

## PARKS, PEACE, AND PARTNERSHIP: GLOBAL INITIATIVES IN TRANSBOUNDARY CONSERVATION

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ISBN 978-1-55238-643-9

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# The Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project: A Cooperative Initiative between Lesotho and South Africa

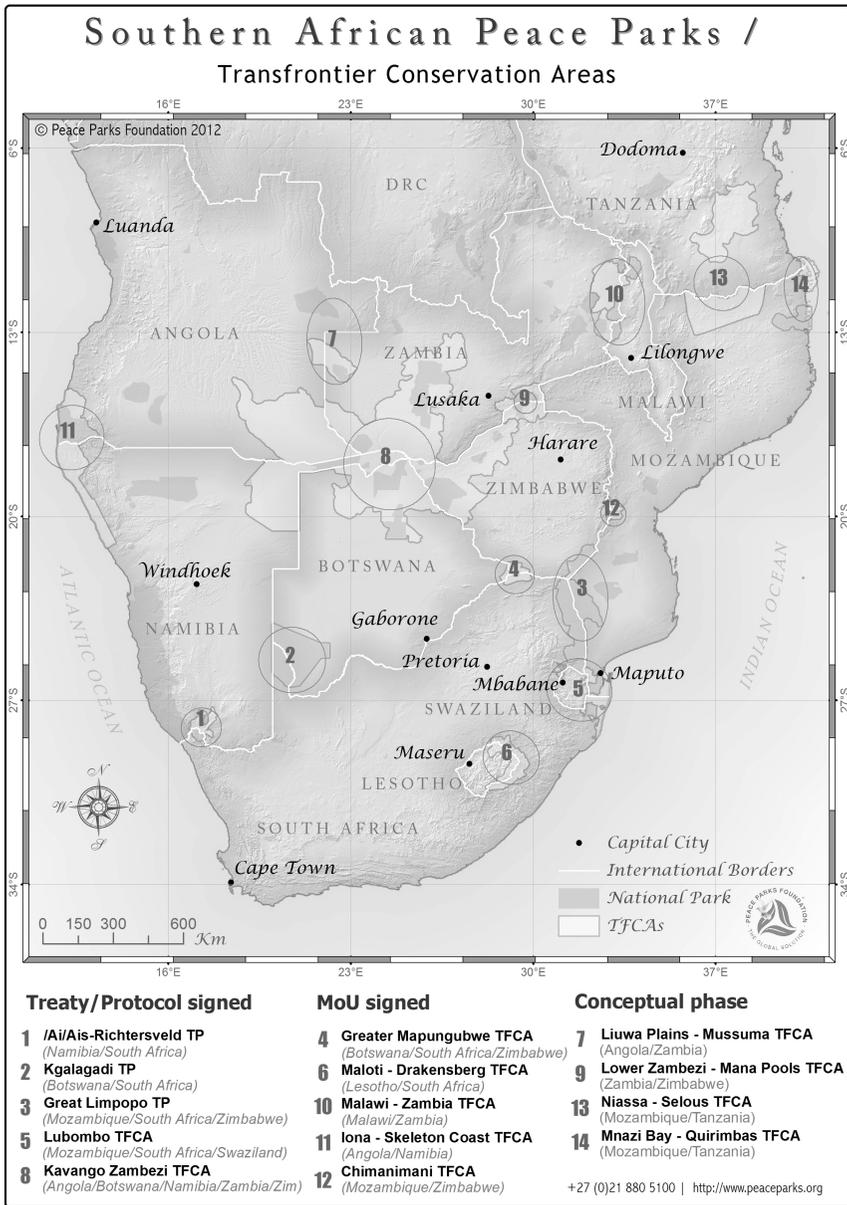
*Kevan Zunckel*

## INTRODUCTION

### LOCALITY AND BROAD DESCRIPTION

#### **Locality**

The Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Area (MDTFCA) covers the 700-kilometre stretch of mountains from its southern extreme near the Eastern Cape Province town of Elliot in South Africa and straddling the eastern Lesotho-South Africa border northwards to Golden Gate Highlands National Park in the Free State Province



MAP 1. TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREAS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA (PEACE PARKS FOUNDATION).

of South Africa (Map 1). Included in the MDTFCA are the Maloti, Drakensberg, and Witteberg Mountain ranges above an altitude of ~1,400 metres, varying with local topography, covering an area of ~55,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The boundary of the MDTFCA is largely defined by the biodiversity associated with the high-lying ground, being represented by alpine, sub-alpine, and montane vegetation types.

### *The International Boundary*

While the two countries share this montane bioregion in broad terms, the vegetation types reflect the topographic reality that the majority of the international boundary is well placed in terms of ecosystem functioning. With the exception of the far northern portion of the area where the Caledon River is the international boundary, the largest portion of the international boundary is on the watershed, which in most cases is on the edge of the escarpment. The drop-off from the edge into South Africa is close to 1,000 metres in places, which explains the distinct differences in the vegetation types. The topographical distinction is less extreme in the south and this is also evident as the vegetation types begin to become common to both countries. Given this distinction between the two countries, one could question the need for a transfrontier initiative based purely on ecological reasoning, but the information provided in this chapter will provide the necessary motivation for all the work that has gone into this initiative thus far and that which is still to come.

### *Land-Tenure Systems*

In Lesotho the dominant land-tenure system is communal and there is only one declared protected area, namely the Selhabathebe National Park (6,795 ha). Two other areas have been set aside for proclamation, namely Ts'ehlanyane National Park (5,394 ha) and Bokong Nature Reserve (1,953 ha). South Africa has three land-tenure systems including communal, private and state land. The latter includes the Golden Gate Highlands National Park / Qwa Qwa Nature Reserve complex (30,000 ha), Sterkfontein Dam Nature Reserve (17,000 ha), Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site (243,000 ha), Coleford Nature Reserve (1,300 ha), Ntsikeni Nature Reserve (9,000 ha), Malekgalonyane Nature Reserve (13,000 ha),

and the Matatiele Nature Reserve (4,600 ha). These protected areas vary in status from a World Heritage Site to a municipal nature reserve and collectively cover just more than 6 per cent of the area. In addition to the inadequacy of this coverage, the protected areas are mostly located in the high-lying areas, and it has been recognized that this situation needs to be addressed.

The communal areas are characterized by subsistence agricultural activities, these being primarily extensive livestock grazing and dry land cropping. The private land is also dominated by agricultural activities but these are more diverse and strongly commercially oriented. They enjoy the support of a variety of bulk infrastructure such as water, power, and transport. A number of urban nodes exist in the MDTFCA, and they are mostly associated with the prevailing agricultural land use that surrounds them.

## **Background to the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project**

The Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project (MDTP) exists as the institutional mechanism to support the conservation and development of the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation Area (MDTFCA). Officials in Lesotho first recognized the need to collaborate on common management issues in the Maloti Drakensberg mountains and approached the then Natal Parks Board in this regard in the 1980s. These early discussions culminated in a meeting of all key role players at Giant's Castle on 14 September 1997, where a declaration was signed by all to work towards the establishment of a transfrontier conservation area, including a transfrontier park. A two-year preparatory phase was then entered into by the two countries (1999–2000) using funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Japanese Government. The essence of this phase was to undertake baseline studies into a variety of aspects relevant to the area and to use this improved understanding to formulate a more detailed funding application to GEF.

On 11 June 2001, an international Memorandum of Understanding was signed at the Sehlabathebe National Park by the environment ministers of Lesotho and South Africa. At the same time, the funding application had been processed and resulted in separate Grant Agreements being

signed between the two countries and the World Bank on 26 July 2002. This funding provided for the establishment of multi-disciplinary project coordinating units (PCUs) in each country with the specific task of facilitating a five-year initial implementation phase designed to build the foundation to take the initiative into the future on a long-term basis. This phase began in 2003 and is set to be completed at the end of 2007.

The overall approach of this phase has been to provide the key implementing agencies with a robust strategic and action planning framework and to facilitate the processes necessary to produce the related products. A twenty-year transfrontier conservation and development strategy has been produced through an extensive stakeholder involvement process and has been based on all the data, both spatial and qualitative, that has been gathered through the duration of this first phase. The twenty-year strategy has been divided into five-year outputs and the first five years (2008–2012) has been captured in a detailed action plan for the implementing agencies and their strategic partners. This will be discussed in more detailed below.

### *The Significance of the Maloti Drakensberg TFCA*

The features listed and briefly discussed below are the reasons the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site (UDP WHS) received its listing in 2000 as one of the twenty-three mixed World Heritage Sites in the world. While these features are prevalent in the UDP WHS, they abound throughout the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Area and in places are of greater significance. The expansion the existing site is already in process, and establishing a series of sites is also a distinct possibility. The latter has been captured in the strategy and could be realized within the next five to ten years.

### **Biodiversity**

The high level of biodiversity, species richness, and prevalence of endemics in the MDTFCA is a result of the diversity of habitat types created by the combination of extremes in topography, altitude, climate, and geology. Conservation International recognizes the area as an Eastern AfroMontane biodiversity hotspot, while Birdlife International sees the Lesotho Highlands and the southern African Grasslands as two endemic

bird areas (Mittermeier et al., 2005). In addition to this, the majority of the area above 1,800 metres has been documented as the Drakensberg Alpine Centre of plant endemism (Cowling and Hilton-Taylor, 1994, Carbutt and Edwards, 2004). Of the 2,520 flowering plant species, 334 (13%) are locally endemic to the area, with a further 594 (23%) being near-endemic.

As far as the animal kingdom is concerned, it appears as if the invertebrates could provide a more dramatic picture with there being high levels of species turnover at scales much finer than the vegetation. The specialist studies that will confirm this picture were not yet complete at the time of writing. The mammalian and herpeto-fauna are not as diverse as in other biomes, but there are some significant endemic and red-listed species that characterize the MDTFCA. There are approximately seventy mammal species, dominated by the charismatic eland (*Taurotragus oryx*) and including interesting endemics. There are nineteen mammals that are both transfrontier in distribution and in need of conservation attention. However, of these, only the De Winton's long-eared bat (*Laephotis wintoni*) is endemic to the MDTFCA. Population sizes and conservation status of these important species remain largely unknown. All the other species have distributions that cover areas much greater than the MDTFCA.

As already stated, the Lesotho Highlands and the Southern African Grasslands are recognized as Important Bird Areas by Birdlife International and of the avifauna important to the area the most significant is the bearded vulture. Although there are populations of this bird in Ethiopia and the Mediterranean, it is endemic to the MDTFCA as far as the sub-Saharan distribution is concerned. In addition to this, its significance comes from the fact that it is a charismatic transfrontier species and the flagship of the program. A recent population and habitat viability assessment and related aerial survey has confirmed that the population is in decline and collaborative efforts are essential to ensure its survival.

## Cultural Heritage

The most obvious feature of the cultural landscape of the MDTFCA is the rock paintings of the San. There are approximately 45,000 images in 600 rock art sites within the boundaries of the UDP WHS with approximately 160,000 images in the MDTFCA as a whole. These images constitute one of the finest outdoor art galleries in the world. The MDTFCA is also the

last areas in the Africa south of the Zambezi River where San people still continued with this tradition until the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition, the area is the heartland of the so-called shamanistic interpretation of rock art, an interpretive framework that is now also used to understand the meaning of rock art in parts of northern America, western Europe and Asia. The San were hunter-gathers who lived in the area for about 20,000 years. They were unable to resist the movement of other people into the area and from the beginning of the 1800s they were systematically persecuted until they were eventually considered extinct by the 1920s. A succession of people from the Zulu King Shaka kaSenzangakhona and the subsequent period of tribal turmoil known as the Mfecane, then Dutch followed by British colonialism, resulted in the demise of the Drakensberg San, although there are still some descendants who have been integrated into the communities living in the area today.

In addition to the rock art, there are numerous other features including the history that is briefly alluded to above. The palaeontology of the area is captured in the sedimentary rock which dominates the lower strata and reflects the prehistoric fauna and flora that occurred. There are numerous sites where dinosaur footprints and other markings can be seen, as well as fossil evidence of their presence. The most spectacular of these are the intact eggs of the *Massospondylus*, which have provided the oldest dinosaur embryos known to man. Iron and Stone Age sites increase the richness of the cultural landscape as does the existence of many Living Heritage sites, i.e. sites of ritual or sacred significance.

### Scenic Beauty

Tourism statistics reveal that approximately 90 per cent of the visitors to the MDTFCA do not leave the comfort of the establishment at which they are staying but are satisfied that by viewing the mountains from relatively close proximity is sufficient for them to be satisfied with a visit to the Drakensberg. The other 10 per cent are treated to closer views of the extremely dramatic landscape that has been created by years of erosive action on the volcanic basalts, which overlay the sedimentary sandstones. The MDTFCA is host to the highest point south of Mount Kilimanjaro, namely Thaba Ntlenyana at 3,482 metres and the second highest waterfall in the world, the Tugela Falls, which plunges 948 metres in five clear leaps.

The sheer cliffs, buttresses, spires, and ramparts inspired the early settlers to call these mountains the Drakensberg, or “The Dragon Mountains” after the spines on the back and tail of a dragon. The Zulu people call them *uKhahlamba*, which means “The Barrier of Spears.” Viewed from the foothills in South Africa, the wall of rock is very impressive, and, once the effort has been expended to summit the escarpment, the views along the summit and back down into the foothills is breathtaking. Although the topography in Lesotho is less dramatic, the almost continuous spread of deeply incised valleys covered in alpine vegetation delivering crystal clear water into the streams provides the visitor with spectacular scenery.

Dramatic seasonal variations enhance the scenic beauty with the vegetation being lush and green in summer and the streams flowing strongly with clear mountain water (although this rapidly becomes turbid with high silt loads as soon as the agricultural areas are reached). This changes as winter approaches and the grasslands become dry and brown. The streams drop to their winter low flows and many of the higher waterfall and cascades freeze into walls and pillars of ice. This season is also dominated by fire as the vegetation is dominated by fire-climax grassland and smoke haze can hide much of the scenic beauty.

As discussed above, the areas surrounding the higher lying mountains are dominated by agricultural activities. This rural agricultural landscape provides the visitor with a sense of space and relative calm before they reach their destination closer to the mountains.

### Ecosystem Services

Amongst a suite of ecosystem services produced by the MDTFCA, the supply and regulation of water is the most significant. South Africa has a low long-term annual average precipitation (approximately 510 mm/annum) and the MDTFCA is one of only five areas where the annual average precipitation exceeds evaporation. Of these areas, only one other, namely the Western Cape, has catchments that are strategically placed to capitalize on the redistribution of this water. The MDTFCA is, however, the most strategically significant as it is located between the economic centres of South Africa. An existing bilateral agreement between Lesotho and South Africa recognizes this as it has brought a massive engineering project into being, namely the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme. Through a system

of impoundments and tunnels almost 50 per cent of the water required for South Africa's economic hub, the Gauteng province, is provided from Lesotho. Other schemes are in place to move water to other areas of South Africa and plans are in place to increase the spread of this ecosystem service. It is predicted that by the year 2030, 70 per cent of the water available for distribution will come from the MDTFCA, i.e., 0.4 per cent of the regional land cover (Diederichs and Mander 2004).

The significance of the above to the MDTP is the close relationship that exists between catchment integrity and biodiversity. While assessing the possibility of introducing systems of trading in ecosystem services, it has become apparent that the most meaningful currency to trade in when it comes to water is basal cover. The MDTFCA is dominated by fire-climax grasslands and when these are managed well they maintain the basal cover at levels that ensure the protection of the soil during precipitation events, effective absorption of water into the soil, and the slow release of the water into the system thereafter. Although it appears that grass species dominate the landscape, closer inspection reveals a greater proportion and diversity of forbs, as stated in the biodiversity discussion above. This diversity implies a resilience which is what is needed to provide the guarantee for catchment integrity and water provision and regulation. Any man-induced actions that affect the biodiversity, such as the injudicious use of fire (too frequent or too infrequent burns) or over-utilization by livestock will have a negative impact on catchment integrity.

## THE NEED FOR THE MALOTI DRakensBERG TRANSFRONTIER PROJECT – DEALING WITH THE THREATS

All of the above features are under threat as unsustainable land use practices dominate the area. The systematic conservation planning process has revealed that there are vast areas with high levels of irreplaceability. The MDTP is a collaborative intervention designed to address these threats through the pooling of resources and coordination of effort. The nature of

the MDTP is discussed in more detail later, after the brief expansion on the threats below.

## **Population Dynamics and Livelihoods**

History and, more specifically, recent history has impacted significantly on the people of the MDTFCA. The engineering of population dynamics by the former South African Apartheid regime created a disparate distribution of access to resources and unnaturally high concentrations of people into certain areas. The land-tenure system in these areas has remained communal and the ‘tragedy of the commons’ is a scenario that prevails. High levels of unemployment are common. The situation in Lesotho is not significantly different, although the population densities are much lower. The influence of colonial power restricted the Basotho nation to an area that is now smaller than it originally was and, whereas agriculture was an income-generating activity, it has been largely reduced to one of subsistence. The colonial influence was entrenched by the Apartheid regime of the former South Africa, and migrant labour to South African mines was at one time the most important source of revenue to the Lesotho government, exacerbating the unemployment situation today.

Most households, especially in the deep rural areas, employ multiple livelihood strategies. Although some of these are directly dependent on natural resources, it has been suggested that agriculture (rangeland grazing and cultivation) has been over-estimated in terms of its role in determining livelihood outcomes (Turner 2001). Dependency on the natural heritage of the region for most of the poor rural communities is an issue of concern. In some isolated cases, a few households actually benefit from job-creation in tourism, with resultant benefits to livelihoods. For private lands, commercial agriculture continues to thrive in specific areas, with farmers continuing to enhance existing livelihoods or diversifying into new ones, often in response to market forces and/or stock theft (change from beef-farming to afforestation, or to potatoes) and new mechanized technologies. In addition, tourism has been developed, with some success in some areas of the MDTFCA, more specifically in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal provinces of South Africa. In other areas, like the private lands in the southern sections of the Eastern Cape portion of the

MDTFCA, tourism is very low-key, but with the potential to increase with resultant livelihood benefits. Livestock production and sale of wool and mohair are a critical component in Lesotho's economy and an important income activity for most farmers in the highlands (Sechaba Consultants 2000). Remittances from a migrant labour system and farm labour still forms part of the income source for the highland communities in Lesotho, as are social grants, particularly in RSA.

An interesting dynamic which requires further research but cannot be ignored is the relative importance of employment and occupation. With the majority of the MDTFCA being classified as an emerging or Third World economy, First World standards are often imposed and poverty is equated to monetary income as this relates to formal employment. Although it may not be a common occurrence in the area, it is possible that families who are "unemployed" and "impoverished" could have members who are fully occupied and thus provide for their needs. It is important that livelihood analysts keep these possibilities in mind before measuring the well-being of rural people.

## **Land Management Issues**

### *Crop Production*

The relationship between crop production and the conservation of biodiversity is largely negative. Moist grasslands are relatively stable systems but they do not recover from transformation activities such as ploughing and the establishment of timber plantations. Where such activities have occurred in the area, it is safe to consider these areas lost in terms of contributions to meeting conservation targets. If these areas are well managed in terms of soil erosion control and other conservation practices, however, they could still contribute to the delivery of some ecosystem services, although the extent of delivery will be at a reduced rate of what it would have been under natural conditions.

### *Fire and Grazing*

Where the natural grasslands have been converted to intensive and irrigated pastures, biodiversity loss is on a par with crop production. The delivery of some ecosystem services will, however, be maintained. Where the natural grasslands are being used as extensive pastures, the use of fire as a management tool and the subsequent application of livestock to this resource base is a significant determinant of the extent to which such areas can contribute to biodiversity targets. The grasslands are fire-climax and it is necessary when fire is applied as a management tool that it be done in way that simulates natural processes. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the majority of the area and fire is generally applied at too frequent intervals to encourage a “spring flush” with resultant negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem functionality.

The above situation is exacerbated where grazing is applied shortly after burning. Unfortunately due to the seasonal palatability of the grasslands in the MDTFCA, this is a common management strategy for both commercial and subsistence farmers. The ramifications of such a practice are severe loss of biodiversity, significant loss of basal cover, increased soil loss through sheet and gully erosion, and an increase in the occurrence and spread of alien invasive vegetation.

### *Alien Invasive Species*

The MDTFCA is threatened by extensive and expanding infestations of various invasive alien plant species. Some species are obvious and well-known and have existing programs to manage their spread, such as black wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), gum (*Eucalyptus spp.*) and pine (*Pinus spp.*) trees. Others, despite their obvious invasion, such as American bramble (*Rubrus americana*), have no strategic control program, although some landowners do personally invest in control on their land. Still other species are considered as emerging alien invasive species and are thus neither well-known nor obvious, and very little is known about their current distributions, spread rates, or impacts.

Alien invasive plants can totally alter the functioning of an ecosystem and reduce the productive value of the land significantly. In so doing, there are often significant effects on the hydrology of an area, depending

on the scale of the invasion and the type of alien species. There is a large body of evidence to demonstrate the huge reduction in stream flow rates in infested catchments and the significant site or local impacts on species composition and structure. Alien infestations can cause local extinction of entire communities of plants and animals. Furthermore, there are also effects on nutrient cycling and associated soil integrity (erosion), fire management (where stands of aliens can change the nature of fire in a landscape), and management access (where dense stands can prevent management access to key parts of a landscape).

In terms of livelihoods, invasive alien plants can affect tourism and agricultural production. Alien trees frequently disrupt tourism viewsheds, and thorny infestations of bramble can block access paths. Extensive infestations of wattle and bramble cause the loss of rangeland and reduce stock productivity. This loss of productive land to alien plant invasions is a significant concern as it often results in increasing pressures on the remaining land. Ultimately, a negative and destructive escalation ensues, with degradation of the remaining lands through the loss of indigenous vegetation making it more susceptible to further invasion. In many cases, the cost of clearing a dense infestation exceeds the value of the land, resulting in significant management costs that need to be borne by the landowner, thus reducing profit margins (in commercial ventures) or increasing the vulnerability of the rural poor. There is, however, the opportunity for contributions to rural livelihoods through employment opportunities in eradication operations. In addition, some of the alien species provide a benefit by way of materials for the production of various household and saleable items such as building material, fuel wood, crafts, and furniture.

### *Incompatible Development Trends*

Over the last ten to twenty years, there has been a proliferation of up-market housing estate developments that are often associated with fly-fishing, golf, or equestrian activities. While this trend is country-wide in South Africa, it has begun to emerge in increasing measure within the MDTFCA. These estates target the rural areas and base their marketing strategies on attracting affluent urbanites or foreign investors into the country, which inevitably means that the homes are second or third dwellings from which

people either undertake their business dealings via the internet or they simply commute to the business centres. While these developments do offer the promise of short-term employment for impoverished local communities, they inevitably bring with them an increased demand for bulk services such as water. They also set in motion development precedents that are proving difficult for environmental authorities to manage.

### *Security*

Despite the extreme topography and climatic conditions along the international boundary, the illegal movement of people happens at unacceptably high levels. Some of these movements, while illegal, do not have criminal intent, but the majority are associated with stock theft, drug (marijuana) smuggling, or the trade in fire arms. The former two activities have been part of the culture of the MDTFCA for hundreds of years and are thus difficult to address. The cultivation and movement of marijuana contributes to the livelihoods of people, and, until alternatives have been established, a crackdown on this activity could have negative economic ramifications. It is, however, essential that the situation be addressed as these activities are affecting the conservation authorities' ability to apply resource management strategies. Arson fires are often associated with the movement of stolen livestock and drugs, and it is thus difficult to maintain sound fire management regimes. Many of the access routes between Lesotho and South Africa have become severely trampled and erosion in sensitive areas is a constant threat.

In addition to the threat to the natural and cultural resources of the area, these activities also pose a threat to existing and potential tourism development opportunities. With the tourism industry being as fickle as it is, the MDTFCA cannot afford to have negative incidents turning visitors away. Hosting the 2010 Soccer World Cup provided additional incentive and great strides were made to unite the tourism authorities and operators into a common marketing and branding strategy that included protecting the safety of visitors

### *Protected Area Network and Management Effectiveness*

The fact that the existing protected area network covers only 6 per cent of the area and that these areas are predominantly located in the high lying portions has already been alluded to. Besides the coverage that needs to increase, the distribution of these areas needs to bring more of the lower-lying areas into the network. This is of particular relevance when the possible ramifications of climate change are considered where the altitudinal movement of species will need to be taken account of.

With regard to management effectiveness, there is a need for a uniform and high standard to be attained and maintained in order to enhance and ensure the integrity of the network. The relative strength of the conservation authorities in the area varies quite significantly and thus their ability to achieve and maintain the acceptable level of management effectiveness. It is thus important that the coverage alone is not considered as the ultimate target, but this must be coupled with management effectiveness supported by committed governance and effective administration.

The ability of conservation authorities to implement effective management is inextricably linked their financial status. Protected areas in many parts of the world, and particularly in Africa, are experiencing a hand-to-mouth financial condition, are dependent upon insecure national budget allocations, have sporadic support from non-governmental conservation organizations, and rely on short-term international project funding (The Nature Conservancy 2001). Unfortunately, the protected areas in the MDTFCA are characterized by a long history of insufficient funding and the symptoms described here are prevalent. In some cases, the association with the MDTP has been used by some of the conservation authorities to leverage external funding to support conservation actions. In the face of dwindling budgets, such initiatives are understandable, but when core business, such as alien invasive plant control is used to motivate for such funding, the wisdom of this must be questioned. Conservation actions generally have long-term application and dependence on donor funding can negatively affect such action.

### *Country Differences*

This aspect may be listed under the discussion on threats; however, it is not the differences themselves that are a threat but rather the failure of the role players and stakeholders to recognize, understand, and function in spite of these differences. Implementation of this current phase of the MDTP suffered from this in the first year until the coordinators recognized the need to convene a workshop for the key role players where an effort was made to identify and understand the differences and find ways of working constructively despite them. The main areas of concern relate to South Africa's relatively stronger socio-economic position as well as its more complex legal, policy, and institutional frameworks.

The different implementation environments presented by the different aspects suggested above resulted in significantly different approaches to implementation in each country, which remained despite the workshop. The South African Project Coordinating Unit challenged and altered the implementation plan that it was presented at the start of this phase, while Lesotho adopted theirs without challenge. South Africa adopted a bioregional planning approach to implementation, whereas Lesotho followed one that was more focussed on community-based natural resource management principles. A detailed investigation and review of these different approaches was undertaken and is being written up for publication (Büscher 2010). This paper documents the difficulties experienced by the two units as they attempted to work within the prevailing differences and with different approaches aimed at achieving the same thing. In hindsight, it has been suggested that the blame for the disparate approach could be levelled at the fact that two separate grant agreements were in place for this phase and that these ignored the differences from the outset. Had there been one agreement and one coordinating unit, things may have turned out differently. As a result of the lessons that have been learnt, a more unified approach has been taken for the next phase.

## TAKING THE MALOTI DRakensBERG TRANSFRONTIER PROJECT FORWARD

The vision for the current phase of implementation was to establish a framework of cooperation between the two countries, and this has largely been achieved in spite of the differences discussed briefly above. A vital decision was taken by the Bilateral Steering Committee in November 2006, when it was agreed that the MDTP would be guided by one strategy and one action plan. It was further agreed that these guiding documents would reflect consensus on actions required, irrespective of their locality within the MDTFCA.

### **Strategy and Action Planning**

Key to ensuring transfrontier cooperation was the development of a single strategy and action plan for the MDTFCA, thus facilitating joint responsibility for achieving targets and associated actions irrespective of their locality within the area. As a result an overall bioregional planning process was developed and implemented by both countries and was facilitated by the two PCUs. This process entailed an exhaustive series of country-specific meetings alternating with bilateral workshops.. Essential feedback mechanisms were in place to ensure that the country-specific stakeholders were kept up to date with how their inputs were being treated within the collective.

As an overall point of departure, it was agreed that the MDTP is an ongoing intervention required to support conservation and development in the MDTFCA and as such the strategy would require a long-term vision. The timeframe set for the strategy is twenty years with five-year action-planning intervals. It was also agreed that both the planning process and the products are equally important, given that the strategy and action plans are being designed for implementation within a complex and dynamic environment. The concept of three- to five-year planning iterations has been accepted and will be supported by a database that will be maintained and regularly updated.

### *The Vision and Purpose*

The Twenty Year Conservation and Development Strategy for the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation Area has the following vision: *“Conserving the MDTFCA’s Natural and Cultural Heritage for the people of the region and beyond.”* This is supported by a Purpose Statement, which reads as follows: *“Effective cooperation among capacitated partners secures the MDTFCA’s priority natural and cultural heritage and supports sustainable livelihoods.”*

### *Strategic Outcomes*

In order to achieve these, six strategic outcomes have been identified, the first of which is a cross-cutting aspect that seeks to establish and maintain the enabling environment necessary for implementation of the others. Aspects related to this are cooperative governance, capacity-building, the regular review and updating of legal and policy frameworks, safety and security, stakeholder involvement, an institutionalized planning process, and coordinated research. Four of the strategic outcomes relate to various approaches needed for meeting conservation targets. The first of these has to do with the establishment and maintenance of a protected area network, while the next two relate to the application of regulatory and incentive mechanisms as well as land-use planning processes. While the conservation of natural and cultural resources could have been integrated, these have been addressed separately merely to enable the practitioners within these disciplines to easily identify and translate their responsibilities into actions. The fifth outcome thus relates solely to the conservation of cultural heritage. Lastly, an attempt has been made to separate out all livelihood-related aspects in order to highlight the effect the strategy will have on livelihoods. It remains to be seen how successful this attempt will be as critics at this early stage have suggested that most aspects within the strategy will positively affect livelihoods and the distinction should not have been attempted.

### *Action Planning*

As stated above, the strategy has a twenty-year vision and therefore broad statements that needed to be translated into more specific and achievable actions. The process followed to achieve this was through the establishment of working groups responsible for focussing on each of the strategic outcomes. For each of the strategic outcomes, a series of strategic outputs were identified with the assumption that if these are achieved the outcomes will be achieved, and if the outcomes are achieved the purpose and vision will be achieved. The link between the twenty-year strategy and the five-year action plan is the strategic outputs. For each of these, the respective focus groups were tasked with breaking the twenty-year outputs into five-year targets. Each five-year target has then been broken down into specific actions with associated timeframes, budgets, responsibilities, and targets and indicators. The targets and indicators will serve as the basis for the monitoring and evaluation plan and its link with the action plan.

While the objective is to compile an overall action plan for the MDTFCA, the basis of determining the required actions has been the existing plans of each of the implementing agencies, where these are available. In this way, it is assumed that the action plan will be more achievable and will fit within the budgets of the implementing agencies and thus enjoy ownership. The latter is absolutely crucial if the MDTP is to move forward, and this is a fact that has been recognized and reinforced by the PCUs from the outset. Fortunately, it has also been accepted that, where the overall MDTP planning process can be used to inform those of implementing agencies, they will be open to adapt theirs accordingly. Ultimately, the individual implementing agencies will have to take the overall action plan and extract from it whatever is of specific relevance to them. They will need to ensure that this is integrated into their organizational frameworks and that it is captured in annual plans of operation.

### *Presentation*

The nature of the strategy document is very technical as it is based on a substantial amount of work and information gathered through the duration of this current phase of implementation. All of the studies that have been undertaken within the various disciplines associated with the

MDTFCA have been written up as reference documents and these will be included in the strategy document in digital format as a CD in an envelope at the back of the document. It is recognized that this is a bulky product and only technically oriented officials and other stakeholders will be prepared to either review it in detail or use it often as a reference source. In order to market the product and encourage its use, a summary version in a popular format was produced with additional maps, illustrations, and photographs. The action plan, on the other hand, is a more concise document that very quickly provides the reader with a clear and specific picture of what needs to be done, who is responsible to see that it is done, when it must be completed, and how often and what resources are required.

## **Institutional Arrangements**

### *International Arrangements*

As already mentioned, the vision of this first phase of implementation was to establish the institutional framework and this has been achieved. The current structure will therefore remain but will be adjusted and added to. It has been recommended that a ministerial committee be established in order to ensure that there is always political support for and buy-in to the MDTP. The existing Bilateral Steering Committee will then remain as the international coordinating mechanism. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that was signed in 2001 has been revised and updated to reflect the vision, purpose, and strategic outcomes of the twenty-year strategy. The description of the MDTFCA boundary has also been updated as the detailed vegetation mapping exercise that was undertaken to support the systematic conservation planning process has provided a rigorous and more defensible boundary. Together with these revisions, the MoU has been upgraded to an International Agreement.

### *National Arrangements*

The Project Coordinating Committees (PCCs) are to be referred to as National Coordinating Committees (NCCs) and the Lesotho NCC, which is already a multi-ministerial structure, will retain its current structure.

The South African PCC, however, has been dominated by the conservation agencies, and it has been recognized that national departments or structures representing tourism, culture, agriculture, and water need to be represented. An existing inter-agency MoU is to be revised in order to better reflect the strategy and to accommodate the broader representation. An additional level of coordination has been recommended and that is for discipline-specific working groups to be formed in order to ensure representation at the next political level. In South Africa, this would be at the provincial level and in Lesotho at the district level.

The possibility of multi-disciplinary structures being required at a level below the NCCs must not be discarded. South Africa has passed national legislation, namely the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, which came into effect on 15 August 2005, which could be used to strengthen existing structures and to guide the establishment of new ones. The Eastern Cape province, which has a number of bioregional planning initiatives that cover various portions of the province, has established a multi-stakeholder forum known as the Eastern Cape Implementation Committee (ECIC). A MoU commits signatories to work together to implement the outcomes of the bioregional planning processes. More recently, the province has produced its own provincial conservation plan, and the ECIC will be used as the mechanism to facilitate the cooperative governance required to ensure meaningful implementation and collective responsibility for its monitoring and evaluation.

### *Assistance with Coordination and Accountability*

This current phase has been supported by grants and two multi-disciplinary coordinating units. Implementation of the next phase is to be financed by the two countries themselves, and implementation will be the responsibility of the key implementing agencies and their partners as identified by the strategy and action plan. The functional work that has been carried out by the two PCUs is to be absorbed by the implementing agencies, except where specific capacity is lacking, and two smaller units will be maintained to simply assist the BSC and NCCs with coordination.

At one point, the possibility of the establishment of an international coordination unit was discussed, but the improved level of cooperation

that had been achieved between the PCUs encouraged the BSC to decide against an international unit.

A clear distinction is to be made between the present and the coming phase with regard to accountability. The current PCUs have been responsible for implementing plans that related to the grant-funding from GEF and as such were accountable to the World Bank, their respective PCCs, and the BSC. At the same time, the PCUs endeavoured to hold the implementing agencies accountable, through the PCC representatives, for their contributions to implementation. While this proved to be a relatively complicated task for the PCUs, their role in the next phase will be simpler. The action plan that is being formulated will be the responsibility of the implementing agencies and the PCUs will assist them to hold themselves accountable to deliver.

## CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

In closing, it is necessary to briefly allude to some critical success factors. In the complex and dynamic socio-political environment of the MDTFCA, there are many but the few listed and discussed below are seen by the author to be of particular significance.

### **Institutionalization**

It has been a struggle of the PCUs to get the implementing agencies to recognize that work associated with the MDTP has not been additional to, but rather part of, their existing legal mandate. It is now apparent that this has become more accepted and institutional blinkers have been removed to embrace a more cooperative governance approach. Much work still has to be achieved to improve the NCCs and related structures as discussed above. In addition to this, local government structures need to be integrated into the MDTP structures some how. The MDTP also needs to be integrated into local government.

Much effort has been expended by the PCUs to have the MDTP integrated into the key implementing agencies, and achievements are seen in places where organizational business plans and specific job descriptions

reflect elements of the MDTP. These achievements are limited to some of the key implementing agencies, and they need to spread to all of them, as well as the new partners that need to be brought on board.

The degree of institutionalization must extend beyond specific champions and into the fibre of their respective institutions. Although it is encouraging to encounter and work with such people, the possibility that they will move on must always be kept in mind.

## **Financial Resources**

It is encouraging to see that the key implementing agencies have taken on the responsibility of continuing with the MDTP without external funding. This does not rule out the possibility that specific parcels of work may be packaged in order to attract donations, but every effort must be put in to ensure that both governments are well aware of the strategic and global significance of the MDTFCA and the work of the MDTP. The above discussion on the strategy and action planning process alluded to the need to package the strategy so that it would draw support from decision-makers. This packaging needs to go further to the extent that decision-makers are well aware that the actions required to meet the conservation targets for the MDTFCA are the least-cost option to securing vital ecosystem services upon which the economies of each country depend.

## **The Realities of Conservation Targets and Institutional Capacity**

In the process of developing strategies, and particularly action plans, it is important to ensure that they are achievable. In order to do so, the existing capacities of the responsible agencies must be considered and built into the plans. This process must, however, be superimposed on the realities of the conservation targets that are to be met. It is possible that the resources needed to meet the conservation targets are not available at the time of compiling the action plan. In this case, it is critical that the implications of not meeting the targets must be clearly understood and every effort made to close the gap.

It is understandable that an implementing agency will produce an action plan that is realistic so that it can report positively on its achievements, but if such an implementing agency is responsible for achieving conservation targets, surely it should rather be measured against these. The MDTFCA is too important an area to be lost under a pile of glowing annual reports that show the achievement of organizational targets but ignore the failures to achieve the conservation targets.

## **Linking Conservation and Livelihoods**

According to the principles of sustainability, it is understood that, in order to secure the conservation of the natural and cultural resource base of an area, there has to be relevance to the livelihoods of affected communities. The MDTP's recognition of this is reflected in the title of the initiative, i.e., conservation and development, and in the detail of the twenty-year strategy. It was also recognized that nature-based tourism would only provide a relatively small contribution to livelihoods and that a more diverse approach was required. To this end, models to support the payment for ecosystem services are being developed. The possibility of brokering agreements between the recipients, or consumers, of ecosystem services from the MDTFCA, and the rural communities, or producers, of these services holds great promise. It is critical that these models are applied once completed and that other ecosystem service opportunities are explored to ensure the social acceptability of the MDTP and support for the continued conservation of the MDTFCA.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This paper is essentially a summary of the Twenty-Year Transfrontier Conservation and Development Strategy (2008–2028) that has been compiled for the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Project. As such, all who have been involved in this endeavour are acknowledged and honoured for their hard work. The strategy in its complete form is available on our web site, [www.maloti.org](http://www.maloti.org).

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