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**EX-POST EVALUATION REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

ITTO Project PD 275/04 Rev.3 (I)

**Improvement of the Sustainable Management and
Utilization of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) in Cambodia**

Prepared for the ITTO

by

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[A complete report is available from the Secretariat.]

Executive Summary

Introduction

The ex-post evaluation of Project PD 275/04 Rev.3 (I) was conducted by the ITTO Consultant whom had visited the project from 15 to 26 July 2012. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to learn lessons from the Project and made recommendations for similar interventions in the future. The Consultant, therefore, has assessed all aspects of the Project from its inception to completion regarding the administrative, financial and operational matters.

The evaluation involved a review of available project documents and files, meetings and discussions with target villagers, concerned officers and staffs of the Forestry Administration, the Executing Agency, at different levels, and field visits to selected project sites on rattan processing, bamboo processing as well as nurseries and NTFP plantations.

Evaluation Scope, Focus and Approach

The evaluation should establish to which the project intervention has achieved its planned outputs and outcomes and draw conclusions and recommendations for similar interventions in the future. Therefore, the evaluation is collection of information, the on-the-spot assessment and in-depth analysis of the performance and impact of the Project after its completion.

The ex-post evaluation involved a review of available project documents and files, an entry meeting with the former project key personnel and officers of the Executing Agency, organized visits to selected sites of rattan and bamboo processing as well as NTFPs nurseries and plantations, discussions with local officers and staffs of Forestry Administration, the Executing Agency, and an exit meeting with the Assistant Director General of the Forestry Administration.

Project Facts

The project was approved and funded during the thirty-seventh ITCC Session held in Yokohama on 13-18 November 2004. Its duration was thirty six months with the sanctioned budget of US\$ 588,412 comprising contributions of ITTO, Royal Government of Cambodia and CIRAD of French in the amounts of US\$ 440,312, US\$ 130,100 and US\$ 18,000, respectively.

The project was aimed to improve local livelihood by achieving sustainable management of NTFPs. Its specific objectives were to: i) help re-organizing local management of NTFPs in its social and legal aspects; and ii) improve NTFPs management and trading including plantation and processing.

The expected outputs were: i) staffs of the executing agency trained on project implementation, ii) capacity of existing groups of collectors improved in NTFPs management, iii) management plans of NTFPs proposed by local communities to local/national authorities, iv) small-scale plantations of NTFPs established, and v) training on processing of NTFPs conducted.

The project was implemented by the Forestry Administration of Cambodia based in Phnom Penh starting July 2006. It was intended to address the problems facing the management and utilization of NTFPs in a sustainable manner which included the low price of NTFPs received by collectors, high transaction costs, lack of skills on processing, over exploitation and lack of planting, and difficulty in obtaining harvest permits.

Findings

The project identification was adequately accomplished; the problems facing the management and utilization of NTFPs were identified in close consultation with the main stakeholders. However, the problems addressed were inadequately analyzed leading to a rather weak project intervention.

Despite weaknesses of the project design, it has greatly contributed to achievement of planned project objectives. Out of five planned outputs, four were fully delivered while one was partially delivered. Therefore, the specific objectives had been almost fully achieved.

The development objective of the Project which was to contribute to local livelihood, was, to a lesser extent, achieved. The reasons for this sub-optimal achievement are: i) most collectors and processors of NTFPs are still heavily dependent on middlemen for financing of their operations thus on selling price of the products, ii) some processors are facing low profit margin due to low productivity brought about by the poor processing tools coupled with low selling price caused by inferior quality; iii) difficulty in obtaining raw materials at affordable price, and iv) less and less villagers are involved in NTFPs business due to the presence of alternative local sources of income.

The project's objectives could have been achieved more effectively had the intervention been based on an adequate problem analysis. Output 1 for instance, is not a relevant intervention as it relates more to project operational management rather than to solving the problem at hand.

Based on the information gathered during the field visits, impacts of the project intervention appear to be insignificant: rattan and bamboo processing do not contribute meaningfully to livelihood of most processors while interest in planting of NTFPs is weakening.

The training program under the project, formulated in accordance with the results of training need assessments, was relevant in terms of the subjects covered, methodologies adopted and duration of training sessions. However, transfer of technologies was hampered by the existing gap in communication as the trainers and trainees do not speak the same language. In addition, the full participation of trainees was difficult to realize as the trainees were also involved in day-to-day income generating activities.

After completion of the Project, trained processors of NTFPs were left by themselves without any assistance in follow-up actions from the Forestry Administration or other concerned organizations. Interviews of the processors indicated that there is a need for an extended external assistance in terms of technical and financial aspects in order to improve performance and increase income from NTFPs processing.

Contribution of NTFPs to household income appears to be decreasing in recent years for a number of reasons including: unproductive application of processing skills, limited access of local communities to forest concession lands, number of villagers is now fewer involved in NTFPs harvesting and processing due to the presence of alternative job opportunities.

Most of the seedlings planted by villagers on the yards and on lands around the villages died of deficient tending which is brought about primarily by the diminishing interest in planting initiative and declining number of villagers that engaged in planting activities.

Despite the one year extension in time without additional funding, the project was implemented in high compliance to the project agreement and existing ITTO rules and procedures. For instance, employment of professionals were made with the prior approval of ITTO, yearly plans of operations were prepared prior to commencing operations, bi-annual progress reports were timely submitted to ITTO, the financial statements of the project were duly audited by registered public accountants, and different project reports had been published and disseminated as appropriate.

Extension in time for implementation was required as several activities experienced delay in completion for at least three main reasons: i) too many project sites had to be visited, 15 villages in 4 provinces, under the extremely bad accessibility due to damaged road network; ii) procrastinated training sessions caused by low participation of villagers who also involved in other day-to-day subsistence activities; and iii) extended hours of individual training sessions due to communication gap between trainers and trainees.

Sustainability of the effects and impacts of the project intervention is somewhat questionable. The interest in processing seems to be diminishing due to the low productivity brought about by the poor tools and facilities for processing; the interest in planting is fading out due to the presence of alternative job opportunities that promise immediate, real financial gain; and developed management plan for community forest has not been adopted in the field nor replicated to other community forests.

The executing agency cannot provide the assistance needed by the communities due mainly to the limited state funds. The support that has been so far granted by the executing agency is confined only to distribution of seedlings of fruit trees and fast-growing tree species but interest in planting trees is weakening due to the uncertainty involved in the undertaking, unconformity of planting activity to the local communities' cultural value of "enter the forest, harvest products and sell for immediate income".

Lesson Learned

- The problems addressed by the Project was identified with the active participation of stakeholders, the process that was necessary for developing sense of belonging and ownership that supports its smooth implementation;
- The problem addressed was inadequately analyzed and resulted in unclear cause-effect relationship, weak vertical logic and weak project design. An adequate problem analysis is a prerequisite to defining a sound and relevant project design;
- Despite weaknesses of the project design, the Project had been smoothly implemented in accordance with its workplans and nearly achieved its intended objectives. The smooth implementation is attributable to the able project management team, competent PSC and supportive partners especially the local Forestry Administration, local government at different levels including village administrations, and consultants. Another key success factor of project implementation was the timely and sufficiently procured inputs of activities notably the disbursement of ITTO funds;
- One of the critical problems facing the Project operations was the large number of target villages that had to be regularly visited under the heavily damaged road network. The Project would have been managed more efficiently and achieved its objectives more effectively had the sites were reduced in number. To this end, an ex-ante evaluation could have been carried out prior to commencing the project operations; and
- There was a communication gap between the project staffs and ethnic people, the target of the project that had to be covered by interpreters. Employment of interpreters is an additional cost to the project that has to be taken into account during the project formulation stage.

Conclusions

- The project has been completed with all outputs almost fully delivered and its specific objectives nearly achieved; the tiny gap in achievement was caused primarily by the too large number of project sites to attend under poor accessibility;
- The problem addressed by the project was identified through adequate consultation with the main stakeholders that their support was satisfactorily accorded to the Project during its implementation;
- The project design was somewhat weak due to inadequate problem analysis; as the main causes and sub-causes of the problem addressed were not clearly identified, the project intervention was not fully relevant nor effective to solve the problems at hand;
- The project was implemented in full compliance to the project agreement and existing ITTO rules and procedures by obtaining the necessary no-objection letters to any critical decisions made and submitting the necessary documents to ITTO in accordance with the project agreement;
- Some 344 species of NTFP have been botanically identified, their herbaria made available, and relevant information on the species collected and documented with the Forestry Administration;
- The project duration had to be extended for one year without additional funds in order to complete all planned activities; particular activities had experienced delay or reduced in volume due mainly to the time consuming journeys between the sites and communication gap between the trainers and trainees;

- The project has trained local people on the necessary skills for harvesting, processing and planting of selected NTFP species as well as for marketing of processed products yet the skills acquired, have not been utilized productively due to cultural, technical and financial reasons;
- The trained villagers on planting of NTFPs are losing their interest in it owing to the uncertainty involved in the survival of plants, availability of alternative sources of income and reduced number of young people residing at the villages;
- Many of the trained villagers on rattan and bamboo processing are making use of the skills they learned from the project but at low productivity as well as profit margin brought about by the poor tools of production and inferior quality of products; and
- Model management plan of community forest for the sustainable NTFPs has been developed under the project in collaboration with the local community owning the rights to manage the forest but the plan is not operational yet nor replicated to other villages.

Recommendations

For the Forestry Administration/Executing Agency

- As share of NTFPs in income of households is significant in many provinces of Cambodia, it is strongly recommended to implement follow-up NTFP-related projects in these provinces taking into account the lessons learned from completed ITTO Project PD 275/04 Rev.3 (I);
- In developing a NTFPs project it is strongly recommended to concentrate on a few sites to facilitate intensive monitoring of operations and efficient allocation of resources to critical, relevant activities;
- The model management plan for sustainable utilization of Tum Or community forest including NTFPs that had been developed in collaboration with the local community and approved by the Forestry Administration needs to be implemented in the field and replicated to other community forests across the country;
- The processors of rattan and bamboo are striving to improve productivity and product quality in order to increase their income; these people are in need of financial assistance to purchase additional processing tools and facilities, and to maintain inventory of needed raw materials for which the Forestry Administration needs to appropriately play its role; and
- In order to sustain implementation of the critical activities initiated under the project, continued assistance to local communities after project completion is needed; to this end, there is a need to allocate needed resources to the extent possible.

For ITTO

- To ensure technical soundness of project design, adherence to existing manual on project formulation is to be observed by the Expert Panel;
- To continue supporting projects on NTFPs as this resource development is basically pro-poor, pro-job and pro-environment with relatively small capital requirement;
- To conduct intensive project monitoring to ensure full compliance of project operations to the project agreement as well as existing rules and procedures applying to ITTO projects; and
- To advise on adjustments to project intervention as need arises during the course of project operations based on the progress made in implementation.