



**INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL
TIMBER COUNCIL**

**COMMITTEE ON
REFORESTATION AND FOREST MANAGEMENT**

Distr.
GENERAL

CRF(LIV)/2
5 October 2020

Original: ENGLISH

FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION
9 – 13 November 2020
Virtual Session

REPORT ON COMPLETED PROJECTS AND PRE-PROJECTS

IN THE FIELD OF REFORESTATION AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

**REPORT ON COMPLETED PROJECTS AND PRE-PROJECTS IN THE FIELD OF
REFORESTATION AND FOREST MANAGEMENT**

A) COMPLETED PROJECTS

(1) PD 723/13 Rev.2 (F) Capacity Building for Strengthening Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation of the Taninthayi Range in Myanmar - Phase I Stage 1

Budget and Funding Sources:

Total Budget:		US\$	153,900
ITTO Budget:		US\$	140,000
Government of USA:	US\$	100,000	
Government of Korea:	US\$	40,000	
Government of Myanmar		US\$	13,900

Implementing Agency: Forest Department, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, Government of Myanmar

Session of Approval: Rev.1 approval: Autumn 2013
Rev.2 approval: Spring 2015

Starting Date and Duration: March 2018 / 25 months

I. Introduction

The project was approved in Autumn 2013 but was revised into two Phases. Phase I has focused on building the capacity of the Forest Research Institute, Myanmar in biodiversity conservation research. The revised project was approved under the Spring 2015 Project Cycle and Phase I - Stage 1 of the project was financed in 2017. The project agreement for regulating project implementation was finalized in December 2017. The Phase I – Stage 1 commenced in June 2018 and the implementation of its activities was completed in March 2020.

II. Project Objective

The Taninthayi (Tenasserim) Mountain Range, located along the border between Myanmar and Thailand, covers a globally important terrestrial eco-region with a transition zone from continental evergreen dry forests common in the north to semi-evergreen rainforests to the south. The Taninthayi eco-region contains some of the highest diverse species of birds and mammals including the world's smallest mammal, Kitti's hog-nose bat. The project's long-term development objective aims to contribute to the conservation of trans-boundary biodiversity in the Taninthayi Range. Specifically, Phase I - Stage 1 of the project aimed to enhance the national capacity and resources in biodiversity conservation in the Taninthayi Range in Myanmar to support future transboundary biodiversity conservation activities in protected areas in the Taninthayi Range in collaboration with Thailand partners.

III. Project Achievements and Outputs

The specific objective of the project Phase I - Stage1 has been achieved by strengthening the capacity of national institutes in biodiversity conservation research and monitoring, as well as livelihood development opportunities for forest-dependent local communities in the Taninthayi Range. Among the main achievements of the project in relation to its three outputs, the following can be highlighted:

Enhanced capacity of the Forest Research Institute to design and implement research and monitoring of biodiversity conservation in the Taninthayi Range

- Biodiversity surveys and research: Forest inventories and flora surveys were carried out through 15 sample plots (30 m × 30 m) and a number of 67 species in 29 families were identified; Wildlife surveys were conducted with the installation of 56 camera traps in natural forests with the technical support of the Chinese Academy of Science. In total, about 30 wildlife species were found and these

include clouded leopard, wild boar, red muntjac, Asian black bear, etc.; A survey on non-timber forest products was carried out using questionnaires combined with face-to-face interviews;

- A socio-economic assessment of seven villages in Taninthayi Township was carried out; and
- Training of Forest Department staff and local communities for biodiversity monitoring: These include SMART patrolling training for local communities on 5-7 September 2018 in Taninthayi Township and for the Forest Department staff on 21 - 23 August 2019 at FRI, Yezin as well as a training on biodiversity conservation, protected areas and habitat management on 19-21 September 2018 in the Popa Mountain Park and its second training course on 25-27 November 2019.

Establishment of initial institutional mechanisms for the transboundary biodiversity conservation in protected areas in the Taninthayi Range

- Stakeholders consultation meetings: Three workshops and five consultation meetings with local communities and related organizations were organized from August 2018 to September 2019. These include two consultation workshops on promoting biodiversity conservation in transboundary areas on 26 June 2019 at FRI in Yezin and on 27 September 2019 at Myeik, Taninthayi Region as well as a regional workshop on promoting transboundary biodiversity conservation in the Taninthayi Range on 26 September 2019;
- Eight public education talks were organized on the role of forests in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, soil and water conservation, and livelihood improvement. The project also jointly organized the Myanmar International Day of Forests 2019 with other partners; and
- At the local level, NGOs such as Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)-Myanmar, World Wildlife Fund (WWF)-Myanmar, Flora & Fauna International (FFI)-Myanmar and Friends of Wildlife (FoW)-Myanmar participated in biodiversity conservation in the project area. They played an important role in promoting joint activities with their extended experience.

Strengthening opportunities to improve the livelihoods of forest-dependent local communities in the Taninthayi Range

- Sustainable livelihood improvement activities: These include training on agroforestry and livelihood development activities for local communities on 9 - 11 September 2018 at Forest Plantation Camp, Chaung Naut Pyan Village, Taninthayi Township. The production of promising non-timber forest products was analyzed in 6 villages, including firewood and charcoal utilization by local villagers, and a training on community-based ecotourism development for local communities was organized on 23 - 25 September 2019 in Taninthayi City; and
- A number of NGOs and the private sector joined in livelihood improvement activities to eliminate local poverty in some villages and provide income opportunities. It is promising that the next project (e.g. Phase I - Stage 2 and Phase II) would receive more supports from them. The private sector would contribute more budgets for livelihood activities through their CSR activities.

During the project period, project staff members, researchers and local Forest Department staff produced several technical reports. These include: Socio-economic assessment in Taninthayi Township; Biodiversity survey - tree species and wildlife diversity; Survey on non-timber forest products; Analysis of forest cover changes in the Taninthayi Region for wildlife conservation; Carbon storage potential and its relation with the structure of natural forest stands in Taninthayi Township; and Species distribution patterns in natural forests of Taninthayi Township.

IV. Outcomes and Impacts

The project has contributed to the establishment of a biodiversity conservation programme in the Taninthayi Range that enhances the conservation of habitats for a wide-range of wildlife species. The main outcomes of the project include:

- Multi-stakeholders consultation mechanisms: During the project implementation period, many government institutions and NGOs have been directly or indirectly involved. Government institutions involved include the Forest Research Institute, the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division of the Forest Department, the Taninthayi Region Forest Department, the Department of Small-scale industry, the Department of Tourism and several Regional Forest Departments. NGOs also played important roles by providing resource persons for the trainings and workshops as well as providing biodiversity information and sharing their experiences. Local communities also actively participated in training courses for livelihood improvements. The project also established good working

relationships with partner organizations such as WCS-Myanmar, WWF-Myanmar, FFI-Myanmar and FoW-Myanmar in promoting biodiversity conservation in the Tanintharyi Region.

- Enhanced capacity of key target beneficiaries in biodiversity conservation and income generation: Primary stakeholders, including the Forest Research Institute, received many benefits in the forms of technical support and capacity building with some equipment (e.g., GPS, hand compasses, cameras and camera traps) for smart patrol and wildlife monitoring. Local communities in the project sites also received a series of hands-on trainings on agroforestry, NTFPs, bamboo-based handicrafts and community-based ecotourism.

The impacts of the project include its contribution to the development of national biodiversity policies. The Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division will update the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), taking into account the lessons of the project. It has also started a programme entitled Reintroducing Natural Habitats (RNH) in Protected Areas (2019-20 to 2028-29), which includes transboundary biodiversity conservation. The Planning and Statistics Division will update the National Forest Master Plan (2000-2001 to 2029- 2030) incorporating biodiversity conservation and social safeguards based on the project achievements. Sharing project results, implementation strategies and experiences with relevant stakeholders and NGOs partners would be useful to scale up project activities and replicate them in other areas.

V. Lessons Learnt and sustainability

The effective conservation of biodiversity is of vital importance for the environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability of the Taninthayi Mountain Range. The most important lessons learnt from the implementation of Phase I – stage 1 include:

- Baseline studies of the biodiversity, social, economic, cultural, and legal aspects of the Taninthayi Mountain Range provided good inputs for stakeholder consultations
- A series of stakeholder consultations helped build close working relationships between Forest Department authorities and local communities through a better understanding of the history and dynamics of conservation and development issues, and each other's interests. But maintaining common interests between the different stakeholders is a challenge
- At the local level, site-specific biodiversity surveys combined livelihood improvement activities received good support from local communities. The involvement of local communities in biodiversity surveys and monitoring created a sense of ownership
- The Forest Department and local authorities provided various support to initiative project activities. Facilitation, coordination, resource mobilization and law enforcement could be more productive if the project received more political support
- Sustainable livelihood improvements of local communities are essential in the long-term
- The conservation of transboundary biodiversity is a challenging goal as it involves multiple organizations and institutions from the local to the transboundary level. Developing and maintaining commitments for transboundary biodiversity conservation management will require substantial political support at the national and regional levels

In the framework of mainstreaming the project activities in the Taninthayi Range, the Forest Department is expected to replicate the model conservation approach in other protected areas in the country. For the development of a transboundary biodiversity conservation initiative in the Taninthayi Range, sustainable funding for the implementation of Phase I – Stage 2 and Phase II will also be essential to increase the long-term sustainability. With the international recognition of the Taninthayi Mountain Range along the border between Myanmar and Thailand as a globally important terrestrial eco-region, the Taninthayi Range is encouraged to be promoted as one of the important priority biodiversity corridors at the regional level, such as ASEAN and Greater Mekong Sub-Region.

VI. Concluding Remarks

As the ITTO Secretariat received the Project Completion Report and several technical reports as well an acceptable Final Financial Audit Report, the Committee may wish to declare the Project PD 723/13 Rev.2 (F) Phase I Stage 1 as completed. Soft copies of the project-related reports and publications can be made available, upon request, by the Secretariat.

(2) PD 754/14 Rev.3 (F) Rehabilitation and Sustainable Management of Sacred Forests on Ramsar Sites 1017 and 1018 in Benin

Budget and Funding Sources:

Total Budget:		US\$	659,131
ITTO Budget:		US\$	541,031
Government of Japan:	US\$	541,031	
Counterpart (NGO Ce.Sa.Re.N):		US\$	118,100

Implementing Agency: NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
CERCLE POUR LA SAUVEGARDE DES RESSOURCES NATURELLES (NGO Ce.Sa.Re.N)

Period of Approval: Spring 2015

Starting Date and Duration: April 2017 / 36 months

I. Introduction

The 36-month project was approved under Spring 2015 Project Cycle through the electronic time-bound approval system, but it was fully funded under Spring 2016 Project Cycle, thanks to the generous contribution of the Government of Japan. The Project Agreement regulating the implementation of the project was considered as signed by all parties on 27 March 2017. The first disbursement of ITTO funds was made on 04 April 2017 to start the project implementation. The ITTO budget of this project was not impacted by the financial impairment issue.

An acceptable version of the project completion report was received in May 2020, within the period of three months (after the formal due date of technical completion on 31 March 2020) in compliance with the rules and procedures applying to ITTO projects. The balance remaining unspent on completion of this project, for an amount of US\$5,365.21, was returned to the ITTO Secretariat in accordance with the provisions of the agreement which had governed its implementation. The project final financial audit report was also submitted by the implementing agency, in May 2020, allowing this project to be documented for the completion and closure procedures.

II. Project Objective

The development objective of this project was to sustainably manage sacred forests within Ramsar sites 1017 and 1018 in Benin through the sustainable management of 42 sacred forests within these sites, to be achieved by building the capacity of stakeholders to improve the living conditions of local communities. The specific objective of the project was to sustainably manage sacred forests within Ramsar sites 1017 and 1018 in Benin by building the capacity of stakeholders to improve the living conditions of local populations.

III. Project Achievements and Outputs

In addition to their cultural and ritual functions, Sacred Forests (SF) in Benin provide a special refuge and sanctuary for local biodiversity, including many rare plant and animal species, some of which are on the IUCN Red List. Sacred forests represent a successful model of traditional biodiversity management and conservation. Their protection is based on traditional local beliefs, the strength of traditional authority, and the power of local dignitaries and religious leaders.

With the involvement of selected local communities living around the Ramsar Sites 1017 and 1018, located in southern Benin in the coastal area between coordinates 1° 37'45" and 2° 42' 35" east longitude and between 6°12'37" and 7°1' north latitude in Benin (Districts of Littoral-Atlantique, Mono, Ouémé Plateau, Couffo and Zou), the main achievements and related outputs, at the project completion, in March 2020, can be summarized as follows:

- Forty-two Sacred Forests (SF) were demarcated under surveys carried out by certified expert surveyors. Simplified forest management plans (SFMP) for 42 Sacred Forests involved in the project implementation were technically approved and validated by the ministry in charge of forestry of

- Benin, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders through a participatory approach. These SFMP had enabled traditional local dignitaries and rural municipalities to jointly define the terms of the management, control and monitoring of good practices in these Sacred Forests;
- These 42 SF were provided with titles of legal recognition while their borders were demarcated with clear boundary marker stones, for preventing encroachment-related activities, through a participatory mapping process with all relevant stakeholders, including local communities depending on these SF;
 - Local Management Committees had been established for the coordination of the management of 42 SF with local authorities based on the recommendations of the socio-economic study carried out at beginning of the project implementation, in order to make available the socio-economic opportunities, derived from the management of these 42 SF, for the benefit of local communities (livelihood, woodfuel consumption; cultural and ritual aspects, etc.);
 - 68.5 hectares had been established with exotic species (*Tectona grandis*, *Acacia auriculiformis*, *Cassia siamea*, etc.) around these sacred forests using the agroforestry system for the establishment of buffer zone contributing to reduce human pressure in Sacred Forests while providing alternative income with food crops associated to multi-purpose planted trees. These income generating activities had contributed to poverty reduction in SF dependent local communities around Ramsar Sites 1017 and 1018 in Benin;
 - Around 160 hectares of Sacred Forests have been subject to the enrichment system with indigenous multi-purpose species (*Khaya senegalensis*, *Milicia excelsa*, *Terminalia superba*, *Triplochiton scleroxylon*, *Adansonia digitate*, etc.), together with reintroduction of rare species of fauna (*Python regius*, *Varanus exanthematicus*, *Varanus niloticus*, *Chamaeleo gracilis*, *Chamaeleo senegalensis*, *Galago* spp., *Cercopithecus erythrogaster*, etc.) for the improvement of biodiversity conservation in these Ramsar Sites 1017 and 1018;
 - A technical study dealing with the identification of improved agriculture production systems (IAPS) was finalised by a national consultant in order to recommend appropriate ways and means to implement these identified IAPS. Eighty-six farmers whose fields adjoin sacred forests were assisted with training sessions on how to implement improved agricultural production systems (*systèmes améliorés de production Agricole - SAP*) and related techniques, as appropriate. The consultation process had been initiated for the synergy and collaboration of relevant stakeholders through the integrated landscape management approach taking into account the SAP requirements;
 - As a continuous and regular activity, the project executing agency continued the sensitization campaign, which started with the project inception workshop, on the roles and importance of Sacred Forests in Benin. Local entities (associations, cooperatives, local NGO) had been involved in the abovementioned sensitization campaign because of their capacity to directly interact with local communities living in areas covered by the implementation of this project in the Ramsar Sites 1017 and 1018;
 - A joint article on biodiversity-related achievements in tropical forests in Benin was prepared and published on the ITTO website on 21 March 2020 for the celebration of the International Day of Forests, in conjunction with similar achievements of the project implemented in Cibodas Biosphere Reserve (CBR) in the Districts of Bogor, Cianjur and Sukabumi on Java, Indonesia.
 - Another article titled “*Saving the sacred*” was published in the ITTO quarterly magazine *Tropical Forest Update (TFU)* in the issue No. TFU29/2 for sharing the main achievements, outcomes and lessons derived from the implementation of the project PD 754/14 Rev.3 (F).

More information on the Project outputs can be found by inserting the project code PD 754/14 Rev.3 (F) into the ITTO project search function at www.itto.int/project_search.

IV. Outcomes and Impacts

By project completion, the main project outcomes and impacts, in relation to the expected outputs and associated activities, had been mainly dealing with the crucial need to revive the particular functions and values of Sacred Forests, which were subject to high respect in the time of ancestors in Benin. All this had contributed to the rebirth and promotion of the cultural identity and ritual aspects characterizing the relationship between the local communities and Sacred Forests. In addition to developing simplified management plans, this project contributed to provide a protection framework for Sacred Forests in order to ensure their physical integrity. Thus, the project contributed to establish two kinds of management body: local committees for sacred forest management (*comité local de gestion de la forêt sacrée - CLFS*) at the local level and municipal committees for the coordination and monitoring of sacred forest integration (*comité communal de coordination et de suivi de l'intégration de la forêt sacrée - CCSI*) at the rural municipality level. These bodies had been responsible for legal recognition procedures conducive to the integration of sacred forests into the permanent forest estates of rural municipalities. It is also important to note that the Embassy of Japan in Benin had been involved in selected project activities (the Ambassador of Japan in Benin

attended the inception workshop while other representatives of the Embassy of Japan were involved in technical workshops, project steering committee meetings and field visits for project monitoring).

As part of the Simplified forest management plans (SFMP) for 42 Sacred Forests involved in the project implementation, business plans were developed, and key beneficiaries were selected and trained on how to prepare a simplified business plan which could allow them to be able to obtain loans as microcredits from national specialized financial institutions of microcredits called systèmes financiers décentralisés (SFDs). The aim was to promote and implement income-generating activities in the buffer zone surrounding these 42 Sacred Forests in the Ramsar Sites 1017 and 1018, as sources of livelihood for poverty reduction in SF-dependent local communities. The project's 36-month duration proved too short to implement the simplified management plans and related business plans in many of the targeted Sacred Forests.

In the medium to long-term perspective, an increase in the forest cover of these 42 Sacred Forests located in the Ramsar Sites 1017 and 1018 could lead to an expected improvement of biodiversity conservation, while the enhancement of the livelihood derived from income generating activities implemented by local communities in buffer zones could contribute to gradually reducing the multi-purpose anthropic-related pressure on these 42 Sacred Forests.

V. Lessons Learnt and sustainability

The key lessons learnt during the implementation of this project had been related to the need to take into account the legal recognition of Sacred Forests based on the legitimate rights of traditional beliefs for members of local communities linked to these 42 Sacred Forests (SF). All relevant stakeholders (traditional authorities, village chiefs, local residents, farmers living near sacred forests, and municipal authorities) were made aware and sensitized of the need to protect Sacred Forests, and various information and awareness-raising sessions were conducted for that purpose. One of the key elements for a smooth implementation was the reinforcement of the participation of rural municipalities in the SF management process by facilitating the interaction with other stakeholders, including local communities.

Sustainability of main project outputs/outcomes had been ensured by the coordinated involvement of key stakeholders, including local communities and rural municipalities, in the project implementation. This contributed to combine traditional management knowledge and practices with modern forest management requirements for the integration of Sacred Forests into municipality protected-area systems. The regulatory frameworks put in place in close collaboration with rural municipalities and local communities, as well as the simplified management plans developed in a participatory approach had made it possible to reaffirm the leadership of local communities in the management of these 42 Sacred Forests covered by the implementation of this project in the Ramsar Sites 1017 and 1018, in Benin. The implementation of this project contributed to increasing the influence of local communities and reinforcing their leadership for the future protection of these Sacred Forests.

VI. Concluding Remarks

As the ITTO Secretariat received in due time the Project Completion Report and Consultant Technical Reports, as well an acceptable Final Financial Audit Report, the Committee may wish to declare the Project PD 754/14 Rev.3 (F) as completed. Soft copies of the project-related reports can be made available, upon request, by the Secretariat.

(B) COMPLETED PRE-PROJECTS

None.

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