



# Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme

## QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT

### FIFTH QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT JULY - SEPTEMBER 2005

#### PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

##### Introduction

This is the fifth quarterly progress report for the MWBP, produced for the Programme Management Committee meeting on 13 October 2005. It covers the period from July to September 2005. The full progress report of activities taken from the database will follow once editing has been completed. This summary report highlights achievements and constraints experienced during the quarter.

##### Strengthening national ownership

At the PMC meeting in Hanoi in July 2005, it was agreed that the chair of the PMC would rotate between the National Programme Directors. The NPD of the country in which the meeting is being held would be the chair, with UNDP Res Rep from Lao PDR being the Co-chair. For the Executive Regional Steering Committee the UNDP Res Rep from Lao PDR would continue to act as chair, with the chair of the National Steering Committee of the country in which the meeting is held being Co-chair. This has been endorsed by the NPDs.

No formal steering committee meetings have been held in any of the four countries during this period. However, coordination and planning meetings are regularly held between MWBP staff and government counterparts, and when UNDP TL and IUCN PM are visiting. These meetings have helped in the development of work plans for the remainder of 2005 and for 2006.

- Cambodia – regular meetings and support to NPD and MoE staff.
- Lao PDR – monthly meetings with LARReC, involving NPO, PMU and IUCN Lao.
- Thailand – Provincial planning meeting held in end August in Nakhon Phanom, followed by joint-Provincial Management Board held in Nong Khai in mid-September
- Vietnam – roundtable meeting held in Cau Lanh PPO, between NPD, Provincial Co-Managers, and IUCN PM, NPC, Project Co-Manager.

#### Activity Highlights and Achievements (arranged by “Story”)

##### A. Let the River Flow:

###### Environmental flows

- The Specialist reports on the environmental flow studies of the Mekong mainstream have been received and are being assessed by the MRC flows team. This will lead to a workshop in November where integration and consolidation of the reports will be undertaken.
- IUCN’s Water and Nature Initiative (WANI) has also continued with Environmental Flows work. The rapid flows assessment in Huong Basin Vietnam supported by WANI and IWMI

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was presented at a stakeholder workshop in Vietnam. WANI also organised a session on Environmental Flows at 2<sup>nd</sup> South East Asia Water Forum in Bali attended by MWBP staff from both Thailand and Vietnam. Working Groups are being established in each of the countries to discuss and translate the 'Flows' book into local languages.

- In the Songkhram, the report on the assessment of irrigation field study undertaken by Khon Kaen University is being reviewed.
- In Lao, the second Upper Mekong monitoring mission for 2005 was undertaken in September. A final report incorporating all four missions is being produced with a national workshop planned in January 2006. Both the NPD and NPC were both involved in this and there was additional representation from Yunnan Environmental Protection Board in China and Centre for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK).
- Participation of Lao NPD and NPC at the UNDP Community Dialogue meeting held in Chiang Khong in August 2005

### B. Flagships for Biodiversity

#### Mapping and Inventory:

- Based upon the earlier wetland surveys the SWAMP wetland database held by the MRC has been populated with data and images;
- A draft wetland map (see image) has been produced for Stung Treng, based upon satellite imagery and ground truthing. The methodology for this has been assessed and refined and during the next quarter there will be an intensive period of GIS and mapping activity,
  - analysing Landsat images of the four demonstration sites
  - update of existing basin wide map with new information from Thailand and Viet Nam;
  - assessment of Cambodian Land Use map for representation of wetlands (using field data from Stung Treng site)
- The Draft Biodiversity Overlay of Protected Areas in the Lower Mekong has been produced with acquisition of map data for wetlands, biodiversity and Protected Areas (see draft overlay);

#### Species Conservation Action Planning:

- **Crocodiles** - The crocodile surveys in Lao PDR have been completed by WCS and LARReC with hatchlings indicating small breeding populations being recorded in several locations. Proposals have been received for community-based conservation measures at one of the wetland sites in Attapeu province.
- A crocodile survey in Vietnam has discovered a non-breeding population of Siamese Crocodiles, threatened by construction of a dam and flooding of the site. A rescue/conservation plan for this small population is being considered.
- Institutional constraints have limited the implementation of crocodile initiatives in Cambodia

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- **Dolphin** field surveys were carried out in Vietnam – no present evidence of the Irrawaddy dolphin existing in the Mekong Delta, although historical accounts and evidence of dolphin skeletons were recorded.
- The partnership between MWBP and WWF, WCS and Cambodia Mekong Dolphin Conservation project has been finalised and joint activities started together with the Department of Fisheries in Cambodia. One such activity has been a television documentary on the dolphins by Animal Planet.
- Dolphin monitoring posts are being established in Cambodia
- Preparations are being made for a follow-up workshop for the transboundary Dolphin collaboration between Lao PDR and Cambodia, leading to the establishment of a transboundary committee.
- **Giant Catfish** – A detailed implementation plan for catfish work has been prepared
- The partnership between NACA and the Darwin Initiative Catfish project has been established and a regional working group meeting was held in August in Bangkok. This was the first time that regional experts had come together to discuss catfish issues. There will be a second working group meeting in December in Phnom Penh
- Priority issues were identified and these will be presented at the MRC Fisheries Programme meeting in November.
- A Technical paper on Observations and Comments about Handling of Mekong Giant Catfish and suggestions for Improvement has been produced and circulated to partners.
- **Sarus Crane** - data on large waterbird populations and status of associated wetlands has been received from International Crane Foundation.
- The Large Waterbird Technical meeting will be held in Phnom Penh between 25 – 27 October at which the Sarus Crane SCAP planning process will be initiated
- A planning meeting was held in Vientiane in early August 2005 to develop the framework for **wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring** in the demonstration sites. This meeting identified priorities and developed workplans for field work in three of Demonstration sites planned for next quarter. During these assessments there will be an emphasis upon capacity building of provincial counterparts, as well as technical information reporting.
- **Wildlife trade** issues in the Demo Sites – TRAFFIC have started their wet season surveys in Attapeu and Stung Treng. Preliminary results will be available in November with dry season surveys planned for January/February 2006
- **Invasive Alien species** - Initiate monitoring of *Mimosa pigra* in Tram Chim. Technical inputs provided to the design of experimental mimosa clearance program.

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### C. People using wetlands

#### Livelihoods

- **Stung Treng –**
  - Sala Phoum research has begun with the Cambodian NGO Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA) taking the lead. The research is focusing on fish species and ecosystems in the Ramsar Site. The first feedback workshop is planned for October to present findings so far – including discussion of the 60 fish species that Sala Phoum researchers have identified and photographed.
  - Study tour to southern Lao PDR on development of community fisheries, involving stakeholders such as community fisheries, head of commune, provincial department staff, CEPA, CAA). Many sites were visited with lessons learnt for the improvement of community fisheries in Stung Treng.
  - Preparation of community based health interventions has begun with Health Unlimited leading a mission to Stung Treng in September to work with provincial partners in order to prepare work plans for 2006.
  - Consultancies for income generating activities including silk cultivation, organic agriculture and community based ecotourism have been prepared.
  
- **Attapeu**
  - Integrated Participatory Planning activities have been carried out in 4 target villages in Attapeu. Representatives from provincial and district line agencies together with project partners developed an approach for planning interventions with villagers and then visited the villages to develop these plans. These relate to community fisheries and aquaculture of indigenous species, community health interventions, provision of tubewells and others. Feedback workshops have also been held with concerned provincial and district agencies. Implementation of these activities will begin in the final quarter of 2005.
  - The importance of these interventions was highlighted by the recent floods that left several of the target villages needing medical supplies, for which a contribution was made by the MWBP. Further health related interventions are being led by Health Unlimited in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health as part of the Integrated Planning Process.
  - Visit to Champassack province for 29 participants including villagers to study community fisheries and fish conservation zones.
  
- **Songkhram –**
  - Thai Baan research is being extended to new villages and new areas of research are to be addressed by existing villages. This is being led by the Thai Baan Research Network in Songkhram.
  - Thai Baan researchers have participated in Fishery Resource Management workshop organised by MRC Fisheries Programme (1-3 August 2005)
  - The Songkhram River Conservation and Rehabilitation Club has submitted proposals for additional activities to the First Provincial Steering Committee held in

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August 2005. These activities will link with the expansion of Thai Baan research to new villages in the Songkhram basin.

- MWBP staff and Thai Baan researchers provided input to the multi-stakeholder platform organised by the Nakhon Phanom Provincial Natural Resources and Environment Office planning workshop that developed a draft provincial management plan for natural resource management.
  - Songkhram Thai Baan researchers hosted study tours for Stung Treng Sala Phoum researchers, and for representatives from CARE Vietnam who are beginning similar activities in their demonstration sites. A similar visit from Attapeu is planned for November.
  - Media interest remains high with Thai TV programmes, newspapers and magazines all visiting Songkhram interviewing MWBP staff and partners.
  - Local schools continue to implement water quality testing in their own stretches of the river with support from Walai Rukhavej Botanical Research Institute.
- **Plain of Reeds**
    - CARE in Vietnam have started implementing livelihoods work in Tram Chim and Lang Sen. A consultant from CARE visited the area and made recommendations for options for resource user organisations.
    - Exchange visit of MWBP and CARE staff and partners was made to Songkhram to discuss how Thai Baan approaches may be applied in the Plain of Reeds

### Environmental Economics

- **Irrigation impacts on wetland resources** - A regional project proposal on topic of " socio-economic assessment of interactions between smallholder irrigation and wetland resources in the Lower Mekong Basin" covering three demonstration areas of MWBP in Cambodia, Lao and Thailand has been developed in collaboration with IWMI. Vietnam partners have also indicated an interest in this.
- **Development of strategy paper on "socio-economic component of MWBP activities in LMB** - Work started in reviewing past studies and program documents to develop an environmental economics strategy paper of the MWBP, which will be very useful outputs for making a detailed programme document of second phase of the MWBP's activities in the region.

### **Cambodia**

- MWBP's economist advised and mentored an economist from IFReDI, Phnom Penh, for a "socio-economic study on small scale fisheries in Cambodia"; funded by fisheries programme of MRC. The field study is completed in Kampong Cham provinces and review and field work in other provinces are going on in Cambodia now.
- Initiated the selection of sites and consultation with the local partners for such field level assessment on "irrigation impacts on wetland" in selected sites (2) in Stung Treng province.

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### Lao

- In collaboration with National University of Lao, Vientiane, a detailed proposal and work plan for study on irrigation impacts study on wetland resources using That Luang Marsh in Vientiane as a case study site in LMB has been developed. The proposal has been submitted to EEPSEA, an IDRC funded grant program in SE Asia in August, 2005.
- Attepeu province - Initiated the process of selection of field assessment sites and potential partners for "irrigation and wetland interaction" study in Attepeu. The field activities will be initiated by the end of October.

### Thailand

- In Songkhram, initiated the preparatory work for study on "irrigation and wetland interaction" in selected sites, particularly collection of the background information and partners for the field activities.
- Initiated a planning for a broad brush assessment of the evaluation of the flooded forest area in Songkhram sub-basin area; this will be done in collaboration with Mahidol University, Thailand.

### Vietnam

- MWBP's economist assisted a group of economists in Viet Nam, from Ho-Chi-Minh City area, in developing a project in relation to assessment of alternate management plans of Tram Chim National Park. Recently, the selection of team members and process of carrying out the assessment activities in 2006, and activities to be taken to prepare a background paper for the demonstration sites have been finalized.

### D. Towards wise use of wetlands

#### Wetland Policy – Guiding principles, Sectoral policy reviews and National Wetland Action Plans

- Regional Guiding Principles activities have been initiated by MRC :
  - developing questionnaires on CBD and Ramsar implementation;
  - interviewing non-government representatives on CBD and Ramsar implementation;
  - planning national meetings with government agencies and related sectors to start dialogue on CBD and Ramsar implementation;
- Several MWBP country team members and partner staff took part in the MRC Policy dialogue on Watershed management in mid-September, at which UNDP TL made a presentation on the process of reviewing sectoral policies affecting wetlands.
- **In Cambodia**, MWBP have assisted the Ministry of Environment in moves to establish the National Wetlands Management Committee. The sub-decree on the establishment of NWMC has been reviewed at meeting of the Councils of Ministers. It is hoped that it can be finalized in October
- The proposal for sectoral policy review (UNDP TRAC) funds was agreed and signed and inception work has begun

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- **In Lao PDR**, the sectoral policy review process will follow the studies already carried out on the accession to the Ramsar Convention. The final report for the Ramsar feasibility has been completed.
- A moratorium has been declared on medium-scale goldmining in the Sekong River in Attapeu due to concerns of environmental and social impacts, highlighted during the first EIA workshop. Further recommendations coming out of a second EIA workshop held in Attapeu in August will lead to case studies being prepared on the environmental and social impacts of goldmining in the Sekong river, irrigation, timber processing, and solid wastes. In addition it is proposed to conduct a participatory survey to establish zoning of key fisheries resources and goldmining sites in the Sekong
- **In Thailand**, Based on discussions with ONEP a draft proposal for the use of UNDP TRAC funds being prepared ready for submission at beginning of November
- UNDP TL took part in a visit to northern Thailand to Kwan Phayao and Nong Leng Sai to advise on rehabilitation measures and possible inclusion in future support to wetlands work.
- **In Vietnam**, this process has not yet started, but it is expected that there will be a linkage with the proposed Dutch funded National Wetlands Support Project. A second meeting with VEPA and NWSP was held in September
- In Tram Chim, the second visit of the multi-disciplinary team developing the Fire and Water Management Strategy took place. Physical structures (filling gaps of dykes, construction of spill dams, installation of hydrology monitoring equipment) for research for the fire and water strategy completed. Planned activities on soil, water, hydrology, and vegetation research are taking place at Tram Chim National Park. A technical workshop was held in mid-September. A draft fire management plan for the park was developed.
- Co-incident with the visit of a three person Fire management team from the US Department of Agriculture, a two-day workshop was organised to consider the issues of management of fire and fire ecology in wetlands in the Mekong Delta. This workshop made strong recommendations to the national authorities to consider the role of prescribed fire in wetlands management, especially in National Parks.

### Support to Ramsar Convention

- A proposal for a **Mekong Region Ramsar Initiative** has been prepared and circulated to programme partners. This will be discussed at the PMC meeting and will form the basis of a roundtable meeting at the Ramsar COP9 in Kampala, Uganda in November.
- UNDP TL represented Peter Bridgewater, Ramsar Secretary General, in presenting a key note address at the UNESCO MAB-Ecotone workshop in Pakse at beginning of October.
- **In Cambodia**, assistance provided to Ministry of Environment to prepare the country report for implementation of the Ramsar Convention
- The legal status is being clarified of Stung Treng Ramsar site for leading to boundary demarcation. Stung Treng Ramsar site has been established but it is not fully protected by the Cambodian law.

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- **In Lao PDR**, the report on the feasibility of accession to Ramsar has been finalised and the accession under active consideration by the Lao Government. High-level Lao government representation to COP9 is being facilitated through the MWBP
- **In Thailand**, a contribution to highlight the work in Songkhram in the Thailand national booth for COP9 has been developed
- **In Vietnam**, assistance has been provided to VEPA in the production of a paper "Overview of Viet Nam Wetlands Status after 15 years of Ramsar implementation" in collaboration with the IUCN Country Office. The report has been completed and launched at the National workshop held on 23 August 2005. The published report will be ready by the end of October for the Ramsar COP9.

### E. Programme implementation and cross-cutting issues

#### Training

- **Communication skills** training was conducted by the regional communication coordinator, 4 National Training and Communication coordinators and 4 outreach officers of the MWBP at Vientiane from 4 to 8 July 2005.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation** training was completed for 25 participants from programme staff and counter part staff at Vientiane from 17 to 22 August 2005.
- Nine participants (2 or 3 government counterparts from each riparian country) attended the three week **Mekong Wetland Ecology and Management Training Course** which was held at Vientiane from 3 to 24 August 2005. This was organised by The University Network for Wetland Ecology and Conservation Trainings in the Mekong Region and the International Crane Foundation. One full-day seminar involving presentations from staff from all three MWBP implementing partners on 5 August 2005 was arranged and contributed to the training event.
- Four participants (1 from PMU and 3 from national offices) have started a 4-month, self-learning online training course on **Wetland Management** (September - December 2005) conducted by UNESCO-IHE, Institute for Water Education, Netherlands.
- The training course on **Economic Valuation related to Wetlands Management** will be conducted for 25 participants from programme staff, and partner agency staff in Vientiane from 10 to 15 October 2005.
- Preparation for 16 participants (4 from PMU and 12 from four national program office and government counterparts) to attend **COP9 and Study Tour to Uganda** which will be held on 8 – 15, 16-20 November 2005. This has included the commissioning of a specialist in Uganda wetlands to prepare a briefing paper for the study tour.

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- The collaboration with RECOFTC has developed through planning for the learning process in **wetlands collaborative management** (4 courses) to be conducted in four demonstration sites. The first course will be organised in early next year at the Songkhram demonstration site. In addition, two customized courses in Facilitation and Communication Skills will be conducted on 28 November to 3 December 2005, and the Conflict Management training will take place in second week of February 2006.
- In Stung Treng, an introductory training was organised for the Ramsar Site rangers. Further trainings will be organised to develop the capacity of these rangers in different aspects.
- In Attapeu a second EIA training was organised to consider assessment needs related to hydropower development.

### Communications

- **Regional Communications Training** - MWBP communications staff received communication skills training. MWBP Communications Staff are competent in key communications working skills including, media, strategy writing, branding, website etc. The communications team is now producing quality communications materials, successfully fulfilling their duties and playing a pivotal role within their office. Information flow within the programme, which is heavily reliant on the communications team, is being distributed and communicated efficiently.
- **Regional Networking Action Plan (Strategy)** - Completed and implementation commenced - Key staff made aware of their roles and responsibilities; membership almost completed for priority networks; RCFW second annual meeting arrangements progressed; information being circulated and archived. These achievements have resulted in the programme gathering and disseminating information and research, and monitoring industry trends and issues. MWBP is now in a position to be proactive in information dissemination and response, as well as aware of current networks in order to bring together key experts in the region.
- **Internal Communications Strategy** - The final draft of the internal strategy is still under review, however initial implementation has begun. The strategy presents simple activities to ensure that all staff and partners remain up-to-date regarding the programme and are free to provide feedback at any time. The strategy formalises the process for internal communications so that all staff and partners are accountable for their contribution, creating a sense of ownership and responsibility for all parties.
- **Website** - The website is continuously growing to reflect the programme. Internal feedback about the website has been very positive, and external organisations (WWF Laos) have requested email updates about the website changes. Updates are taking place approximately every 1-2 weeks and the website is now becoming the “hub” for information about the programme, both for staff and externally.

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- **Media** - Six programme media releases distributed; one media meeting held in Viet Nam. At least seven references to the programme in regional media (outcomes of the Viet Nam media meeting are still coming through). Twenty-four journalists were present at the Viet Nam media meeting where two presentations were given by the RCNC "Regional Perspective of MWBP" and "MWBP and the Media: A Sustainable Partnership for the Future". The first presentation was covered in Vietnamese media, and the second instigated a long discussion about media needs and how the programme can meet them. The Thai TV station Channel 11 broadcast an interview with Thai Baan researchers about their work in the Songkhram. Other Thai media have also visited the Songkhram.
- **Publication production and review** - Programme publications peer reviewed and produced with branding. All available publications from MWBP are now available on the website. Hard-copies were also produced. These include the WWD 2005 Activity Report, Participatory Poverty Assessments for each country, Thai Baan Guidelines (Internal only)
- **Promotional materials** Initial promotional produced for the programme. Through the production of stickers, t-shirts, reprinting posters the programme is building identity.
- **Branding Guide** - Monitoring of programme branding. Programme branding is complex and at present not always correct. Continuous monitoring and communication has taken place over the past months to ensure correct usage of the guide and representation of the programme. How the programme is perceived and communicated is highly important to our partners and donors.

### Office operations and staffing

#### Finance Guidelines

A draft of financial operations procedures and guidelines for the IUCN-managed parts of the MWBP has been produced. This is a key document for the transparency of financial operations at the PMU, national and provincial offices and is considered a living document in that parts may be revised according to experience of operations. It has been tabled for consideration at the PMC meeting.

The refinement of the financial reporting process is presented at the PMC, and comment requested on its suitability for the needs of programme partners.

#### Revising workplans and developing workplans for 2006

Considerable effort has been put into the revision of workplans and budgets for 2005. It was realised that the original 2005 workplan was over-ambitious, and a number of activities and tasks have been pushed forward into 2006. They form the basis of the 2006 workplan, which will be supplemented with additional activities and tasks. A briefing document has been prepared and tabled for consideration at the PMC meeting for simplifying the allocations of funds according to the different components.

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### Database, Monitoring and Evaluation

The MWBP database and M & E system has continued to be refined and expanded to include other information, e.g. deliverables, media, publications, meetings and trip reports. The indicator monitoring system is now established and a summary of this is attached as an annex to this report.

### Mid-year internal review

An internal review of the MWBP was conducted by the Programme Administrator and the M & E specialist, through discussions and questionnaires sent round to the different programme staff at regional, national and provincial levels. This review has been very useful in highlighting issues and perceptions that could develop into constraints for implementation in the future and in making recommendations on how to address them. This Internal review is provided for information to PMC members.

### Dialogue with IUCN Asia Regional Office

A meeting was held in mid-September between key PMU staff and the IUCN Regional office in Bangkok. The purpose was to address some of the constraints identified in the mid-term review, and to identify additional areas of support from IUCN ARO to MWBP and linkages with the IUCN country offices. One key requirement was assistance in the development and administration of contracts for consultancies and work under the MWBP.

### Final recruitments

During the quarter the final recruitments for the national and provincial offices have been completed. These have included:

- In Cambodia – the appointment of Mr Pech Darong as Project Co-Manager in Stung Treng and his replacement by Mr.Sous Sivutha as Outreach Officer.
- In Lao PDR – the appointment of Mr. Phatsakorn as National Training and Communications Coordinator in NPO, Vientiane
- In Thailand – recruitment completed
- In Vietnam – appointment of Ms. Le Minh Huyen as Finance and Admin Officer in the PPO in Cau Lanh. A driver has also been appointed

### Office Operations

All nine offices (PMU + 2 offices in each country) are now fully operational. The PPO in Cau Lanh, Vietnam, has taken some time to establish, in getting the necessary permissions from Provincial authorities, and renovations, but these are now complete. In Attapeu, the PPO has now relocated from temporary space to a permanent office in the offices of the Extension Service of the Provincial Agriculture and Forests Office. This office is now fully operational.

### **Issues and Constraints**

#### • **Funding issues**

The relatively low spending rate during the early months of the year, has meant that there is no shortage of funds for much of the work undertaken by the MWBP. The contract for the Dutch

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Livelihoods funds has now been finalised and it is hoped that these funds will flow shortly. The decision to use existing funds for livelihoods work pending the receipt of the Dutch Livelihoods funds has enabled much of the planning work to be completed so that actual implementation can proceed.

- **Administration assistance in PMU**

With the expansion of work in the PMU, and with all the technical staff on board, it has become apparent that support is needed for contracts administration and monitoring. The support will reduce the time spent by the technical staff in the preparation of contracts. On the job advice and training for programme staff at all levels in contracts administration should also be provided. IUCN ARO has agreed to provide some additional support on this.

- **Communications**

The provision of the internal communications strategy and branding guidelines are helping to improve communications between the programme offices. However, reliance upon emails as the only means of communication has often been shown to be insufficient, and phone calls and faxes are still necessary to ensure that messages get through and areas of confusion resolved.

- **Continuing need for orientation of staff and partners**

Despite regular orientation presentations at trainings and meetings this continues to be a requirement for a programme as complex as MWBP.

Signed

**Peter-John Meynell**  
UNDP Team Leader

3/7/2005

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