured good level of engagements of both parties and had a discipline effect on project implementers. Unfortunately, during the second phase of the project one of the key partners from MOAF diverted from the initially agreed targets and despite all efforts at the highest possible level the situation could not be reverted. By mid 2007, the MOAF had not fulfilled its financial commitments to the project.

The overall experience gained in conducting projects in the field of SMNR shows that MoU provides certain benefits for the overall project steering and hence impact but also sets some restrictions and limits:

Benefits of MOU:

- *Sets formal legal grounds for mutual understanding on the most important elements of the project;*
- *Clearly stipulates in a formal manner the commitments of each party and constitutes locally the project implementation (project document, administration, steering, financing etc);*
- *Ensures stability and consistency in the work and obligations of the Bulgarian Government when cabinets and other responsible persons are constantly changing;*
- *Provides legal grounds for communication and interaction with other concerned state and local institutions when needed, especially in countries in transition like Bulgaria with highly centralised and hierarchical administrative system;*
- *Sets procedures for communication and consultations at strategic level for the project;*
- *Provides for involvement of concerned parties and endorsement of important outputs (Evaluations, Management Plans, and Strategies);*
- *Provide for consistency in project steering from one phase to the other;*
- *Provides clauses and conditions for Programme/Project termination and follow up.*

Restrictions of MOU:

- *The negotiation of the clauses of the MOU is often difficult and time consuming;*
- *MOU cannot replace the lack of commitment (or even opposition) of any of the concerned parties;*
- *MOU and SC are posing some formal, often slow, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, which can suppress the flexibility of the project;*
- *MOU may limit project management units in using certain instruments or critically addressing issues of relevance to the concerned parties (e.g. corruption);*
- *Restricts the flexibility during the project implementation in cases where the original goals need adjustment or change;*
- *Does not guarantee the avoidance of delays in implementation of obligations from the Bulgarian side, especially in periods of economic difficulties.*

Conclusions

Although sometimes the MOU may introduce restrictions, it is better to have such a constituting document. MOUs are important foundations, when projects address policy development and enforcement elements, especially regarding SMNR. It is a powerful legal binding at the highest level that guarantees that commitments are valid when Governments change. This is very important in the realm of natural resource management where strong economic interests are involved, which may threaten the sustainable use of resources and the conservation of nature. In a period of transition the MOU provide certain guarantees that money is spend for the original project goals. It also guarantees the continuous participation of the state institutions representatives in the implementation. MOU helps focus the attention and provision of finances and human resources for the sustainable use of natural resources in the recipient country in transitional periods when the nature conservation legislation (development and implementation) can often be neglected.

Gerassim Gerassimov, September 2007.

Case study 3:

The Institutional Development of the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation: logical process and Bulgarian team initiative

Back in the 1994, the Bulgarian Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program (BSBCP) was started with the donor support of the Swiss government. In late 1997, the Swiss partner NGOs in the programme created Foundation BSBCP with the aim to be the juridical body for the implementation of the BSBCP. In 1998 the Foundation BSBCP had started some activities outside of the scope of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Swiss and the Bulgarian governments, acting as an independent NGO. Gradually the idea emerged that the Foundation BSBCP had its own place in the conservation community of Bulgaria. It started developing and implementing its own projects and looked for additional funding.

In 2000, the management team of the BSBCP foundation presented arguments to support the further establishment of the NGO as an independent player of the conservation community in Bulgaria to donors. In order to help with this process in the BSBC Programme Document for Phase III specific activities were included:

- *organizing a meeting for strategic planning of the future of the Foundation;*
- *elaborating the strategic vision for the role of the Foundation;*
- *involving an expert consultant to elaborate the business plan for the Foundation's activities;*
- *developing projects and fund raise for them.*

During the phasing out activities the strategic vision for the future of the Foundation was elaborated, the Foundation's Board was enlarged to include 5 new Bulgarian individuals, the name of the Foundation was changed to Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF), and the Statutes were completely revised. The BBF started to develop and to get funding for additional projects.

At the end of the BSBCP, the BBF had inherited the corporative history (background) of the BSBCP, the contacts and partnerships, the documentation, part of the team and the experts network, and some equipment. BBF was invited by SDC to develop a new 3-year project through which the new (old) foundation should position better itself not anymore as a donor organisation, but as a partner of the other players in the conservation scene and should develop its capacity to raise funds from non-SDC sources. As a stimulus for BBF to search for funds and not rely again only on SDC, the amount of money for each of the 3 years of the project were shrinking gradually. The resources provided by SDC have given a substantial input to the re-orientation, positioning and capacity building of the foundation. The positive results are obvious, but some comments can be made here:

- *In the last 6 years BBF has been hesitating between several roles: 1) large donor agency redistributing funds of other larger donors; 2) civil society organization with policy and advocacy functions; 3) large membership-based NGO; 4) small consultancy group of experts. It is clear that there is no need to choose between one and the other, but the important thing is to maintain and combine the functions.*
- *The role initially negotiated with SDC was viewed as a continuation of the foundation's role during the BSBCP – re-distributing funds of large donors. However, attracting new large donors has turned out to be unrealistic. Private foundations or international donor agencies starting new presence and activities in Bulgaria are opening their own structures.*
- *By 2007, a large membership based nature conservation NGO was still missing in Bulgaria. Until then BBF had missed the opportunity to cover this niche as during the strategic planning the Swiss partner NGOs had restricted the foundation from such*

role avoiding the concurrence with the existing Bulgarian associations. The BBF had been obliged to close its regional offices but in 2007 they were being re-established!

Lessons learned:

The institutionalization of a project management unit (PMU) into an independent organization has to be set as a project objective (or at least a possibility) as early as possible in the project cycle. Such effort can better be targeted if a strategic decision is made concerning the role of the organisation in the post-project life. The initiative should be that of the local partners.

The institutionalisation process requires a special set of activities:

- capacity building of the staff for management, fundraising, public relations;*
- support for the promotion of the organization as reliable, motivated, expert-based, etc.;*
- resources provided guaranteeing the existence-minimum of the organization at least 10 year after the project end (among these resources, providing the office seems to be very important!).*

Rossen Vassilev, September 2007.

Case Study 4:

On Regional Planning:

The **regional planning approach** represents a very promising approach to be applied in SMNR. The CapEx team has identified the following steps for future application of the experience gained in regional planning:

A Main steps identified by the stakeholders in order to capitalise SMNR approaches as integrated planning tools:

- Demonstrate and document in leaflets best practices as case studies with recently conducted participatory planning
- Compile list of instruments adapted, applied and implemented in concrete projects in Bulgaria (such as PA Management plans, multifunctional forest plan, community development plans, other instruments on nature in non-protected areas)
- Support the successor organisation of the Swiss programmes on conduction in-depth studies about the upcoming EU-programmes with relevance for municipality and regional planning
- Develop a “marketing” strategy with the help of Bulgarian experts on SMNR in cooperation with a journalist aiming at presentation of the concepts, tools, technologies developed to experts, to the scientific public and within the SCO final CapEx to the state and a broader public
- Define landscape planning as part of the municipality and regional planning approach
- Use the municipality and regional planning approach for integration in curricula development for specific study courses in Sofia or Oblast universities (on-going initiative by BBF)

B Target groups identified during the CapEx team:

- Municipalities and their subordinated communities
- MIG – mestny initiativny gruppy (local initiative groups in Bulgarian)
- NGO at the local level
- Municipal / Oblast ecological inspections
- Sectoral planning organisation (infrastructure, industry, tourism, forestry, protected areas a.o.)
- At a later stage (>approx. within 2 years): Planning authorities on the national / oblast level
- Universities at the Sofia and Oblast levels

C Examples and Best practices documented in the interviews :

- Municipality planning Germen –developed from a MFP
- Oblast-/Regional planning: Oblast Pasardjik – MFP approach transferred from the municipality level to “focus planning” on the oblast level
- Municipality planning within and around a large protected area (in Central Balkan a.o.), e.g ecological tourism , pasture management, close-to nature forestry
- Municipality forums / regional forums
- Stara planina programme – transboundary planning integrating municipalities
- “Green belt” project, dealing with all spheres of SMNR (PA, forests, agriculture participatory planning, transboundary regional planning)

D Possible geographic focus:

- Rural, “under”-developed oblast / municipalities in Bulgaria
- Touristic and mountain oblast / municipalities
- Specific buffer/ development zones in and around large protected areas , close-to-nature forest areas
- Transboundary regions of Bulgaria – transfer to neighbouring EU and CEE countries
- Contribution to spatial, nature conservation and landscape planning, also EIA / SIA contributions for large infrastructure projects.

Heino Messen, September 2007.

Annex 1: SDC's concept on Citizen and Democracy

From a concept paper of SDC the following information regarding the importance of citizen participation and democracy in SDC country programme in Bulgaria can be extracted:

Citizen Participation and Democracy

Citizen participation is the essence of democracy. The concepts of freedom of speech, assembly, voting, and equal representation have evolved through the years to form basic pillars upon which democratic states were established. Although democracy is assimilated to the principle of equal right and treatment for all, the driven force is based on the assumption that everything is perfectible. Therefore the application of democracy principle should generate innovation capable to improve the living situation.

Promotion of Democracy as Goal of the Swiss Cooperation

Within the framework of the co-operation with the States of Eastern Europe⁶² the Swiss Confederation supports these States in their efforts of construction and consolidation of the democracy and in their efforts of transition towards a market economy and the installation of corresponding social structures.

The co-operation with the States of Eastern Europe has in particular as goal

- the promotion and reinforcement, in these countries, of the State of right and the respect of the humans right as well as construction or the consolidation of the democratic system, in particular the development of stable political institutions,
- the promotion of an economic and social sustainable development, conforms to the principles of the market economy and supporting economic stability, the cultural development, the increase in incomes and the improvement of the living conditions of the populations, while encouraging
- the respect of the environment as well as the rational use of the natural resources.

Therefore the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has a central mandate to support the democratic system in Bulgaria.

Source: SDC, 2003: Bulgaria. Co-operation Approaches and Strategy in the domain of Citizens and Democracy. Concept paper. Roland Python. Deputy Country Director SDC Sofia. http://162.23.39.120/dezaweb/ressources/resource_en_24165.doc

⁶² Federal Decree (Bundesbeschluss) from 24.3.1995 concerning the cooperation with States from Eastern Europe, based on the message of the federal Council of September 19, 1994.

Annex 2: Concepts, Tools and Know-how developed and their present and future application

SDC programme	Concepts developed	Tools applied	Technical Know-How transferred	Inputs in to policy dialogue and legislation	Adaptation to Bulgarian requirements in direction to governmental services	Transfer to / Implementation by EU- / other instruments	Strength of the SMNR Domain > Opportunity for Joint Instruments
SOAP Bioselena Biofarm Bio Bulgaria	Integration of methods on Organic Agriculture (OA) in Sustainable Land Management concepts for the Central Balkan region Networking and strengthening of Bio-Farmers	Support to Certification of farms and products Product development and marketing	Production techniques for legumes, herbs, livestock a.o. Development of marketing strategies for organic products	Paragraph on OA included in the law of agricultural development for the EU accession process	Adaptation of Consultancy services on OA to support governmental rural advisory services Introduction of study courses on Biological Agriculture at the Agricultural University of Plovdiv	Knowledge how to apply for EU / governmental subsidies programme on OA	Development of instruments in the direction of integrated planning tools and Sustainable regional development together with RIBP and BBF
RIBP Rare Breeds		Introduction of Herdbooks	Scientific description of rare breeds Conservation techniques for 4 breeds	Input to the relevant sections of the law and by-laws	Introduction of study courses on Biological Agriculture at the Agricultural University of Plovdiv	Contribution to the EU regulation on the conservation of rare breeds	Joint implementation local / regional pasture management plans with BBF
BSBCP>BBF	11 Management plans for protected areas (PA) including large parks 11 Action Plans for Preservation of Species	Geobotanical analyses and list of species for large PA	Scientific know-how in conservation Participatory techniques in biodiversity conservation	Main stakeholder for development of the law on PA		Working with natura 2000 LIFE + and LEADER programmes	

SDC programme	Concepts developed	Tools applied	Technical Know-How transferred	Inputs in to policy dialogue and legislation	Adaptation to Bulgarian requirements in direction to governmental services	Transfer to / Implementation by EU- / other instruments	Strength of the SMNR Domain > Opportunity for Joint Instruments
	Participatory nature conservation + landscape planning ("Green Belt")	Participatory planning Habitat studies Pasture Management					Joint implementation local / regional pasture management plans with RIBP Concepts for landscape planning adopted to EU-requirements
	Clearing House Mechanism			Main actor within the Bulgarian clearing house mechanism (CHM)		Working for the government, Cooperating with bul. /international NGO community	Joint lobbying initiatives for concept and tools developed by all programmes of the domain in the direction of the Bulgarian government
	Regional planning input for the South-East-planning region						Regional planning as opportunity for joint SMNR input of all programmes of the Swiss domain
		Assessment tools for water ecosystems					Protection of water bodies, water harvesting, Nature conservation , close-to-nature forestry
BSFP	Multifunctional forest plans	Practical implementation of plenter methods	PhD dissertation on various scientific subjects Technical trainings Innovative concepts and approaches for near-to-nature	Local policy dialogue crosscutting landscape / nature conservation and close-to-nature forestry – the case of Pirin and Central Balkan National Parks			Municipality development further developed the MFP as joint concept

SDC programme	Concepts developed	Tools applied	Technical Know-How transferred	Inputs in to policy dialogue and legislation	Adaptation to Bulgarian requirements in direction to governmental services	Transfer to / Implementation by EU- / other instruments	Strength of the SMNR Domain > Opportunity for Joint Instruments
			forestry				
	Socio-economical development of municipalities	Training tools and units for forest workers Security training	Organisation of Capacity development on all spheres of forestry with CH partners institutions and forestry schools			Application for twinning programmes with similar EU forestry schools	

Annex 3: Brief Profiles of the five SMNR Projects

i) SOAP 1996-2007⁶³

Since 1996, SDC provides support to sustainable agriculture development in Bulgaria, focusing on the promotion of organic agriculture. Initiated by the "Swiss Institute for Organic Agriculture" (FiBL), the project gained its Bulgarian ownership with the establishment of two local organisations: the Foundation for Organic Agriculture "Bio Selena" and "Bio Bulgaria" Cooperative. Since 2003, SECO supports the establishment and operation of a Bulgarian organic certification agency: "Balkan Biocert Ltd", as an important actor in organic production and marketing process.

The project for Sustainable Agriculture in Central Stara Planina (known with the acronym "Bioselena") was reviewed during the autumn 2003. The evaluation confirmed its relevance and recommended continuation. It also provided insight for applying recent Swiss ODA policy on reducing commitments over the period 2005-07. Key recommendations of the evaluation suggest: i) opening up of the circle of organisations to be involved in the last phase of the Programme thus including organisations and institutions having a stakes on important elements of the organic agriculture (partners) – policy, production, marketing, consumers and ii) addressing the entire organic production and marketing chain through improving the performance of the actors involved in the realisation of particular organic products.

Outcome Mapping planning instrument was recommended and utilised as means for achieving wider impact through the improved performance of key players in the field.

Redesigned scope of SDC support to OA in Bulgaria necessitate specific planning and tests of the recommended new approaches – development of a broader OA movement.

The phase III (main activities where implemented in the period 07.2004-06.2005) was set to trace the cooperation among the 5 institutions forming the so called OA Partnership in Bulgaria – Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MoAF), Agriculture University, Plovdiv, "Ecofarm" Association and traditional, SDC supported organisations - Foundation Bioselena and Bio Bulgaria Cooperative. Elaboration of the National Organic Agriculture Action Plan (NOAAP), co-financed by SDC and MoAF is an ultimate result from the joint efforts of the partnership. The advanced draft of the plan, expecting Government endorsement by June 2005, is a policy framework setting strategic priorities for OA development for the period 2006 - 2013. It is expected that the plan will become a whole part in the National Plan for Agriculture and Rural development 2007 - 2013.

Despite this achievement, cooperation and partnership among involved organisations, in their specific field of competences, proved to be yet premature and more donor-driven than conscious need.

The 6-month period of the bridging phase, although bringing good practical results like addressing OA along the whole production-marketing chain, confirmed that the establishment of lasting and efficient partnership needs longer, targeted support.

ii) BBF/BCBCP 1994-2007⁶⁴

The Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation (BBF) is the successor of the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme (BSBCP) which had worked for 10 years (1994-2004) on priority issues concerning the biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

The BSBCP went through three individual phases, each with separate characteristics and each giving specific experience and bringing valuable legacy for the BBF.

⁶³ Source: Credit Proposal last phase, 13.6.2006

⁶⁴ Source: BBF Project Document 2005-2007

- ◆ The **Phase I** was principally conceived as actions planned from outside and executed locally, most of them being linked to research and inventories aiming to draft management plans for different ranks of protected areas.
- ◆ The **PHASE II** has been much different in its planning, its structure, as well as its day-to-day operations. The intensive knowledge transfer of Phase I allowed to design much more independent programme, composed of strong, efficient and autonomous local teams. Their action was coordinated at the central level by a Central Office – core team led by an executive director, a new position that considerably contributed to giving the Programme its own identity. The nature of activities also changed, shifting from management planning to management (in spite of difficulties encountered with the process of official approval of the management plans), and to dialogue-facilitating among local stakeholders. The
- ◆ **Phase III** built upon this experience and continued this trend of growing autonomy and responsibility with one of the main objectives being to legitimize the BBF, initially established as purely a tool to manage the Phase II of BSBCP, but latter strategically aimed at gaining extended autonomy and emerging as a key player in the Bulgarian nature protection circles.

The ten-year efforts of the BSBCP brought to significant improvement of the preservation and management of the rich natural heritage of the country. The Programme was a pioneer in the development of holistic **managerial tools** – the **Management Plans for Protected Areas (PAs)** – corresponding to the contemporary views for participatory, public driven approach to conservation. A total of **14 management plans** for different PA categories were elaborated.

This was combined with **extensive studies**, providing sound scientific basis for the management of the Bulgarian biodiversity. In addition, the species conservation action programmes made a contribution to the world-wide conservation effort, recognized by the IUCN's SSC and the BirdLife International. **Important merits of the programme** are:

- ◆ **new protected areas established** on an area of more than 10,000 ha
- ◆ **four new Ramsar sites are approved** (Lake Pomoriysko, Lake Vaya, Poda Lagoon, Ropotamo Complex)
- ◆ **three new Nature Parks** in less studied regions **were proposed in partnership** with other organisations: the Eastern Rhodopes (an area of almost 200,000 ha) and two other mountainous regions Belasitsa (about 30,000 ha) and Western Balkan (some 73,000 ha).

This whole process, organised on local basis had another valuable asset – the **formation of the team of experts**, which latter formed the inner circle of a dozen of resource people of the BBF. It is further extended by a larger circle of experts of the Bulgarian Academy of Science and academic institutions – closely involved in the work of the programme. They could build the basis of the advisory and consultative organs of the BBF.

- ◆ The BSBCP also developed **Species Conservation Action Programmes** for a number of plant and animal species of global importance were elaborated (total 11).

The Programme also identified the need of **capacity building of the national institutions involved** in the nature resources conservation and sustainable management at both national level (Ministry of Environment and Water and Ministry of Agriculture and Forests) and regional ones – the regional inspectorates of both ministries, the directorates of the national and nature parks. Extensive training has been provided to local staffs and much support ensured for introducing modern concepts, technologies and equipment to assist them in the future applying of the managerial tools provided. The staffs of two National Parks and the largest Nature Park in Bulgaria underwent specifically developed training modules, including exchanges with similar administrations from European countries of excellence. The regional inspectors in three regional inspectorates have also been trained.

The BSBCP dedicated substantial effort to the **work with academic institutions**. Every opportunity was sought to ensure to young people the opportunity to elaborate master thesis through effective work in the field. At least 150 students benefited from this and many of them are

now involved in either state or non-governmental institutions dealing with biodiversity conservation issues. This is a vital capital of the BSBCP, which should be further utilized by the BBF.

To effectively achieve the ambitious goal of enhancing the nature protection in Bulgaria the BSBCP had to develop its **relations and partnerships with key stakeholders**. On first place such have been the municipalities in its focal regions. In the ten-years period of work of BSBCP **over 30 key municipalities** such as Varna, Burgas, Gabrovo, Karlovo, Troyan, Ivajlovgrad, Madjarovo, Kirkovo, Blagoevgrad, Razlog, Bansko, Belogradchik, etc., have been involved in various activities. It is doubtless that the BSBCP made certain progress towards changing the perception of nature protection in those municipalities, representing over 40% of the country. At least, after ten-year work the terms biodiversity, nature conservation and sustainable resource use become regular expressions in their regional development plans. The basis is now established to deepen the impact by working for effective integration of the biodiversity agenda into the municipal sectoral policies. Moreover, it is expected that the municipalities shall play a key role in utilizing the European structural funds.

The BBF also carries forward the lessons of **establishing local platforms for discussing biodiversity issues** by various stakeholders, including not only local authorities and regional structures of state institutions, but also NGOs, business, and educational institutions. Although the experience with these so-called **Regional Forums** has not been completely positive, the lesson learned manifests the need of these, and moreover the need of targeted approach and effort for organization, coordination and mediation of such structures to contribute to the defending of the biodiversity agenda at the regional development level. The **added value of this effort** is the further **enlargement and diversifying of the circle of partners of the BBF**. The BBF is also taking over the public reputation of the BSBCP as a key non-governmental player at the scene of biodiversity protection. The current challenge is to further build the constituency and strengthen the partnerships and turn them into an effectively working tool for public control and influence on the national biodiversity protection and sustainable resources use policies.

Certain efforts of the Programme **targeted altering and modeling the general public opinion and increasing the awareness** on the Bulgarian biodiversity importance, both as a part of the common global and European heritage, but also as a valuable resource to be preserved for the future generations. Substantial work was carried out with secondary and high schools. **Four visitors' information centers were supported**, as well as the **networking between all nature conservation and tourist information centers** in the country. It should be clearly stated that now-a-day the BBF is in a better position (compared to the beginning of BSBCP) having to work with a better informed general public, local authorities and local state structures.

An important asset of the BSBCP's work has been the **development of models of sustainable use of the resources in the different regions**, such as:

- ◆ “salinas train” around Atanasovsko Lake reserve;
- ◆ the sustainable use model for the highland pastures in the Central Balkan NP;
- ◆ the establishment of fishermen association in Durankulak region.

The models provided valuable arguments in defending the biodiversity protection agenda. Now these should be taken a step forward by BBF through turning them into stable public-private partnerships for developing pro-biodiversity businesses in the areas of the highest conservation concern⁶⁵.

Concluding, the BBF takes off from a favorable basis, built through the ten-year effort of the BSBCP. Yet it is faced with the challenge to enrich the legacy and broaden the constituency of the Programme, take over the positive lessons and introduce them at a larger scale in the country by

⁶⁵ Such high conservation value areas refer to internationally recognized criteria. These differ from the IUCN's PAs categories and are more related to biotopes no matter protected or not, such as forests, wetlands, agriculture areas, etc. Much work has already been carried in Bulgaria for determining the high conservation value forests; the Bulgarian CORINE sites for example also form such areas.

developing and broadening the partnerships for effective protection of the Bulgarian biodiversity. In other words the BBF is now committed to continue building bridges rather than fences to ensure the sustenance of the country's natural heritage.

iii) BSFP 1997- 2007⁶⁶

Swiss cooperation was among the first to support Bulgaria's forestry sector. The Bulgarian Swiss Forestry Programme in its first phase (1997-2001) provided assistance and transfer of know-how in establishing the scientific base for sustainable forest management in Bulgaria. The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) Zurich was the executive agency for the first project phase, as on Bulgarian side; the implementation of activities was organised by the Forest University of Sofia. The second project phase (2001-2003) aimed at supporting the forestry sector in Bulgaria in achieving a balance between the ecological, economic and social functions of the forests by means of sustainable, "close-to-nature" management practices.

This project goal is sustained for its third phase. This conclusion was reached after almost a year-long process of planning and discussions with main partners, namely Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MoAF) and its National Forestry Board, Intercooperation, Bern and BSFP Operational Centre in Sofia (which followed the external evaluation exercise conducted in May 2003).

In its last phase, BSFP will face the following challenges:

- (1) Reinforce Multifunctional Forest Planning and Management (MFPM) as participatory instrument for integrated local (rural) planning and development.
- (2) Promote and build capacity for deconcentrated and decentralised decision making in the forest sector in pursuing National Forestry Agenda.
- (3) Empower forests stakeholders, especially local ones, to actively and effectively participate in forest management through MFPM process.
- (4) Capitalise the experiences gained during the previous phases and leave behind self-sustaining processes and results.

Objectives

The **general objective** of the last phase is the same as the one defined for Phase II:

To support the stakeholders in the forestry sector in Bulgaria in achieving a balance between the ecological, economic and social functions of the forests by means of sustainable and close-to-nature management

The **project objectives** are:

- To Support the National Forestry Agenda through targeted capacity strengthening of NFB and other forest stakeholders to pursue reforms in the forest sector,
- To promote Multi-Functional Forestry Planning and Management (MFPM) in selected areas.

A general Project Logframe is provided in Annex 2 where interlink between BSFP III objectives' system and paramount priorities set in NFPS is also shown.

⁶⁶ Source: Credit Proposal Phase III, 20.4.2004

iv) Rare Indigenous Breeds Project (RIBP) 2001-2001⁶⁷

Although initiated by the team of the “Sustainable Agriculture” Project, the aim of the project is to contribute to the conservation of unique diversity of rare indigenous breeds in Bulgaria – one of the objectives set by the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy. The project started in mid 2001 and contributes to the preservation of 4 threatened indigenous breeds by rendering their breeding economically feasible for farmers and animal owners. Planned activities involve: development and approval of breed descriptions ii) enlisting and marking the animals belonging to the 4 target breeds; iii) support to animals’ owners to get access to EU SAPARD funding; iv) support the establishment and development of breeding association(s).

Project implementation is constituted by MOU between the Government of Switzerland and the Government of Bulgaria. Its implementation is mandated to BioSelena Foundation. Swiss partner organisations are REED (backstopping) and Pro Species Rara (expertise) as on the Bulgarian side this is the state Executive Agency “Selection and Reproduction in Animal Husbandry”. As the project results greatly depends on the execution of EU SAPARD agro- ecology measure 1.3, serious efforts are paid by the project team in supporting respective authorities on devising and kicking this measure off. Reviving (revitalising) breeding association(s) is the other challenging task in front of the project as this goes along with redistribution of tasks and public services between the Government and civil society organisations – a process hampered by inconsistent and often controversial policy context and regulatory framework.

v) Monitoring of trans-boundary air pollution affecting the forests (1997 – 2003)⁶⁸

The objectives of this project were to support Bulgaria in the fulfilment of its obligations towards two international programmes, the *International Cooperative Programme on Assessment and Monitoring of Air Pollution Effects on Forests (ICP Forests Level I and II)* and the programme on *Mapping Critical Levels and Loads (ICP Mapping)*.

During the first phase important amounts of funds (1 Mio CHF) were invested in scientific hardware (three field monitoring stations and laboratory equipment). However, the initial set up of the project was very weak. In 1996 the Sofia Forest University was chosen as a main partner and mandated by the NFB for this purpose, because it was one of the few stable Bulgarian forest institutions. The Academy of Science was charged with work regarding to pathology and entomology. Project progress and the scientific quality of the work done was weak, and key projects partners were not qualified and reliable. On the Swiss side, the scientific institution charged with the support to the project was inexperienced with international cooperation, and had problems to deal with this difficult situation. In addition it was discovered belatedly that the MoEW charged by the Bulgarian government to deal with the reporting and was delivering part of the data, thus the Swiss effort was duplicated.

The responsibility for the poor preparation of the project is shared between SDC , BUWAL and IAP.

In 2001 it was decided to transfer the project to the MoEW, to support the continuation of the scientific work and to phase out the Swiss support within 2 years. According to the latest ICP report published in 2007, Bulgaria has started to deliver data by 2003. The data delivered is of intermediate quality (“with warning”), but this is also true for data from other countries (including Switzerland).

⁶⁷ Source: SMNR concept paper. Gerassim Gerassimov. 2003.

⁶⁸ Source: SDC note from 8.2.1001 and other SDC documents (Forest Focus Monitoring Database System. TECHNICAL REPORT 2004 LEVEL II DATA. Hiederer. R. T. Durrant, O. Granke, M. Lambotte, M. Lorenz. B. Mignon, V. Mues. EC Joint Research Centre. 2007 <http://forestfocus.nsi-sa.be/forestfocus.php?a=4&b=1>)

Annex 4: List of people interviewed

In Bulgaria

1. Abadjieva Veleslava, Project Manager, GEF Small Grants Programme (UNDP)
2. Apostolov Stoilko, Bioselena Foundation
3. Bashev Ahmed, Mayor Garmen Municipality
4. Bossevsky Valentin, Chairman of the National Trust Eco-Fund
5. Cholakov Angel, Governor, Pazardjik District
6. Damianova Roza, Editor and Presenter for the Hristo Botev Program of the Bulgarian National Radio
7. Dimitrov Dimiter, RIEW Plovdiv, biodiversity expert
8. Dundliker Gottlieb, consultant SVS BirdLife Schweiz
9. Gerassimov Gerassim, Communication Officer, Swiss Cooperation Office Bulgaria, Embassy of Switzerland
10. Germer Carsten, UNDP office Sofia
11. Gruncharov George, Director, Pirin National Park
12. Hinkova Silvia, Executive Director of the Stara Planina Tourism Association
13. Karov Stoycho, Ekofarm Association
14. Kaufmann Heinz, Country Director, Swiss Cooperation Office Bulgaria, Embassy of Switzerland
15. Kazakova Yanka, WWF Bulgaria
16. Markovska Simana, Chairwoman of Pirin Tourism Forum
17. Mihajlov Misho, Ministry of Environment and water, National Nature Protection Service
18. Minkov Nanko, Section head, Central Balkan National Park
19. Nencheva Gergana, Balkan Biocert Ltd.
20. Nikolov Vasil, Professor Agriculture University Plovdiv
21. Petrova Zoya, Director, Forestry Professional High School, Teteven
22. Sedefchev Sider, Semperviva NGO, nature conservation and rare breeds conservation
23. Spiridonov Jeko, Wilderness Fund
24. Staykova Radka, farmer, member of the Association of rare breeds, Vurben village, Karlovo, Local Initiative LEADER Group member
25. Stefanova Viara, Head of Agri-environment and LFA Department, RDD, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
26. Stiptsov Vassil, Program Manager of BSFP and Manager of Sylvica Foundation
27. Todorova Ivanka, Monitoring of the Forest Ecosystems Project of ICP Forest
28. Tsetska Dimitrova, Mayor of Teteven municipality
29. Vassilev Rossen, Executive Director, BBF
30. Veliat Mehmed, Head, Regional Forestry Board, Pazardjik
31. Yancheva Christina, Professor Agriculture University Plovdiv
32. Yonov Nikolay, Head of Department "Protected areas, international cooperation and NGOs relations", NFB, MAF

In Switzerland

1. Capt Georges (former country director SCO), by questionnaire
2. Damary Peter, former FIBL consultant (Organic Agriculture)
3. Duerr Christoph, BAFU, former IC expert (Forest)
4. Egger Jean-Pierre (SDC)
5. Flückiger Walter and Sabine Braun, IAP (Pollution Monitoring)
6. Galland Pierre, consultant, formerly pro Natura (Biodiversity)
7. Heeb Marlène, FIBL, project coordinator East Europe (Organic Agriculture)
8. Hislair Peter, consultant (Biodiversity)
9. Kireva Polina, PhD student at CDE and Coordinator Environmental Education Programms, Vlahi Eco-Center
10. Luthi Markus, consultant (RIB/SOAP),
11. Mauderli Ueli (SDC)
12. Sansonnens Bertrand, Pro natua (Biodiversity)
13. Schläppi Walter, Consultant, (SOAP)
14. Schuetz Jean-Philippe, Prof. em. ETHZ (Forest)
15. Sorg Jean-Pierre, Prof. ETHZ (Forest)
16. Zahner Philippe (SDC)
