Participatory Conservation Co-Management

A Component Description

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Intended Audience of this Document

1. Policy-makers, planners and senior managers concerned with protected area management.
2. NBCA Heads and NBCA staff.
3. Heads of Provincial Agriculture and Forestry and Provincial Forestry Offices.
4. District Agriculture and Forestry Office Heads.

Purpose of the Document

1. To describe LSFP’s overall approach to participatory NBCA co-management.
2. To introduce readers to a variety of co-management methods and tools available for use by NBCA managers and staff.

Explanation of ‘Component’

In partnership with the Department of Forestry, the Lao Swedish Forestry Programme (LSFP) has been working in 4 protected areas on the development of a Participatory Protected Area Management System appropriate to the current and future needs of the Lao PDR. The system embodies 3 major components and a variety of methods, tools and case studies which are described in an inter-related series of documents as follows:
Information provided in this Document

- Goals and objectives of participatory protected area co-management in Lao PDR.
- The steps and procedures involved in protected area co-management.
- End users and target beneficiaries of the procedures.
- The experiences and major lessons learned in protected area co-management.

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
MAF              Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
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
TPZ              Totally Protected Zone
VFV              Village Forestry Volunteer
BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

In 1993 the Government of Laos instituted a protected area system which now 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.

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 a participatory conservation co-management system. Development has focused on working with guardian villagers to identify potential co-management roles for villagers and to develop test and refine a variety of tools which help them fulfill these roles.

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 can also help to improve the quality of life in the villages. A participatory conservation co-management approach is considered particularly appropriate for Lao PDR given the government's commitment to a partnership approach with local communities for the management of protected area resources.

Government’s acceptance of the rights of communities to reside in protected areas, its recognition of the rights of communities to sustainable resource use in these areas and its commitment to devolved planning and participatory action with villagers, creates a unique opportunity for the development of effective systems of conservation co-management in the Lao PDR. Indeed, given the resources and staff currently available to NBCAs, the assistance of guardian communities in co-management is essential if conservation is to be at all effective.

Under the Participatory NBCA Management System, co-management is defined as a joint responsibility for managing conservation among villagers, district officials and NBCA authorities, all of whom are key stakeholders in the natural resource base. It involves providing guardian communities with adequate incentives and a commensurate stake in the benefits of natural resources conservation. Such incentives are provided in a number of ways:

- The provision of secure and equitable land-use rights within NBCAs.
- The provision of assistance for livelihood development activities in return for community participation in conservation management.
- Support for sustainable harvesting activities in NBCAs to give guardian villagers an economic stake in the protected area's resources.
- The development of community-based eco-tourism or other activities from which villagers receive an equitable share of the economic benefits.
- Remuneration or some other form of tangible benefits to communities or Village Forestry Volunteers for their work on co-management activities.

**KEY ATTRIBUTES**

The Participatory NBCA Management System incorporates a number of attributes which are considered critical to it successfully achieving these objectives. The system is:

**PARTICIPATORY:** It involves villagers in every step of the process and encourages them to make their own decisions regarding sustainable natural resource management.

**SIMPLE:** It is purposely simple to ensure access by all sectors of society including all ethnic groups, women and men, the illiterate, and those with little or no education.

**EMPOWERING:** It strengthens community organisation and capability and provides villagers with the skills and tools to solve their own problems and make improved decisions in regard to the sustainable management of natural resources.

**GENDER RESPONSIVE:** It promotes the active participation of women and men in all decisions regarding resource allocation and management by the use of gender disaggregated discussion groups to ensure that both men and women contribute to and benefit from improved natural resources conservation.

**INTER-COMMUNITY:** It promotes inter-village cooperation to solve resource use conflicts and creates linkages among villages to develop broader networks for mutual support and cooperation in both conservation and community development activities.

**HOLISTIC:** It focuses at the level of the entire ecosystem and addresses the key interactions among habitats, wildlife and people in a holistic manner.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY:** It is conducted by stakeholder teams comprising land use planners, conservationists, agriculturists, gender specialists, mass organisations and district officials who work with villagers in an interdisciplinary manner.

**INTEGRATED:** It links conservation with development in an integrated manner through two-way agreements
under which villagers are compensated for curtailing certain resource use practices by government assistance with livelihood and community development activities.

**STEPWISE:** It follows a logical sequence of discrete steps with ample time for due consideration of the outcomes and implications by both villagers and NBCA staff.

**ITERATIVE:** As villagers implement activities, follow agreements and adopt new resource management practices, conditions change, new problems emerge and additional lessons are learned requiring that certain steps are repeated in light of the changed circumstances.

**GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

Participatory Conservation Co-Management is designed to protect biodiversity values in the Lao PDR. At the same time, it recognises the development needs of both the nation as a whole, and the many Lao men, women and children who are dependent on the natural resource base for their day-to-day livelihoods. It also endorses the rights of all stakeholders to actively participate in making decisions about protected areas, but emphasises that with these rights come responsibilities for protecting and sustainably managing the natural resources they contain. Based on the foregoing, the overall goal of co-management can be defined as:

*Jointly, with guardian villages and other stakeholders, to protect, enhance and manage protected areas and their resources in a sustainable manner, for the good of local people and the Lao Nation as a whole.*

To achieve this goal co-management embodies the objective of:

*Developing co-management systems with guardian villagers by providing them with a stake in the resources they are being asked to help protect through the development of secure and sustainable resource use and monitoring systems.*

**MAJOR METHODS**

Co-management comprises 4 inter-related methods or sub-components :-

2. Wildlife and habitat surveys.
3. Patrolling and the monitoring of impacts on the protected area.
4. A management information system for the collation, storage and management of protected area information for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

**Conservation Education and Awareness**

Conservation education has 3 major objectives:

1. Promote community awareness of the importance of conservation and its relationship to sustainable resource use within local livelihood systems.
2. Increase villagers’ appreciation of how they will benefit from conservation.
3. Improve community understanding of their roles and responsibilities in participatory conservation co-management.

Because the majority of guardian villagers rely heavily on the natural resource base for their livelihood needs, they are usually well aware of the importance of conservation.

Thus, education programs are aimed more at increasing awareness of alternatives, rather than explaining why current practices are bad for the environment. A number of methods and materials are used to achieve this, including: (I) printed materials such as hand-outs, brochures and posters; (II) audio-visuals such as lectures and videos; and (III) a variety of other means such as reading books, songs and competitions.

**Wildlife and Habitat Surveys**
Comparatively speaking, very little is known about habitats and wildlife in protected areas in Lao PDR. Unfortunately, inventory work requires considerable expertise which has yet to be developed in NBCA staff. Consequently, current co-management systems rely heavily on obtaining this information from guardian villagers who have extensive and valuable local knowledge about wildlife and their habitats.

This participatory survey system is based on a method called BIORAP, pioneered by FOMACOP, to identify and classify habitat types based on local knowledge and the indigenous terms used by guardian villagers. Essentially, the tool describes and maps local habitats which allows wildlife sightings and other data obtained from villagers to be conveniently monitored and recorded. Computerised data storage systems for the information have been developed and are available for use in Lao language format.

Monitoring Impacts and Patrolling

Negative impacts on protected areas are monitored in two ways. Firstly, through reports received from villagers, district staff or other stakeholders, and secondly, by patrolling. Patrolling has 3 major functions: (I) gathering information, (II) showing a presence in the protected area and (III) enforcing the law. Under participatory comanagement, law enforcement by government staff is low key and is instead promoted as a village network responsibility. Only when impacts are serious, or are caused by powerful external elements, do NBCA and district authorities play a role in policing.

Monitoring and Evaluation MIS

Management information systems (MIS) have been developed for the storage and analysis of a variety of data sets, allowing the information to be tracked for monitoring and evaluation purposes (see Table 1). These protected area MIS are essential for the effective monitoring of management effort and the results it produces in terms of the protection of biodiversity values. As such, the MIS is a central component of the participatory NBCA management monitoring system.

The monitoring information form all sources contained in the MIS is used to evaluate the effectiveness of co-management over the longer term. Key indicators used to measure this include the incidence and severity of reported impacts, the amount and types of wildlife hunted and traded, villager encroachment into restricted forest zones for agriculture, the abundance, use and marketing of NTFPs, etc. By this means, records can be tracked over time and trends will indicate either success or help to identify areas where co-management needs improving.

Table 1. Protected area management information system data sets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>Staff records, job descriptions, attendance logs, field work, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equipment Vehicle logs, maintenance schedules, equipment inventory, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic</td>
<td>Village data, education, family size, income, farm size, crop yields, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>livestock, fisheries, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem census</td>
<td>Problem types, priority lists, proposed solutions, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land use</td>
<td>Village boundaries, forest zones, parcel records, agreements, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial data</td>
<td>Maps of village boundaries, forest and land use zones, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTFP use</td>
<td>Types, importance, location, harvest methods, abundance, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife use</td>
<td>Species, importance, locations, abundance, hunting methods, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitat/wildlife</td>
<td>Habitat types, locations, local names, descriptions, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impacts</td>
<td>Type, dates, location, extent, incident reports, action, results, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Prime Minister’s Decree 164, promulgated in 1993, established the protected area system and laid down the
rules and regulations governing NBCA management. The Forestry Law of 1996 also 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, co-management activities are targeted at the CUZ where villagers have a management role.

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 to ensure that villagers are adequately recompensed for their assistance with conservation activities.

**LAO OWNERSHIP**

**Methods Development**

The development of participatory co-management methods 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 a co-management 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 co-management methods.

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**

Co-management methods have 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 planning and coordinating co-management 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 coordinating co-management activities and providing the necessary authority for dealing with more serious infringements, particularly those perpetrated by external influences.

**Village Level:** Villagers have overall responsibility for co-management activities in their traditional use areas in
the CUZ and for reporting to and coordinating with the guardian community network.

Co-management supports the decentralisation of authority to the local level by:

- Utilising a bottom-up planning process whereby local communities are actively involved in the implementation of co-management 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 conservation management 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

Co-management methods incorporate a number of gender responsive features:

- A gender focal person with responsibility for mainstreaming gender considerations 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.
- Both men and women participate in conservation co-management in an equitable manner.

MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED

1. The development of a successful system of participatory co-management requires that both guardian communities and government take on appropriate and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for conservation and protection. In respect to monitoring conservation agreements, it is important that guardian villages, rather than the district, play the lead role in policing the agreements. If the district is to be perceived by villagers as an equal partner in co-management efforts, it should not have responsibility for enforcing the agreements, nor for imposing penalties for their infringement. While local government should be available to support community action in this respect, it should only step in at the request of the villages involved.

2. Conventional approaches to protected area management tend to assume that local people are the biggest threat to biodiversity conservation. Although subsistence-based hunting and gathering activities by local communities still have negative impacts on the natural resource base, participatory co-management is beginning to reduce these to sustainable levels. However, there is a growing body of evidence to show that the most serious threats to both habitat degradation and wildlife destruction are now coming from external pressures and these can be expected to increase in the future. Empowering guardian villages to become effective partners with government in the fight against these more serious and insidious external threats is a major objective of the participatory NBCA management system.

3. If participatory conservation is to work, it is important that guardian communities are given a commensurate stake in the resources which they are being asked to protect. Such incentives might include secure land tenure rights, land tax concessions, help with development, stipends for VFV’s, village use of fines and sustainable harvesting systems for NTFPs. Community forestry activities, in selected areas and under special provisions, might even be considered in NBCAs in order to give guardian communities a stake in conserving the area’s most valuable resource - its timber.

4. Community-based nature-tourism provides such incentives for conservation co-management activities in two ways. Firstly, it generates income that can be used for paying stipends to VFV’s or for funding other co-management activities. Secondly, it indirectly supports patrolling by the villagers who act as guides for the tourist treks through the protected area.

5. Considerable investment in training for NBCA staff in patrolling and survey techniques has been made by LSFP and other projects in Lao PDR. Unfortunately, skills in this area remain low in most NBCAs in the country. Part of the reason for this is the rapid turnover rate of NBCA staff who, after training move to other positions, usually entirely unrelated to conservation and protected area management. If patrolling skills are to be upgraded and investment in such training is to be cost effective, two major reforms are required. Firstly,
NBCA staff recruitment procedures need to be reviewed and modified to attract people with a genuine interest in, and a commitment, to conservation. This should also include efforts to recruit more women who, in many cases, are more likely to have the desired qualities than men. Secondly, there is a need for a commitment by government to retain dedicated staff in NBCA management positions and to reward service with a career-based promotion system with adequate incentives and opportunities for staff advancement within the protected area system.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Participatory Conservation Co-Management


General

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


