INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL TIMBER COUNCIL

Distr.
GENERAL

ITTC-JC(XLV)/2 – Annex II
26 September 2011

ENGLISH

FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION
14-19 November 2011
La Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala

META-EVALUATION OF PREVIOUSLY EVALUATED ITTO PROJECTS

Lessons learned & good practices towards sustainable management of tropical forests

Summary Report

3. Protected areas and biodiversity conservation

Markku Simula, Hosny El-Lakany and Ivan Tomaselli

THEMATIC SUMMARY REPORT No. 3

PROTECTED AREAS AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

1. INTRODUCTION

Protection, conservation and enhancement of forest biodiversity are national and international priorities to ensure the stability and resilience of ecosystems. ITTO's mandate is to foster international cooperation in the achievement of sustainable forest management (SFM), including the maintenance and enhancement of forest biodiversity. ITTO has consistently sought to promote biodiversity conservation both in forests managed for timber production and in protected areas. The Organization has promoted zoning of forests to enhance both production and protection functions. Field level projects have been important in capacity building and designing national policies in biodiversity conservation.

In addition to national level efforts, ITTO's trans-boundary initiatives have been valuable both in improving the status of conservation on the ground and in translating the political commitments of participating governments into practical operational collaboration. These projects have been especially useful in contributing to capacity building through sharing of experience amongst all levels of forest management and conservation organizations from the field to the line ministries. Assumptions that underpin the related forest policy debate have also been tested in practice. The high political profile of trans-boundary conservation projects has ensured that the lessons learned have fed into the policy development and educational programmes.

Trans-boundary initiatives have special significance as many of the world's most important remaining tropical forests are found in remote frontier areas. Conserving and sustainably managing these forests is one of the major global environmental challenges. In addition to government executed projects, ITTO also collaborates with communities and NGOs in trans-boundary projects which have laid down the groundwork for establishing a community-based conservation and development programs that can maintain the long term integrity of national parks and develop effective models for managing trans-boundary protected areas.

The ITTO/IUCN guidelines for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in tropical timber production forests is a useful source of information for the design and implementation of projects related to protected areas and conservation of biodiversity.

Ensuring forest health and vitality in ecosystems is a global conservation priority. Effective strategies are based on an appropriate balance of strictly protected areas and effective biodiversity conservation in other forests but it is difficult to define in practice. ITTO-funded projects are crafted within the framework of sustainable forest management. Typical examples include: (1) field projects in areas where local population is the determining factor for forest biodiversity conservation (buffer zone or inside the protected area); (2) main development alternatives for local population include forest management, restoration/reforestation, harvesting of forest products and their processing, etc. (3) exceptional value of the forest biodiversity is highly endangered, especially when forest genetic resources are valued for the future.

2. KEY ISSUES

- Deforestation and loss of biodiversity take place in situations where there is lack of awareness of the importance of different forest types for biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods among local populations. Market failures drive unsustainable utilization of forest resources, and other factors include weak governance and insufficient scientific information on ecology, silviculture, harvesting and utilization of tropical forests.

- Protected areas often lack management plans or their implementation is ineffective – many protected areas are only "paper parks". Therefore, projects need to ensure the sustainability of forest ecosystems through the implementation of a management plan for conservation and sustainable use, as appropriate. Planning should be based on adequate studies and research on forest values, including on the resource potential and the needs of local populations. Strengthening of institutional capacities is often also needed.

- The trans-boundary aspects of flora and fauna of the forest reserves are particularly important for the conservation of migratory species. There is also a need to contribute to security in protected areas and building up trust between the collaborating nations. These measures would be necessary also for tapping new revenue for conservation from the tourism potential in the participating countries.
- Communities living adjacent to protected areas need to participate in decision making as usually stipulated in the legislation. However, often communities cannot do so due to lack of awareness, skills, and weak internal organization. In fact, it is often difficult to structure operational relationships between communities and other stakeholders in and around protected areas. Socio-economic studies are only a first step in building up effective partnerships which is a delicate time-consuming process that can easily get bogged down.
- In many national parks, illegal bush meat poaching may continue in spite of enhanced control measures often with external support. Control cannot be effective if culprits are not prosecuted and condemned in the courts. Poaching is an additional security risk for park guards as well. Even if the law may allow subsistence hunting for the inhabitants of the area, control of hunting tends to remain largely ineffective.
- In some conservation areas, many externally funded environmental and social projects are operating without effective coordination which limits their impacts. Cooperation and coordination would be particularly needed for financing of critical activities for social development as resources of individual projects are often insufficient. Development of alternative sustainable economic activities has proved to be difficult and remains a key constraint for engaging local people in conservation.
- Also in trans-boundary projects national authorities' participation may lack operational coordination, although partner governments officially support the project. While some forestry authorities can provide financial support during execution and may express willingness to assume larger responsibilities in the future, others may remain uncommitted. Very few public agencies in participating countries make necessary commitments to implement activities and bear their costs to maintain effective community participation in biodiversity conservation in the buffer zones after the project has been terminated.
- Project proposals may be attractively designed on paper but in practice, they may turn out to be too ambitious considering fund availability, planned time period, working conditions and capacity to control external factors. Project plans may also fail to foresee adequate activities to achieve the identified specific objectives. The design too often requires NGOs as Executing Agencies to carry out actions that are beyond their legal and professional competence such as establishing a protected area system on government or private lands.
- Although the idea behind some projects could be valid given the problem analysis that led to its formulation, there is always a need for participation of beneficiaries and other stakeholders through adequate consultation in the project formulation process. The project rationale is usually based on filling existing gaps in the knowledge on the resources in order to elaborate management plans for the areas under consideration. Success on the long term requires effective implementation arrangements of the plans prepared but such arrangements are not always considered in the project design phase.

3. LESSONS LEARNED

Project design

- Achievement of biodiversity conservation objectives with indigenous people's participation can be more effective than through establishment of strictly protected areas. This, however, greatly depends upon (1) tangible results of sustainable management alternatives generated by the project; (2) population growth and ethnic diversity in the target areas; and (3) fulfillment of the government's responsibilities regarding infrastructure and social services.
- Communication, awareness raising and training are fundamental prerequisites for change in local customs but it takes time to have a true impact due to traditional resistance if the targeted change in behavior is not by obligation.

- Participative community management depends on the socio-cultural environment; the well-being of local people is a precondition for success in conservation and engagement in productive activities. Most conservation projects come with a restrictive initial agenda for communities but their members are seldom entrepreneurial or interested in a change of life style. Externally imposed management of sacred sites and trees is also difficult to accept by communities.
- Understanding ethnic diversity, local traditions and cultural and spiritual values in the protected area is necessary as conservation measures are built on them.
- Development of alternative sustained livelihoods activities within the framework of a forest conservation projects requires a broad range of skills which should be provided through the project team.
- Income generation needs to be addressed as a community or family business enterprise and not only as a forest conservation project activity. Strategic partnerships can be elaborated to devolve local community development activities to NGOs and other actors such as rural banking institutions or extension organizations to ensure continuous support to alternative livelihoods.
- Alternative economic activities can provide tangible impacts, particularly during the transition period toward effective conservation management. There is no blueprint for their development which is a stepwise process through trial and error for which communities need patience. Successful development of activities should also consider differences in gender priorities and participation.
- Adequate resources may have to be invested in community development, even if it may not be the main target of conservation. The results of past projects have shown that it has often been a key element for the success.
- Improvement of local livelihoods usually requires investments in infrastructure and economic activities which can bring along increased risk for the clearance of forest land and illegal activities.
- To address poaching in protected areas, zoning for hunting areas within the conservation areas is helpful for improving control. Rotation can be applied when allocating hunting rights to have sufficient areas for fauna recovery. Special measures are often needed for management of large wildlife in order to avoid animals getting accustomed to feeding on crops. Village committees can be useful for monitoring their threats.
- Buffer zones, with a mosaic of multiple use areas around protected areas can provide sustained protection while helping build up economic resources. However, expectations within a limited time period should be realistic, particularly with regard to changes in community behavior.
- Generating credible information is necessary for raising awareness among the decision-makers on the importance of different types of forests and their biodiversity for the preservation of the environment and the national economy.

Project implementation

- If a biodiversity conservation project is implemented strictly according to its original operational plans within a relatively short period, it may produce visible short-term outputs but there is a risk of compromising long-term impacts.
- An adequate time period is needed for participatory processes to root down and for developing adequate approaches and ownership by the beneficiaries and partners. For this reason a minimum of three-year project duration should be planned.
- By their nature project impacts tend to always evolve slowly and therefore interventions should remain active for several years even after project termination. A follow-up mechanism can ensure that actions can continue.
- In trans-boundary conservation projects there is a risk of accumulated complexities due to the fact that more than one country is involved which calls for early devising of adequate mitigation measures.

- 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 other local partners. This would ensure relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the project activities.
- If the project was initially planned to be implemented by a government agency, but no progress could be seen, project implementation could be improved through subcontracting to a competent NGO while recognizing their limitations to influence policy and change institutions.
- Partnerships have proved to be an excellent concept to build up collaboration among participating actors. However, operational partnerships with communities take time to establish and need a phased process for capacity building.
- Delays during the implementation can occur due to changes in national policy, regulations and institutional framework, which calls for adaptive project management.

4. GOOD PRACTICES

Project design

- Conservation projects need to be designed through a careful consideration of the best available practices. These include: (1) empowerment of local communities' leadership, through organizational assistance, carefully promoting democratic approaches; (2) frequent but precise up to date communication on the project's objectives and implementation; (3) respect for local traditions, especially indigenous people's customary rights and own rules; the latter can incorporate biodiversity conservation elements; (4) facilitating contact between indigenous leadership with national or regional government authorities; (5) recognition that some classical approaches to conserve biodiversity, such as establishment of strictly protected areas, may not be feasible; (6) redefinition of limits of existing protected areas when these include populated areas without biological diversity value; (7) land titling for indigenous people as a pre-condition to set aside protected areas; and (8) selection and training of indigenous or local people as promoters of conservation goals and project results.
- Conservation projects can succeed when they are inclusive and the appropriate target groups are involved and benefit from the outputs. Well selected target groups (e.g. indigenous peoples, forest communities) are the determining factor for successful biodiversity conservation projects. However, all the relevant stakeholders should be consulted, including local and regional authorities, settlers and other forest dwellers, community-based organizations, forest enterprises, contractors, civil society organizations, etc.
- Cooperation and partnerships with communities, forestry companies, protected area agencies, forestry departments, international conservation organizations and local NGOs can be effective if based on commitments of all groups. Establishment of mutual trust and understanding is a pre-condition for project success.
- Project plans could make provisions for action to encourage local authorities, enterprises and communities to include biodiversity conservation activities in their forest management plans. Voluntary groups active in this field can play a significant role in raising awareness on conservation if they can receive professional advisory support, which the Executing Agencies could arrange.

Communities in conservation areas

- Effective conservation and sustainable management of forests requires that communities who live in and around the forests can benefit from the project outcomes. Community stewardship is often a useful strategy in management of conservation areas.
- Involvement of conservation NGOs and other civil society organizations in biodiversity conservation field projects can be highly valuable as they bring new skills and perspectives, and often funds. They can also help ensure that adequate attention is given to local peoples' concerns.

- Measures are often needed to avoid unrealistic expectations on the benefits that relatively small-scale projects can bring rapidly for community livelihoods in remote forest regions and conservation areas.
- The Community Organizer approach has proved to be useful in training of rural promoters recruited among local farmers in integrated national park management and in economic activities. Refinancing of promoters' work could be achieved for example by licensed collection of saleable goods, hence motivating them to regularly visit their clients and pass information and offer training to them.

Zoning

- Park zoning needs an evaluation of biodiversity assets, assessment of traditional land use and clarification of use rights. Re-classification of forestland into a national park allows functional zoning, including limited use areas within the park borders. A good planning process is consultative and its outcome is negotiated with local authorities.
- Declaration of a national park can mobilize national and international funds for its management.
- Earmarking of buffer zones around sensitive areas is an important component of the protected area management plans. Buffer zone management can be successful if plans have been developed with the participation of local institutional, non-governmental and rural stakeholders. For development activities in the buffer zone, collateral financing from non-project sources could be raised to generate income and employment, as well as to supply timber and non-timber forest products for local use and markets.

Trans-boundary conservation areas

- In trans-boundary conservation projects a joint coordinating committee at a sufficiently high-level can ensure that national-level commitments for co-operative action are implemented in practice. These projects may need to develop specific multi-national financing mechanisms for sustaining post-project activities for effective conservation.
- Trans-boundary projects can be successfully crafted within regional initiatives, such as the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, the Heart of Borneo Initiative, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty and others, to promote biodiversity conservation in production forests. However, overly complex implementation arrangements should be avoided.
- While the engagement of local people is important in all field projects, it is especially necessary in trans-boundary projects as they occur in remote forest areas which are often the home of marginalized groups, ethnic minorities and populations that are amongst the world's poorest and most forest dependent.

Research

- Databases, research and studies developed by the project can be designed taking into account the needs for the design of conservation strategies and forest policies.
- Engagement of research and educational institutes is particularly useful for designing and implementing scientific components of the projects, and for validation and dissemination of results and lessons learned.

Project implementation and sustainability

- Low levels of support over long periods are often more effective than heavy financial support delivered over short time-frames. The entire cycle of project preparation, negotiation, implementation and evaluation contributes to the progress in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in project areas.
- Many existing management plans of protected areas need revision by adopting an action oriented approach, including effective cooperation arrangements with local stakeholders (institutional and rural) for co-management, and for ensuring economic and social development.
- Project offices located in the vicinity of remote conservation sites ensures the ease of work and effective supervision, but enough computer facilities are needed to save staff time for field activities.

- Regular monitoring and reporting help smooth implementation of biodiversity projects.
- Adequate funds need to be raised to continue data collection and to monitor changes in the conservation forests after the project completion. Seeking additional financing from donor agencies is often necessary.
- National public works departments can be engaged to maintain the main infrastructure (road/bridges) in the project area for the benefit of adjacent communities.
- Transparency and effective communication among project partners is a key for smooth joint implementation and reducing unnecessary frictions. Clarity on roles and responsibilities is fundamental for successful partnerships in conservation areas. Clear rules for accountability for each partner are usually necessary.
- Conflict resolution committees can be useful in solving possible conflicts. A possibility to organize extraordinary meetings is needed to address emerging problems.
- An NGO member can be a useful partner for witnessing and providing international perspective as well as specialist technical knowledge.
- Biodiversity conservation projects need feasible exit strategies to ensure that project activities can be sustained. Mobilizing funding from new sources and enhancing cooperation with local and international NGOs can be potential elements of such strategies.

SOURCES

This thematic summary is based on the ex-post evaluation reports of the following projects:

PD128/91 Rev.2 (F)	MANAGEMENT, CONSERVATION, AND DEVELOPMENT OF MANGROVE FORESTS IN PANAMA
PD026/92 Rev.2 (F,I)	DEVELOPMENT OF METHODS AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINED MANAGEMENT OF MOIST TROPICAL FORESTS IN CAMEROON
PD026/93 Rev.1 (F)	DEVELOPMENT OF BENTUANG KARIMUN NATURE RESERVE AS A NATIONAL PARK - PHASE I
PD014/00 Rev.5 (F)	INTEGRATED PLAN FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE BAGRE HIGHLANDS BIOLOGICAL CORRIDOR, PROVINCE OF DARIEN
PD017/00 Rev.3 (F)	CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE NATURAL PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM OF TAMBOPATA (PERU) - MADIDI (BOLIVIA)
PD289/04 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)