

On the threshold of something special

Four recently evaluated ITTO projects show that creative approaches to conservation on international borders can benefit local people, biodiversity and cooperation between countries—but long-term commitment is needed

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BIODIVERSITY conservation, community participation and development, international peace and cooperation: each of the goals implicit in these terms, taken separately, is very difficult to achieve, and combining them might therefore be expected to magnify the difficulty. But in border regions, striving for all three goals at once might actually be the best way to realise any single one of them.

This is the challenge that several countries, with ITTO assistance, have decided to undertake. Since 2000, four ITTO projects in Ecuador, Peru, Indonesia and Thailand (Table 1) have made starts in participatory biodiversity conservation in border regions. Despite many obstacles, relatively little funding and short execution periods, each has achieved impressive results, providing hope and inspiration for future biodiversity conservation efforts.

This article summarises the overall results of an ex-post evaluation of the four projects, the first phases of which recently came to an end. The evaluation was conducted in early 2005 by a team comprising Gary Wetterberg (USA), Maria Tereza Jorge Padua (Brazil), Carlos Roberto Bueno (Brazil) and the current author (team leader; Peru/France).



Photo: G. Wetterberg

Similarities and differences

The four projects had some important similarities and differences. All four were located in international frontiers with very high biodiversity value, and they were all executed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with governmental support. In three of the four project areas the cooperation of the very poor, mostly indigenous local communities is essential for achieving biodiversity conservation. In Ecuador and Peru the projects aimed to establish protected areas, while in Indonesia and Thailand the protected areas already existed.

A significant difference between the Ecuador/Peru projects and the two in Asia was that the Ecuador/Peru projects

Project summaries

Table 1: Four ITTO transboundary conservation projects

PROJECT NUMBER	PROJECT TITLE	IMPLEMENTING AGENCY	ITTO FUNDS (US\$)	ITTO DONOR COUNTRIES	TOTAL BUDGET (including in-kind contributions; US\$)
PD 2/00 Rev.2 (F)*	Bi-national conservation and peace in the Condor Range region, Ecuador-Peru: Phase I (Ecuadorian component)	Natura Foundation	701 701	Japan, USA	926 160
PD 3/00 Rev.2 (F)*	Bi-national conservation and peace in the Condor Range region, Ecuador-Peru: Phase I (Peruvian component)	Conservation International—Peru	701 502	Japan, Switzerland, USA, Korea	852 160
PD 38/00 Rev. 1 (F)	Management of Kayan Mentarang National Park to promote transboundary conservation along the border between Indonesia and Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak – Phase I	WWF Indonesia	853 398	Japan, Switzerland, USA	1 040 676
PD 16/97 Rev.3 (F)	Integrated buffer zone development for sustainable management of tropical forest resources in Thailand	Thailand Environment Institute	601 333	Netherlands, Japan, Australia	695 240
TOTAL			2 857 934		3 514 236

*See TFU 14/4 for a summary of the outcomes of these two projects



Residents: Dayaks in Indonesia's Kayan Mentarang National Park. *Photo: G. Wetterberg*

were implemented in tandem in protected areas that adjoined across an international boundary. Indonesia's Kayan Mentarang project, on the other hand, did not have such a sister project in Malaysia—although the Pulong Tau National Park in Sarawak has recently been extended so as to be contiguous with Kayan Mentarang and an ITTO project there is starting up. Thailand's Kaeng Krachan National Park, although abutting the border with Myanmar, does not connect with any protected area there.

It may be impossible in many places to conserve tropical forest biodiversity without the willing collaboration of local people, but it is also evident from accumulated experience that community participation in biodiversity conservation is not easy. Most communities value and want to protect biodiversity, but not at the expense of their own survival and development.

The projects varied in the size of the communities with which they dealt. In Ecuador the project encompassed over 88 000 people, including 8000 Shuar Indians; in Peru, the project's

sphere of influence included some 22 000 Aguaruna and Huambisa Indians. Kayan Mentarang, a very large park (1.36 million hectares), is occupied by 16 000 Dayaks, while few people live in Kaeng Krachan National Park (which is also a much smaller 291 500 hectares in size). Moreover, Kayan Mentarang has had very little management presence in the past, while Kaeng Krachan is well-equipped and heavily visited. Therefore, the Kayan Mentarang project set about establishing a set of management practices for the use of the Park's resources in ways compatible with biodiversity conservation, while in Kaeng Krachan much of the work with communities focused on the Park's buffer zone.

Conservation and development

It may be impossible in many places to conserve tropical forest biodiversity without the willing collaboration of local people, but it is also evident from accumulated experience that community participation in biodiversity conservation is not easy. Most communities value and want to protect biodiversity, but not at the expense of their own survival and development. The main achievement of the projects in Ecuador, Indonesia and Peru has been to offer alternative approaches in which development does not lead to degradation, nor conservation hinder development.

Under the influence of the ITTO project the Dayak people living inside the Kayan Mentarang National Park now show a willingness to adapt their development activities so that they are more in line with the park's management objectives. They also discussed and agreed on a re-delimitation of the park's boundaries that may reduce conflicts over resources while maintaining the size and integrity of the park.

The Thai project achieved good results in the buffer zone of the Kaeng Krachan National Park by harmonising agricultural production techniques with biodiversity requirements and restoring degraded forests in an effort



Borderland: the international boundary between Thailand and the Union of Myanmar follows the distant ridges at the edge of the Kaeng Krachan National Park. *Photo: G. Wetterberg*



Great hope: biodiversity conservation and international peace—ITTO transboundary goals—will be in the hands of youngsters such as this visitor to Thailand's Kaeng Krachan National Park. *Photo: G. Wetterberg*

to provide refuges for wildlife outside the park. The main conflict between the park and the farmers in the area is created by frequent incursions of wild elephants into semi-industrial pineapple plantations; additional funds have since been acquired to find ways of dealing with this problem.

Biodiversity conservation in the Condor

Despite a long history of deception and broken government promises, the indigenous people of the Condor range in Ecuador and Peru agreed to set aside relatively large portions of their traditional territories to establish protected areas and buffer zones. Table 2 shows the new protected areas that indigenous people agreed could be established on their land and incorporated in national protected-area networks; this is one of the main conservation outcomes of the two projects and is almost unprecedented in recent times, since indigenous people are generally strongly opposed to the establishment of new protected areas. The project has also been instrumental in the highly participatory preparation of management plans for the new and proposed protected areas and also of several regional development plans with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including public authorities and both indigenous and non-indigenous local people.

Nevertheless, the results of the Peru/Ecuador projects are not yet sufficient to guarantee biodiversity conservation in the Condor range. The three new Ecuadorian protected areas are too small to ensure adequate protection of the wildlife, and in any case they have not been deemed totally protected: even mining may be allowed within them. The Peruvian proposal for a new national park, despite its larger size and the fact that it will be 'totally protected', will only cover a few of the several ecosystems of the Condor due to its shape, which is long and narrow along the border with Ecuador and consists in large part of precipitous cliffs. In

Parks and buffers

Table 2: Main biodiversity conservation achievements in the El Condor projects in Ecuador and Peru

ECUADOR			
ACHIEVEMENT	SIZE (hectares)	STATUS	COMMENTS
El Zarza Wildlife Refuge	3643	Established	
El Quimi Biological Reserve	9266	Established	
El Condor Protection Forest	17 846	Established	
Conservation areas inside a Shuar protected territory	122 000	Proposed	Depending on new legislation
PERU			
Ichigkat Muja National Park	152 874	Proposed	The decree is being processed
Ichigkat Muja buffer zone	451 247	Proposed	The decree is being processed
Community reserve	100 000	To be proposed	Studies under execution
Conservation areas inside indigenous communities		To be implemented	

other words, the bulk of biodiversity conservation efforts in the area will depend much less on the formal protected areas that are being established and much more on how the indigenous land is managed, including in the buffer zones and conservation areas, which are very large in size; the buffer zone on the Peruvian side, for example, will consist of the entire indigenous territory organised in some 19 titled indigenous communities. The proposed communal-reserve category there will allow hunting and other uses of natural resources.

That is why it is important that future actions are oriented towards providing indigenous people with viable economic alternatives that support sustainable development. These



Sustainable? Many Indigenous people, such as the community leaders attending a project meeting (left) and the woman spinning yarn, have made significant investments of time and energy in the transboundary conservation initiative in the Condor and play a crucial role in the realisation of project goals. Project continuity is essential for sustaining their engagement. *Photo: G. Wetterberg*



Value-adding: scientists at the Lalut Berai Experimental Station in Kayan Mentarang National Park inoculate a tree with an incense-producing fungus, one of the income-generating alternatives pursued by the project there. *Photo: G. Wetterberg*

might include restoring already-degraded lands and forest resources, developing appropriate sustainable agriculture, adopting semi-intensive wildlife management, reforestation with valuable species, and managing natural forest resources for timber production (all activities undertaken within the scope of the Kaeng Krachan project). Making sustainable development work for the many families involved will require a sustained effort over the next decade or more.

Peace and cooperation

The authorities of both Ecuador and Peru, as well as Indonesia and Malaysia, have made serious efforts to coordinate work across boundaries and to develop a series of actions of common interest. Progress was especially noteworthy in scientific terms: for example, a joint Indonesian-Malaysian scientific expedition was organised to the Kayan Mentarang National Park, and for the Condor projects there was an abundant and open sharing of information, including cartographic, between Ecuador and Peru. However, essentially due to logistic difficulties, the bilateral collaboration did not achieve field results regarding biodiversity conservation; progress was limited or nil in such areas as the harmonisation of management plans, joint fire information and control, coordinated or joint patrolling, and the exchange of information about illegal logging, mining and poaching. The Condor frontier is almost inaccessible, limiting exchanges between local staff, and coordination meetings are usually held in the nations' capitals.

The situation between Indonesia and Malaysia is similar, although the start-up of the project in Pulong Tau may help improve coordination. But, in general terms, the projects were successful in opening a dialogue between authorities of the countries and scientific results were above

expectations. Perseverance by authorities on both sides of a transboundary conservation reserve may bring significant rewards, but undoubtedly it will take time and patience.

The risk of disillusion

The projects achieved both expected and unexpected results in a manner that was efficient and effective, especially considering the relatively small amount of money available, the short period of execution and, in the case of the Ecuadorian, Indonesian and Peruvian projects, the enormous difficulties imposed by geographic isolation. The NGOs

responsible for project execution worked very well with local populations and were also able to maintain good coordination with government authorities. In each case, too, these NGOs were able to recruit significant additional funding for project execution. However, the sustainability of the initiated actions is not yet guaranteed because they greatly depend on governmental funding in addition to the possible financing of second phases of the projects through ITTO and/or other international donors. If funding is not available in a timely fashion there is a risk that these initial and successful efforts will be lost; this could create huge disillusion among those indigenous people who have invested their time and energy in and made significant commitments to the process, inevitably making future work much more difficult.

Non-transient transboundary

The four projects show that transboundary conservation is a viable concept with great potential as a tool for sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. It is proving to be an important way of engaging indigenous and other local people in conservation management and of creating avenues for sustainable development. But it takes time, in most cases undoubtedly more than a decade, for such initiatives to make substantial progress towards their three goals: biodiversity conservation, community participation and development, and international peace and cooperation.

This means that ongoing support from donors is essential. Such projects should be approved with longer periods of execution or a mechanism created to reduce gaps between phases. In addition, governmental support and participation is needed in greater measure, especially through staffing—including the training and appointment of local people as rangers or in other functions. High-level, long-term political support at both the national and international levels is therefore essential.