Integrated Conservation and Development

A Component Description

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BIORAP  Rapid Biodiversity Appraisal  
CUZ    Controlled Use Zone  
DAFO  District Agriculture and Forestry Office  
DFRC  Division of Forest Resource Conservation  
DOF  Department of Forestry  
FOMACOP  Forest Management and Conservation Project  
GOL  Government of Lao PDR  
ICAD  Integrated Conservation and Development  
LSFP  Lao Swedish Forestry Programme  
LUP  Land Use Planning  
M & E  Monitoring and Evaluation  
MIS  Management Information System  
NBCA  National Biodiversity Conservation Area  
NTFP  Non Timber Forest Products  
PA  Protected Area  
PAFO  Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office  
PFO  Provincial Forestry Office  
PXH  Phu Xang He
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background and Justification 1
Overview 1
Scope of Activities 2
Key Concepts 3
Goal and Objectives of ICAD 4
Major Steps 4
Problem Identification and Analysis 5
Planning Development Activities 5
Implementation 6
Monitoring and Evaluation 7
The Legal and Policy Framework 7
Lao Ownership 8
Methods Development 8
End Users and Target Beneficiaries 8
Gender Responsiveness 9
Major Lessons Learned 9
Additional Supporting Documentation 11
Integrated Conservation and Development 11
General 11

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

In 1993 the Government of Laos instituted a protected area system which currently comprises 20 National Biodiversity Conservation Areas (NBCAs) and numerous provincial and district conservation forests. The establishment of this protected area system was the start of a long-term process of developing a management system capable of protecting, enhancing and managing these valuable resources on a sustainable basis, for the good of the entire nation.

Government policy on conservation focuses on developing a partnership approach to protected area management with the local people who live in and depend on the natural resources in these areas for their daily livelihoods. Since the early 1990’s, policy has emphasised participatory action with villagers in developing sustainable livelihood and conservation strategies through a local partnership approach which strongly advocates people’s involvement in natural resources management and protection. A key component of this process is the provision of appropriate assistance for livelihood development needs in NBCA guardian villages.

TPZ Totally Protected Zone
VFV Village Forestry Volunteer
In partnership with the Department of Forestry, the Lao Swedish Forestry Programme (LSFP) has been working in 4 protected areas on the development and testing of appropriate methods and tools for implementing Integrated Conservation and Development (ICAD) programs. Development has focused on identifying activities which not only improve the quality of life in guardian villages but simultaneously contribute to conservation goals.

OVERVIEW

It is now widely accepted that local stewardship of resources plays an important role in sustainable resource use. The participation of local communities in the management of biodiversity not only promotes conservation, but when linked to development initiatives, it can also help to achieve rural economic development goals. ICAD is increasingly being used as a key component in participatory protected area management throughout the world. It is considered particularly appropriate for Lao PDR given the country’s commitment to a partnership approach with local communities for the co-management of protected area resources.

The rationale for helping villagers with community development within an ICAD framework embodies three closely related objectives:

1. Villages in and around protected areas are among the poorest in the country because of their remote position, their rugged environment and their often harsh and inhospitable surroundings. Most families have no regular income and rely entirely on what they can grow or collect. Consequently, in times of crop failure, illness or death in the family, marriages or the need to buy school books they turn to the protected area as a source of food and income. By helping guardian communities solve these key problems, it is possible reduce their dependence on destructive and non-sustainable extraction of resources from protected areas.

2. Participatory protected area management is a two-way agreement between villagers and government. In the process villagers are asked to forego some of their traditional rights and to help with conservation activities. By assisting with their development needs, Government is demonstrating to villagers a parallel commitment to the agreement.

3. Through the process of livelihood development, communities become better organised and are strengthened and empowered to better manage their own affairs and development needs. This helps prepare them for the task of participatory conservation co-management, which is more likely to succeed in cohesive, well-organised communities comprising committed and capable people.

Scope of Activities

ICAD is not merely the provision of community development activities per se. Rather, it is assistance targeted at those problems that are forcing guardian village families into destructive and non-sustainable use of NBCA resources. Although the actual development activities often vary from place to place according to local conditions and community needs, as a general rule, ICAD activities will:

- Address priority problems and needs as identified by the villagers themselves.
- Focus primarily on those problems that are forcing families into destructive patterns of resource use in the NBCA.
- Focus on the poorest of the poor or those families doing most damage to the protected area.
- Have a clear and demonstrable positive effect on natural resource conservation.
- Be cheap, simple to implement and give significant benefits with rapid results.

Interventions can be wide-ranging and may involve a number of different disciplines such as agriculture, water resources, health, education, infrastructure development, etc. In many cases, specialist technical expertise, materials or financial support is required for these activities. To obtain such support, it has been found useful to form partnerships with government agencies, other projects or NGOs who are working in the relevant field. For example, in order to obtain support for ICAD activities Phu Xang He LSFP developed partnerships with:

- Tassano Rice Research Station for a rice variety improvement program.
- UXO Lao for assistance with clearing unexploded ordinance near guardian villages.
- Regional Development Committee (RDC) for assistance with village fisheries management.
- Savannakhet Tourism Office for assistance with community-managed ecotourism.

Key Concepts
ICAD attempts to improve the quality of life of guardian villagers by linking conservation with development in such a way that they support each other in a mutually beneficial manner.

A good example comes from Phu Xang He NBCA where none of the enclave villages were able to produce sufficient rice to meet subsistence needs. Indeed, in some years, many families were in rice deficit for half a year or more. This was forcing villagers to follow a variety of strategies to meet their subsistence food needs, all of which were harmful to the environment. Some of their more common strategies included:

- Opening new forest land to expand their rice production area.
- Borrowing rice from richer neighbours and repaying the debt with sawn timber in the dry season.
- Hunting and selling the catch to pay for additional rice.
- Increased collection of NTFP’s either for sale or for consumption as a substitute for rice.

All of these strategies were having a direct negative impact on the protected area. By helping villagers to increase yields on their existing rice land through the provision of improved varieties and training and demonstrations on rice husbandry and nutrient management, these impacts can be reduced.

Similarly, the community-based eco-tourism program increased family incomes through the sale of produce, handicrafts and food, and the provision of accommodation, guide services, etc. At the same time, it demonstrated to villagers the value and importance of the protected area and gave them a vested interest in conserving these resources to maintain the income they receive from eco-tourism.

To implement ICAD activities successfully, a few key concepts need to be understood and followed.

- ICAD is participatory in nature and actively involves villagers in the entire process from needs assessment through activity planning to implementation and evaluation.
- It is empowering and aims to increase the capacity of guardian communities to better manage their own development needs.
- It is community focused and encourages cooperation among villagers in the implementation of development activities which benefit the entire community.
- ICAD is gender sensitive and attempts to respond to the specific needs of women, in particular: family planning, domestic water and the management of NTFP’s.
- It is holistic in approach and considers entire livelihood systems and their interactions with natural resources in the protected area.

Villagers who receive assistance through ICAD need to be made aware of a number of key issues. Firstly, they should understand that ICAD is a two-way agreement and that the provision of development assistance is contingent on their reciprocal help with conservation. Secondly, the importance of ‘community ownership’ of the development activities cannot be over-stated. Villagers are expected to contribute labour, materials and possibly even money to ICAD activities. The role of the NBCA in the process is merely to help villagers address their own problems, not to do the job for them. Most importantly, villagers must understand that integrated conservation and development is a joint partnership requiring an equal commitment from both villagers and NBCA authorities.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF ICAD

The basic goal of ICAD is to ensure that:

Development contributes positively to Conservation, and that

Conservation contributes positively to Development

To achieve this ICAD embodies a number of inter-related objectives, as follows:

1. Reducing the reliance of local communities on the NBCA’s natural resources by the provision of assistance for community development activities.
2. Linking development activities with conservation to provide villagers with a vested interest in the natural resource base, thus ensuring positive outcomes on it.
3. Targeting communities, groups or individuals who are having the greatest impact on the protected area.
4. Building management expertise and self-reliance in guardian communities to enable them to better manage their own development and conservation needs.

MAJOR STEPS

ICAD comprises a number of steps which are followed in sequence in a participatory manner with villagers. The process starts with an orientation to explain to villagers the purpose of ICAD, what it will involve, their role in the process and how they will benefit from it. It then moves to identifying and prioritising the major problems facing the community, followed by an analysis of their root causes and how they impact on the natural environment. Next, development activities are selected based on their likely positive impact on the protected area and detailed planning begins. Once the activities have been implemented, both the benefit to the community and their impact on the protected area needs to be jointly evaluated with villagers. The evaluation may lead to modification of the activities or identify new activities which are then implemented in a second cycle of the process.

The ICAD process is in many ways similar to the LSPF full cycle extension system. It involves a number of sequential steps, including problem identification and analysis, activity planning, implementation and evaluation. Their sequence and how they relate to each other in the overall process is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Key steps in the integrated conservation and development process

CONSERVATION

Problem identification and analysis

Problems are identified jointly with villagers using problem census and rapid appraisal techniques with gender dis-aggregated villager groups to ensure that the key problems as perceived by both men and women are adequately covered. The problems are then prioritised using participatory ranking tools and the key problems are jointly analysed with villagers. Participatory problem analysis provides a number of benefits:
Villagers better understand the causes of their problems and begin to realise that solutions are within their reach.
Analysis helps to show the villagers how many of the problems they face on a daily basis are related to the degradation of natural resources in the NBCA.
The continuing involvement of villagers gives them a greater sense of ‘ownership’ of the solutions which will eventually emerge from the process.
The men and women are empowered as they help each other understand the causes of the problems they face and as they begin to identify solutions to them.

The eventual output of problem identification and analysis is a set of proposed livelihood development activities which address the key problems facing each village.

Planning development activities

Planning ICAD activities involves working with villagers to (I) define the major objectives of the activity, (II) describe the expected outputs, (III) agree on the key implementation steps, and (IV) develop an overall plan including budgets, responsibilities and monitoring schedules.

Selecting development activities which simultaneously improve quality of life in guardian villages and also have a positive effect on conservation in the protected area is the key to successful planning. Although certainly important, the potential impact on the protected area is not the only criterion which is considered when selecting projects for implementation. Proposed projects are also screened according to a number of other criteria to ensure that they:

- Address priority problems and needs as identified by the villagers themselves.
- Focus primarily on those problems that are forcing families into destructive patterns of resource use in the NBCA.
- Focus on the poorest of the poor or those families doing most damage to the protected area.
- Have a clear and demonstrable positive effect on resource conservation.
- Are cheap, simple to implement and give significant benefits with rapid results.

Implementation

Some projects can be implemented by villagers themselves using local materials and expertise; others require support from the NBCA authorities or even specialist expertise, specific materials or additional funding from an external source. Such specialist services are obtained by developing partnerships with other projects or government agencies.

The guardian village networks, described in more detail in the Land Use Planning Component Description, are also used for the implementation of community development activities. It is intended that, as the networks develop, they will play an increasing role in both conservation management and in the replication of development activities throughout all member communities. By this means, government support for development can be tied to conservation responsibilities and an incentive provided for communities to develop and strengthen the network which serves both conservation and development needs. This networking approach has a number of advantages:

- It enables new villages to learn from other communities who have more experience of the process.
- Development initiatives can be shared and replicated through the network, thus speeding up their adoption.
- By linking villages to a common conservation and development cause, it empowers the network to resist threats from external sources which might be beyond the capacity of any single village on its own.
- It improves efficiency in the use of staff time and budget as the network itself takes over the management of some aspects of the development process.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring schedules for ICAD activities, which were drawn up during the planning phase, are followed throughout the implementation period. Villagers themselves are trained in and encouraged to take on day-to-day monitoring tasks and the information generated is checked during regular monitoring visits by the district level NBCA staff. Completed monitoring reports are submitted to the NBCA Head on a regular basis, who makes follow-up, trouble shooting visits as the situation may demand.
Evaluation of ICAD activities is also conducted jointly with participating communities to determine their subsistence, economic and livelihood benefits. During this process, the ideas of villagers are sought in regard to improving the performance of the activities and to expanding the benefits to other households and villages.

During the evaluation process, it is also important to make an assessment of the impact of activities in three key areas. Firstly, the socio-economic impact on women, the poor and other disadvantaged groups is assessed and ameliorative action taken where necessary. Secondly, the agro-ecological impact on land use patterns, forest habitat quality and wildlife populations is assessed and acted upon, where appropriate. Finally, the impact of the development activities on the community commitment to co-management and their sense of responsibility towards conservation generally, is evaluated.

THE LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

In 1993, 18 NBCAs were established by Prime Minister’s Decree 164, with two more being added in 1994 (Dong Phu Viang), and 1997 (Xe Sap). After several years of preparation, a comprehensive Forestry Law was promulgated in 1996, which included a number of clauses relating to NBCA management. Between them, these two legal instruments form the statutory basis for protected area management in Lao PDR.

The provisions of PM 164 confer a high level of protection on NBCAs by naming and defining the boundaries of the sites with multiple protection objectives, and by prohibiting all destructive activities within them. It also provides for legal penalties for infringements and places management responsibility with MAFF and the provincial authorities.

The Forestry Law reconfirms Government’s commitment to participatory management by creating a framework for zoning NBCAs into totally protected (TPZ) and controlled use (CUZ) zones. This is further elaborated by Article 42 which specifies the rights of villagers to utilise the CUZ for a variety of livelihood purposes. The legal implication is that while TPZs remain the direct responsibility of NBCA authorities, CUZs are jointly managed by villagers with support from the government. Hence, ICAD activities naturally target the CUZ which is managed by villagers for their livelihood activities.

Current policy strongly emphasises Government’s commitment to a system of devolved co-management of NBCAs, as provided for under the law. Since the early 1990’s, policy has also stressed the need for a balance between conservation and development which emphasises participatory action with villagers to develop sustainable livelihood strategies which simultaneously contribute to conservation.

LAO OWNERSHIP

Methods Development

The development of ICAD methods and tools has been a broad-based initiative by DoF in partnership with the Lao Swedish Forestry Programme and many other donor programs. As such, LSFP’s efforts in this area are merely one contribution to the overall goal of developing an ICAD approach, appropriate to the needs of the Lao PDR. The LSFP Dissemination Workshop held in September in Vientiane brought together all protected area stakeholders with the objective of consolidating this broad base of knowledge and experience and an entire day of the workshop was devoted to ICAD activities.

The overall approach has thus been developed in close association with protected area staff from the national (DFRC), provincial and district levels. As a result, it is within the capabilities of protected area managers and district staff and is relevant to the day-to-day demands they face in their normal work.

Development within LSFP has taken place entirely within the current government administrative system. As a consequence, the system is capable of being sustained within existing government structures following completion of the Project.

End Users and Target Beneficiaries

The ICAD approach has been designed for use by NBCA Heads and staff at the provincial and district levels.
While it puts responsibility for implementation primarily in the hands of NBCA staff and villagers, it is supported by central and provincial levels through a system of devolved responsibilities, as follows:

**National Level:** DFRC has responsibility for communicating national policy guidelines to NBCA managers and providing specialist technical advice in support of the needs of field level staff.

**Provincial Level:** NBCA Heads have responsibility for coordinating ICAD activities in the NBCA and for providing general technical and management support to district level staff.

**District Level:** DAFO Staff have responsibility for day-to-day planning, management and monitoring, in conjunction with guardian villagers.

**Guardian Village Network Level:** Guardian community networks have responsibility for cooperating and helping each other in the development process and for the replication of promising ICAD activities to other villages in the network.

**Village Level:** Villagers have overall and final responsibility for decision making in regard to all aspects of ICAD activities.

ICAD supports the decentralisation of authority to the local level by:

- Utilising a bottom-up planning process whereby local communities are actively involved in the design and implementation and evaluation of development activities.
- Giving local communities an economic stake in the natural resources and thus providing an incentive for their sustainable management.
- Placing responsibility for day-to-day management of ICAD activities primarily in the hands of the villagers themselves.
- Allowing national, provincial and district level staff to perform mainly a support and advisory function for the villagers rather than a supervisory role.

**GENDER RESPONSIVENESS**

ICAD incorporates a number of gender responsive features:

- A gender focal person with responsibility for bringing gender considerations into the mainstream of integrated conservation and development activities has been involved throughout the methods development process.
- Wherever possible, gender dis-aggregated data are collected and needs assessments and problem identification exercises are conducted with separate male and female groups.
- ICAD targets both men and women as beneficiaries in an equitable manner.
- Family planning awareness and support activities are included in the development activities in response to problems perceived by women.

**MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED**

1. Worldwide, integrated conservation and development has had its fair share of failures, and unfortunately, it is beginning to get a bad name with some donors. However, due to GoL’s acceptance of the rights of communities to reside in protected areas, a recognition of community rights to sustainable resource use in these areas, and a policy emphasis on devolved planning, the Lao PDR offers a quite **unique opportunity** for successfully integrating conservation and development. The reasons for the significant success of a number ICAD activities in Lao PDR should be analysed and documented as case studies, as lessons for a worldwide audience.

2. The **timing of ICAD activities** is vitally important. They should be introduced at the same time that land use and conservation agreements are being developed with villagers. This demonstrates government’s role in the two-way agreements and shows a commitment to compensating villagers for the traditional activities they were willing to forgo under the agreements.

3. It is important to understand that ICAD is not merely the provision of community development *per se*. ICAD is **targeted assistance**, aimed at solving those problems which are forcing guardian village
families into destructive and non-sustainable resource use. Activities must have strong links with conservation and, at the same time, should address priority problems and needs as identified by the villagers themselves. To be effective, they should also focus on the poorest of the poor or those families doing most damage to protected area resources. This poverty and forest-resource-reliance focus is promoted in the Participatory NBCA Management System by the use of a variety of tools such as wealth ranking, forest dependency ranking and gender dis-aggregated discussion groups.

4. The very rapid population growth rates common in virtually all NBCA guardian villages throughout the country is putting increasing pressure on the resource base. Traditional hunting and gathering activities which were previously sustainable are now exceeding sustainable levels due to increasing population numbers. This issue is commonly raised by women during problem analysis in connection with health and workload problems. As a consequence, family planning programs offering information and advice are a central component of ICAD under the participatory NBCA Management System.

5. An all-too-often overlooked benefit of ICAD is its effect on capacity-building and empowerment. Through the process of livelihood development, ICAD increases capacity in guardian communities, which become better organised and empowered to manage their own affairs and development needs. This helps prepare them for the task of participatory conservation management which is more likely to succeed in cohesive, well-organised communities comprising capable people. Part of this empowerment process involves instilling villagers with a sense of ownership for the development activities they undertake. This is best achieved by involving villagers in all aspects of activity planning and implementation, and also by requiring them to contribute labour, material and even funding for the activities.

6. Some ICAD projects can be implemented by villagers themselves, others need the support of NBCA authorities, while yet others require specialist assistance from another source. The Participatory NBCA Management System emphasises the establishment of development partnerships with relevant government agencies or other projects or programs to obtain assistance in these areas. To develop such partnerships, NBCA Heads will require coordination and networking skills and sufficient standing in the development community to be able to approach other agencies for necessary assistance.

7. If done properly, eco-tourism has a high potential as an integrated conservation and development activity in the Lao PDR. Community-based nature tourism increases family incomes through the sale of produce, handicrafts and food, and the provision of accommodation, guide services, etc. At the same time, it demonstrates to villagers the value and importance of the protected area and gives them a vested interest in conserving these resources to maintain their source of income from eco-tourism. It can target hunters or the poorest of the poor as guides and is also gender focused; as it provides equitable opportunities for women to benefit through handicraft production and working as guides, cooks and cleaners.

8. The community networks developed under the Participatory NBCA Management System are also an extremely valuable tool for the expansion and replication of community development activities. As promising activities are identified, the network can be used to expand them to other villages. Eco-tourism, in particular, represents an activity which could be managed by the network by rotating trips around member villages, not only to spread the benefits but also to reduce any negative impacts from the over-reliance on eco-tourism by any individual village.

9. The Participatory NBCA Management System makes full use of community study tours as a tool for ICAD. Cross visits, either to villages within the community network or further afield to other projects and programs, is used not only to replicate existing ICAD activities to other villages, but also to introduce ideas for new activities which have been pioneered elsewhere.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Integrated Conservation and Development


**General**

Anon., (2000). A Manager’s Guide to Protected Area Management in Lao PDR. Division of Forest Resource Conservation, Department of Forestry, Lao PDR.


