Increasing local, national, and international awareness of the unique biodiversity of the Succulent Karoo.

The stakeholders involved in designing the SKEP strategy recognised that generating local and national awareness about the importance of the Succulent Karoo Hotspot was the first step to ensuring that conservation and sustainable land-use practices are adopted. The strategy sought to raise the profile of the unique nature of the biodiversity of the region among land-users, government officials, and youth; these have been the areas targeted by various projects funded by the CEPF. Although a baseline study was unfortunately never undertaken prior to SKEP, it is generally agreed that one of the greatest successes of SKEP has been in the arena of raising awareness of the region as an important conservation priority.

Addressing the strategic priorities:

At national scale, both governments have committed to new policies and programmes that will support the achievement of the SKEP targets because of the interventions by the SKEP CU and project implementers. In line with the strategic priorities, awareness was raised at several international and important industry programmes.

Our strategy was to:

- target key land use sectors in conservation activities;
- run awareness campaigns for government officials; and
- focus on environmental education and programs for involving schools in biodiversity conservation.

Awareness of government officials:

Through many and very successful awareness campaigns and projects the programme have received support from various implementing partners, for example the involvement of both industry players and the agricultural sector in the RARE awareness campaign in Northern Namaqualand. Through the Knersvlakte awareness campaign, targeting farmers and workers, mining companies and the schools in the region support is being built for the establishment of a new provincial reserve. Through a small biodiversity booklet in Bushmanland priority area support is being build for the establishment of a network of
private and communal reserves in the area.

The most significant impact thus far has to be at the level of local municipalities. At a recent SKEP Implementation Committee meeting, Ruan Kruger from the Development bank of Southern Africa said the following about municipalities:

“During my recent travels to the West coast and other Namaqualand municipalities I discovered that all the municipalities were aware of the SKEP programme and are well aware that they should include SKEP priorities into their future planning.”

Everyone is both speaking, and more importantly, starting to base some of their decision-making on the SKEP priorities.

Through various presentations and participation of both SKEP Co-ordination Unit and implementing partners at national and local events like the Arid zone forum, Fynbos Forum, SA National Mining and Biodiversity Forum, National Bioregional forum, the Programme has become known among key stakeholders. The results of this support can be seen from the Northern Cape Government including the Premier and MEC, who both verbally agreed to sign the SKEP MoU in 2005. It is further seen by the recent focus and alignment of funding sources to support implementation at local level from the Northern Cape Government.

Several other high-level government-briefing meetings have been held with department heads. These include meetings with permanent secretary of MET, SANBI board and executive committee, all who have recognized and support the Programme’s activities. Through several meetings with DBSA, the Programme has received funding alignment. Recently the Co-ordination Unit presented to the Director of Resource Use in the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT). Through these effective awareness-raising meetings with government officials, the Programme has received support for several of the SKEP activities.

Environmental Education:

Several Environmental education programmes for schools have been initiated. With support from the South African Botanical Society, the first Succulent Karoo Eco-schools node was started in Calvinia in 2005. Recently through support from CEPF, the Southern Karoo Environmental Education Programme (SKEEP) in the Little Karoo formed a partnership with
the Junior Land Care Programme of the Department of Agriculture and the Western Cape Education Department. The project focuses on running school education camps and developing appropriate lesson materials.

International events include a presentation by the SKEP Co-ordination Unit at Conservation International’s annual conference in 2003 and 2004; a slide presentation and participation at the World Parks Congress; a presentation in one of the parallel sessions at the IUCN conservation congress in Bangkok; several high-level field trips, including the CEO of SANBI, CEO of Cape Nature; as well as many donor visits that have been hosted by the Co-ordination Unit in the Succulent Karoo. The most recent visit of donors has resulted in the financial support for Namaqua Wilderness Initiative being implemented by CI.

In 2004 the CI communications team visited the regions and filmed an awareness video to be released in 2006. This video focuses on the unique biodiversity of the Succulent Karoo Hotspot and people’s connection with this

Creating Pride - A model for awareness raising in the Northern Cape

Just one year after the implementation of this awareness raising campaign in the region, farmers in the Northern Namaqualand were able to correctly identify three effects of overgrazing.

Post campaign survey results showed that farmers’ awareness of overgrazing increased from 6.34% to 30%. Conservation International’s conservation educator, Morne Farmer, conducted this initiative, originally identified as a priority action by stakeholders during the planning phase of the SKEP programme. The campaign module that was developed by RARE and Morne, a local resident from Steinkopf, was sent to the United Kingdom to learn the pride methodology and then implement his project in the Northern Namaqualand region. The campaign began in December 2003 with the aim of raising awareness, increasing knowledge and changing behavior of the general public in the region towards the environment.

Future Goals:

- To continue building the capacity of civil society to conduct action-based awareness campaigns.
- Facilitate participatory approaches for the development of educational and awareness materials on biodiversity (e.g. videos, poster design competitions, etc.).
- Develop school programmes to get youth involved in protecting biodiversity in their region.
- Develop a Succulent Karoo brand for marketing natural resource and tourism products that are developed sustainably.
- Continue to facilitate exchange programmes, attendance at international environmental forums, and to raise the profile of the SKH.
- To seek co-funding for the SKEP communications strategy.