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EVALUATION REPORT

ITTO PROJECT PD 289/04 Rev.1 (F)

**“MANAGEMENT OF THE EMERALD TRIANGLE PROTECTED FORESTS
COMPLEX TO PROMOTE COOPERATION FOR TRANSBOUNDARY
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION BETWEEN THAILAND, CAMBODIA
AND LAOS (PHASE II)”**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared for ITTO
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June 2010

ABBREVIATIONS

ACLEDA	Association of Cambodian Local Economic Development Agencies
CALM	Conservation Areas through Landscape Management
FA	Forestry Administration (Cambodia)
GIS	Geographic Information System
HQs	Headquarters
ITTA	International Tropical Timber Agreement
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization
LCF	Local community fora
Logframe	Logical framework matrix
ME	Monitoring and Evaluation
MES	Monitoring and Evaluation System
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PVPF	Preah Vihear Protected Forest
RFD	Royal Forest Department (Thailand)
SLA	Sustainable Livelihoods Approach
TBC	Transboundary Biodiversity conservation
TBCA	Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation Area
TORs	Terms of reference
USD	United States Dollar.

Evaluation of ITTO Project PD 289/04 Rev.1 (F)

“Management of the Emerald Triangle Protected Forests Complex to Promote Cooperation for Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation Between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos (Phase II)”

Executive Summary

1 INTRODUCTION

The mission for the evaluation of ITTO Project PD 289/04 Rev.1 (F) “Management of the Emerald Triangle Protected Forests Complex to promote cooperation for transboundary biodiversity conservation between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos (Phase II)” took place from 18 March to 2 April 2010. It started in Thailand (18 – 22 March), continued in Laos (23 – 25 March) and ended in Cambodia (25 March – 2 April 2010). The focus of the Evaluation was based on its Terms of Reference, and the evaluation criteria are those defined in the ITTO manual for Project Monitoring, Review, Reporting and Evaluation”. In addition to summarizing the analysis carried out by the Evaluator to appreciate the objectives and strategies of the project, the process followed in its identification, its design, this report provide an assessment of its results, experiences and lessons learnt, and makes recommendations on the future course of action.

The Evaluator wishes to express his sincere gratitude to the Executing Agencies and the Teams of the Project for the kind assistance that they provided during his stay in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

2 EVALUATION SCOPE, FOCUS AND APPROACH

The purpose of the evaluation is to guide on all factors relevant for the efficient and successful completion of the project in accordance with the rules and procedures of ITTO, including any necessary follow-up actions based on the experiences of the project implementation, to draw lessons and key project elements that can be used to improve similar projects in the future. The scope of the evaluation included the work taking place between 1 March 2008 (starting date) and March 2010, in Thailand and Cambodia. Fieldwork and discussions focused on currently ongoing operations. The field visits were limited to sites that reflect community involvement in the Project and that provide a cross-section of the benefits they derive from this involvement. The TORs called for the Evaluator to:

(a) Analyze and assess for:

- The overall role and contribution of the project in light of sectoral policies, development programmes, priorities and requirements to improve biodiversity conservation in the countries concerned.
- The current status of biodiversity conservation within the project's area of influence, the effectiveness of the project's implementation and its effectiveness and impacts in promoting the conservation of biodiversity in transboundary tropical forests.
- The effectiveness of dissemination of project results.
- The overall post-project situation in the project sites.
- The unexpected effects and impacts, either harmful or beneficial, and the reasons for their occurrences.
- The cost efficiency in the implementation of the project, including the technical, financial and managerial aspects.
- Follow-up actions for the successful completion of the project.
- The identification of any issues or problems that should be taken into account in designing and implementing similar projects in the future.

(b) Make recommendations on:

- the efficient and successful completion of the project in accordance with the rules and procedures of ITTO
- The needs for similar projects in the future aiming at improving biodiversity conservation in transboundary tropical forests in the Emerald Triangle Protected Forests Complex.

- The objectives of such similar projects and any innovative approaches/designs
- Appropriate target groups, e.g. countries, governments, organizations, forestry sector, local communities, etc.
- The organizational arrangements of the project.
- Follow-up and evaluation practices.
- Supplemental, alternative activities, processes, procedures, and/or follow-up programmers in the field of biodiversity conservation in transboundary tropical forests, if appropriate.

3 PROJECT FACTS

The project is the second phase of the ITTO project PD 15/00 Rev. 2 (F) 'Management of the Pha Team Protected Complex to promote transboundary biodiversity conservation between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos (Phase 1)'. In Phase I which was implemented in Thailand, a number of valuable surveys and studies on socio-economic aspects, forest and wildlife ecology were conducted. The core elements of the second phase are the implementation of activities set forth in the management plans on Thailand side, and to apply lessons learnt during Phase I in Cambodia and Laos. The overall objective of this second phase of the project remains the conservation of transboundary biodiversity in the Emerald Triangle Protected Forests Complex, an area that is situated between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Specific objectives set forth in the project document are as follows:

- Strengthen cooperation between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos on transboundary biodiversity conservation
- Enhance protection and monitoring of biological resources along the tri-national borders.
- Strengthen the involvement of local communities and stakeholders in sustainable uses.

The expected situation after the completion of the project phase was the secured trans-boundary biodiversity conservation area that facilitates migration and long-term survival of large mammals in the region concerned, a situation to be accomplished through the following:

- (1) There will be a sound understanding and cooperation among the three countries for trans-boundary biodiversity conservation at the local and national levels.
- (2) Livelihood of local communities will be improved and they will be more aware of trans-boundary biodiversity conservation issues and participate in integrated conservation and development activities.
- (3) Systematic baseline data on ecology especially wide-range species along the tri-national border and socio-economic are available and shared by the three countries
- (4) Park rangers of protected areas will be trained and gain more knowledge on protected area management
- (5) Necessary tools for effective patrolling will be provided to park officials.

The project is implemented by the Royal Forest Department (RFD), which is the main implementing agency working in close collaboration with the Cambodian Forestry Administration.

4 FINDINGS, LESSONS LEARNT

4.1 Findings

The Project has not reached its first Specific objective "Strengthen Cooperation between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos for Biodiversity Conservation in respective TBCA" which was central in its design. The achievement of the respective outputs is less than what was planned. This is due to the non-participation of Laos and to the border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia since 2008 which created a context that is not conducive to any strategic dialogue between the three parties as far as pursuing TBC goals in the Emerald Triangle is concerned. It should also be added that for Cambodia, the Project started with the diversification of activities other than those preparing the ground for TBC as no prior scoping study was conducted. The Evaluation also recognizes that while Laos has not participated, cooperation between Thailand and Cambodia has strengthened.

Similarly, the non participation of Laos in the Project and the difficult politico-diplomatic and security context due to the border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia did not allow the Project to achieve its 2nd Specific Objective "Enhance protection measures and monitoring of the biological resources along tri-national borders". Though the Project Document had mentioned that there was a risk for the Project to face these problems, no mitigation measures were proposed in form of re-adjustment of the objectives and

implementation approaches of the Project. Therefore, in relation to Logframe indicators, no concrete results under Specific Objective 2 were achieved, although activities such as patrols and monitoring of biological resources did take place.

With regard to the 3rd Specific Objective “Strengthen the involvement of local communities and stakeholders to ensure sustainable uses and management of natural resources inside PAs and in the buffer zones”, the Project scored more achievement. With the Thai Component, the Project was effective in supporting its beneficiaries to expand their source of income using the Revolving Fund formula. In many cases the beneficiary groups contributed above expectation towards the successes of the messages on protecting biodiversity in Pha Taem National Park, for example by returning the orchids to the forests. Coupled with the close collaboration of lower levels of RFD, these achievements have a potential to enhance biodiversity conservation in respective areas. However the system of using revolving fund cannot be seen as sustainable as there is no clear road map for sustainable rural funding involving in the medium the rural credit institutions.

In Cambodia, the Project initiated development activities in support of food security and water supply. “Although there has been an effort to raise awareness on conservation among the local communities through meetings, the activities conducted so far, besides being in their initial stages, they do not provide convincing evidence on the link with biodiversity conservation.” The intervention in its current form cannot be sustainable as it seems to depend too much on external funding. Although the fruit plants distribution, rice bank, poultry and water well activities introduced by the Project are part of the local farming systems and correspond to local needs, they appear to be stand-alone interventions of a very limited scale. Hence the achievements in initiating activities ensuring sustainable management and use of natural resources remain incomplete. The Component lacks a road map defining what is to be achieved with the SLA and how this approach links with biodiversity conservation.

4.2 Lessons Learnt

The main lessons learnt are as follows:

- ✓ To design this kind of project, more attention is needed to the understanding of the development and conservation contexts, and to develop the social ownership of the initiative.
- ✓ For implementation design, it is important to consider that sufficient time is needed for social processes to root down and for developing adequate approaches and their ownership by the beneficiaries and partners. For this reason a minimum duration of 3 years should have been planned.
- ✓ Implementation of sustainable livelihoods activities in the framework of a conservation project requires a broad range of skills that may not be present within the project teams. Strategic partnerships should be developed to devolve local community development activities to the NGOs and other actors such as rural banking institutions.
- ✓ It is very important for Project Teams to be based in the Project area in order to be able to make frequent contacts with communities and local partners and thus ensure relevance of the activities.
- ✓ Income generation needs to be addressed as a community or family business enterprise and not as a project activity. Hence the importance for projects to facilitate the link of community business to the rural banking institutions and to specialized local development NGOs for advisory services. Lack of this link led to ‘projectization’, with a relatively high proportion of personnel and consultants expenses.
- ✓ Support to livelihoods activities should be channeled through specialized local NGOs as medium and long-term partners of the Executing Agencies, using a focused village planning of natural resource use and conservation, and corresponding business plans. More attention should be paid to building capacity of beneficiary communities in the use of the tools of village natural resource plans and business plans, market identification for their productions and organization for market access, products quality control, accounts management, and registering as community enterprises.
- ✓ All countries concerned by a TBC initiative should manifest in the clearest way that they share the vision and they want to take part in its implementation.
- ✓ The quality of indicators of the Logframe should be improved and an MES should be designed to allow drawing information from bottom-up.

- ✓ With regard to the implementation of the support to community development activities, a lesson learnt from the difficulties of justifying them in relation to conservation objectives is that the interventions should respond to the following criteria:
 - Substantial contribution to forest protection and biodiversity conservation.
 - Substantial contribution to livelihoods improvement for the poor communities.
 - Results can be sustained without outside subsidies and are replicable.

5 CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The Project was evaluated two months before its completion. It resulted very difficult to fully assess its effectiveness in promoting TBC between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, and achieving livelihoods improvement through its local community development interventions. The reason is that the logframe indicators are defined more as process criteria than as result oriented and measurable targets.

The achievement of outputs relating to specific objectives 1 and 2 was incomplete, due to several reasons. First the design of the Project did not clarify the overall targets to be reached or the targets to be reached by each component. It did not describe relevant and “real” key assumptions to be met for the success of the Project in reaching its specific objectives, and it did not give sufficient weight to the risk that Laos PDR would not join the TBC initiative in the Emerald Triangle.” Second, the livelihood strategy chosen for community development activities, though it is consistent with beneficiaries priority needs, did not follow the SLA framework as it is known and practiced. The way the livelihoods interventions are chosen and executed, outside such a framework, gives the impression of a dispersion of effort in activities that could otherwise support the conservation endeavor. Third, the Project did not do enough to expose the beneficiaries to new ideas of organizing themselves, of finding ways of funding their activities in the future, of producing more and improving marketing of the productions. Fourth, for Cambodia, the deployment of human resources to implement the Project, which is in conformity with what was planned in the Project Document, is not optimal for the actual tasks at field level. Most if not all the members of the Management Team are consecrating only part of their working time to the Project. They are based in Phnom Penh, rather than having offices in the Project area. There is no separation from Project Director position who could be based in FA in Phnom Penh to ensure the link with decision making level and liaison with ITTO, and the Project Manager who should be based in Preah Vihear and should head and coordinate the Project Team for the day to day activities. The distance between staff based in Phnom Penh and the Project area means that planning and working together as a team in the Project area and working with local development partners is not adequately taking place, and visits to villages are not frequent enough. It further means that component managers are not fully playing their role as facilitators of the development visioning process, which requires mediating national interest and local needs.

The Project made an effort to engage with local communities through its support to livelihoods improvement activities, and had more achievements in local community development. In Thailand an interesting start to promote ecotourism and rural credit in form of revolving funds has been made, and justification with regard to forest resource conservation is always provided. All this work needs up-scaling and consolidation in a 3rd Phase. However the revolving fund practice is hard to justify in a country where rural banking institutions are well developed. Community development activities have been entirely executed by the project's Team, although with considerable support from lower levels of the local RFD services. As a result, these services have not fully developed the capacity to take over from the project. Hence by not engaging sufficiently with local development and environment NGOs and rural banking institutions, the Project missed an opportunity of developing foundations for sustainability of most of its livelihoods improvement results.

In Cambodia, in spite of the Project's effort to engage with local communities, the most of the current livelihoods activities in relation to conservation objectives need a stronger justification. The interventions undertaken need consolidation so that natural resource users can deal with management issues and increase their income. There is still a gap in truly empowering communities to plan and implement their income generating activities due to lack of a clear approach for community engagement. This gap is not only due to poor quality of baseline data and no analysis to scope the livelihood interventions, but to methodological problems as well. Implementation strategy has not developed partnerships for multidisciplinary community development. No rural funding mechanism was included in the implementation of livelihoods activities. While insufficient rice production in Preah Vihear is a prime poverty indicator; the

Project has not proposed a strategy to increase rice production and has limited its support to the construction of a rice bank. This is not a question of Project's own resources that are obviously limited, but of seeking partnership with specialized development actors. Support to poultry certainly has a high potential to contribute to income but requires technological input and assistance that the project staff cannot offer (health, feeding, marketing).

Based on the assessment made, this Evaluation is of the opinion that most of the measures for sustainability outlined in the Project Document will perform as far as the management of buffer zones is concerned. It was noted however that the extension of the model to other border protected areas has not yet taken place as planned. As for Cambodia, the sustainability measures were probably hastily designed. Most of them, besides lacking indicators for their monitoring, have not been implemented. Therefore the project is not yet performing as far as laying the foundation for sustainability of its results in Preah Vihear Protected Area is concerned. In this regard, it should be noted that following the request of the PSC in November 2009, sustainability measures were revised and the revision could help in designing the 3rd Phase.

Can TBC in the Emerald Triangle be described as a failure or a success? TBPA's are opportunities for improving biodiversity conservation in border areas, consolidating international cooperation to this effect and providing alternative means of livelihoods to border communities. The project has had an initial success in adding value with regard to these goals, although the results that have been achieved in reaching objectives 1 and 2 are by and large below what was planned. However, the need to cooperate for TBC in the Emerald Triangle is recognized by the governments of both countries. Indeed in spite of the difficult political and diplomatic context between Thailand and Cambodia described in this report, the project Teams of both countries have been able to meet and exchange. There is an opportunity of building on this spirit for the 3rd Phase to prepare a project proposal with realistic objectives. In this perspective, it will be essential to reassess the key TBC issues in the new environmental, political and socio-economic context in order to provide a factual basis for the formulation of a new proposal.

On a scale of TBC from "low cooperation" characterized by lack of mechanisms for institutional cooperation between parties, to "advanced cooperation" characterized by a high degree of institutional organization and financial autonomy of the TBC initiative, TBC in the Emerald Triangle is about a quarter of the way towards advanced cooperation because it got a boost, first by a joint project implementation agreement, second by a joint PSC and third by the setting up of joint task forces within regular meetings.

5.2 Recommendations

The Evaluation finds that the Project has laid the foundation for TBC between Thailand and Cambodia. It should move into a final phasing out in order to strengthen the technical transboundary conservation aspects despite the problems raised in this report regarding the participation of Laos and the border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. However, the 3rd Phase Project should adapt its implementation approaches to take into account the challenges of the 2nd Phase, in particular, to meet the circumstances of Laos not joining and to be more relevant to the need of peace at the border between both countries.

The Evaluation recommends continuation of the Project and the design of a 3rd and final Phase of 3 years duration, with particular attention to the following specific recommendations:

To the Executing Agencies

- (1) Revise the Project objectives to make them clear and realistic. Revise the external environment of the Project in order to make an adequate analysis of the risks for achieving these objectives.
- (2) Plan for a project duration of 3 years that should be sufficient for a successful implementation of social development processes.
- (3) Make sure that indicators in the Logframe allow measuring the progress of the Project and demonstrating its results.
- (4) In the preparation of the next phase, make sure that the chain of results, i.e. the logic of the Logframe, is adequately tested. In particular:
 - ✓ Make sure that indicators for the specific objective describe the expected outcomes in form of real development changes;
 - ✓ Include among the indicators those that best capture development changes;
 - ✓ Where necessary, provide baselines and milestones to allow progress to be measured;

- ✓ Provide an adequate description of key assumption particularly with regards to the specific objective.
- (5) For Thailand, plan a sustainability (i.e. phasing out) phase, with an exit strategy based on the development of the capacities of beneficiaries to maintain the results after the termination of the Project. For Cambodia, the next phase should also serve for establishing the baseline and scaling up.
- (6) For Cambodia, there is need of conducting baseline environmental and socio-economic studies in the next Phase, and provide a stronger link between livelihoods interventions and biodiversity conservation.
- (7) For both components, institutionalize the SLA; requires hiring national SLA experts as part of the project teams.
- (8) Ask beneficiaries contribution in funding community development activities in order to ensure stronger ownership and sustainability.
- (9) Plan activities to build capacity of beneficiary communities in developing natural resources management taking into account the conservation needs.

To both Governments of Thailand and Cambodia

- (1) Both governments should set-up clear institutional mechanisms to promote TBC in the Emerald Triangle.
- (2) Seek strategic partnerships with the civil society, rural banking institutions and the private sector to implement community development activities. In particular, involve in the activities of the Project those NGOs that have a potential of providing support and advisory services to local community natural resource-based enterprises. This requires developing accountability systems such as contracts, M&E systems, and contracts-plans.
- (3) Involve lower levels of RFD for Thailand and FA for Cambodia; this requires:
 - ✓ Training local staff in relevant management, participatory and SLA skills;
 - ✓ Changing the ways of working and work culture, from focus on low enforcement to co-management;
 - ✓ Deploy an adequate number of appropriate staff including the Project Manager at the Protected areas level, keeping only the Project Directors in HQs;
 - ✓ A livelihood specialist who will liaise with Banking institutions and the Civil Society.

To the Government of Cambodia

- (1) Seek ways of integrating the ITTO Project in the Preah Vihear FA in order to avoid a parallel effort to the CALM Project. The overall project effort and approach should be to support provincial and local services to manage the PVPF integrating the TBC and community development dimensions.
- (2) The Project Team should have their office in the Preah Vihear, and Project staff should be 100% on Project activities or conservation activities in the PVPF.
- (3) The design of the 3rd Phase should avoid dangers of sliding towards development activities that are not integrated in the conservation objectives. It should place an emphasis on building the capacity of lower level FA services to carry out conservation work and related community development activities that are essential for engaging with them in conservation endeavor.
- (4) With regard to future local community development activities, collaborate with specialized NGOs, rural banking institutions, agricultural services them in partnership.

To ITTO

- (1) Although TBC does not have to be based on formal agreements, ITTO should encourage participating countries to agree on mechanisms, formal or informal, to ensure adequate governance of the cooperation, effectiveness of biodiversity conservation, strong ownership of the initiative and sustainability of the results.
- (2) Without standards for TBC, it is difficult to assess how projects are performing in developing TBC processes. Based on its past experience with TBC projects, ITTO should provide such standards, showing the minimum requirements of TBC proposals that countries should meet for funding.

- (3) For lesson learning, further facilitate contacts with Laos in order to understand the factors that did not allow its involvement in the Project.
- (4) Develop conditions that should exist in the projects contexts so that the use of revolving funds to support local development activities may be allowed. One these could be that projects should not provide revolving funds if there is no proof that there are no other ways through for ex. rural banking institutions.
- (5) Revise mechanisms for project monitoring and reporting to ensure that projects make use of indicators of the logframe to report on progress.
- (6) Project Teams should view the Logframe as a living document that needs to be revised with approval of the PSC and ITTO Secretariat if necessary based on expert analysis.

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