

Summary & Lessons Learned of Tonle Sap Conservation Project Terminal Evaluation

I- Summary:

TSCP has achieved some significant results in terms of establishing the management systems for the Core Areas of the Tonle Sap Biodiversity Reserve and reducing the level of illegal fishing and hunting. The project provided equipment, management and human resources which has created a site level conservation authority in the Core Areas where none existed previously. The boundary demarcation, ranger patrols, monitoring and enforcement have served to raise awareness of the conservation areas and to deter illegal activities. There is a new appreciation within communities of the effects of overexploitation and destructive practices and the consequences of violating conservation laws.

The biodiversity monitoring component produced an effective and accepted set of protocols and procedures for monitoring, patrolling, recording and reporting on biodiversity and the local hunting, fishing and other activities affecting conservation. The success is largely due to the relationship between GDANCP, TSCP and WCS and the concerted effort in developing and refining the MIST system, undertaking wildlife population surveys and training in patrolling and law enforcement. This has resulted in both a significant improvement in the data and knowledge on biodiversity and in strengthening the compliance and enforcement of conservation laws.

TSCP established 25 self help groups with the assistance of UN Volunteers that led to generally successful microfinance savings and investment in alternative livelihoods and income generation involving over 500 people from the local communities around the Core Areas. Some of the groups have increased their initial investment funds by four times. The project also undertook an environmental education and awareness raising program that involved curriculum development, teaching materials, training of teachers (255), initiation of eco-clubs in nine schools and various events to promote environmental awareness. The education component has made an important contribution to environmental education in Cambodia.

TSCP has provided Core Area management infrastructure and tools, and recruited and trained staff but despite the dedicated efforts of the project team, there are too many gaps in the current level of management capacity to declare the project as having fully achieved its objective. The conflict with fishing lots remains largely unresolved, the Core Area management plans are mostly ignored and the organization and commitment within government to sustain the achievements to date are not evident. For these reasons, TSCP is

considered to have been only moderately satisfactory in achieving the objective of strengthened management capacity for biodiversity conservation.

The extent to which GDANCP and Provincial DoE have integrated the conservation responsibilities, plans and management systems into government operations is very limited with the notable exception perhaps of the patrolling and reporting processes which may be sustained with the ongoing help of WCS. The national commitment to and ownership of the project is also not fully evident, with some views that the project has been excessively donor-driven and UNDP managed.

TSCP implementation was adversely affected by the complex organization and geographic spread of the project, the heavy involvement of external staff, the weak CNMC-MoE-FiA working relationships, the lack of sustained results from PIUs inherited from TSEMP, and the inadequate emphasis on long term institutional strengthening of GDANCP (MoE) and PNRCOs (DoE). There were distinct limitations and inefficiencies in the particular design of the TSCP project organization.

The project has generally had effective managers and technical advisors at the strategic level that have recognized the importance of the project for Cambodia and UNDP and have sought to improve the performance of the project. However, there have also been significant internal operational weaknesses that have constrained project partnerships, performance and quality assurance, including communication and coordination issues between CNMC, MoE and UNDP.

The TSCP experience provides some important lessons learned for protected areas management in Cambodia. These focus on the need for an overall capacity development strategy and greater sustainability in the project design, and the importance of inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral relationships in PA management in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve. Development assistance for protected areas needs to be more fully integrated with government responsibilities and institutional capacity building rather than technical assistance and training alone, building upon the success of site-based projects to strengthen institutions at the community, provincial and national levels. A new form of partnership and incentives needs to be considered that moves beyond training of staff toward facilitating more effective organizations responsible for biodiversity conservation within government and communities.

Six recommendations are presented related to:

- (1) continuing discussions and finalizing agreements between MoE and FiA on coordinated patrolling and enforcement within the Fishing Lots;

- (2) developing and implementing a Core Areas financing plan and Tonle Sap Conservation Fund;
- (3) fully integrating MIST into the Ministry of Environment organization, operations and budgeting systems;
- (4) re-assessing the development assistance model for protected areas in Cambodia to enhance institutional impact and sustainability;
- (5) developing a mechanism to maintain the Central Committee responsible for overseeing and supporting the SHGs at the Core Areas; and
- (6) re-assessing the microfinance-livelihoods approach for future projects with the aim of establishing explicit links and conditions between livelihoods development and conservation.

II- Lessons Learned:

The objective of TSCP was to strengthen management capacity for biodiversity conservation in Tonle Sap Biodiversity Reserve. Some of the stakeholders suggested that the project was never intended to address capacity at the ministry level. Technical assistance and training were considered the means to strengthening capacity without having to address institutional change. The lack of an overall capacity development strategy and the use of project staff from outside of government imposed severe constraints in a site-based, activity-oriented conservation project that had little sustainability in its design. This is not consistent with the evolving UNDP approach where the enabling environment, organizational and human resource dimensions are to form a structured, results-oriented approach to capacity development.¹ Within the constraints on policy and civil service modernization in Cambodia, there are opportunities to improve program commitment/ownership, institutional capacity and performance of MoE in a more effective manner. This begins with recognition that capacity development is a complex process well beyond the scope of the technical assistance and training that are normally provided in conservation projects in the country.

The view of some MoE staff that the project was mostly owned by UNDP, CNMC and WCS is a particular concern that reflects weaknesses in both capacity development strategy and project organization. The split project management-implementation responsibilities between CNMC and MoE imposed a further barrier to effective implementation.

¹ The policy, organizational and institutional context within which new skills are applied is critical to capacity development programs. See advice in: UNDP, 2011, *Capacity Development Practitioner's Guide: Capacity Development for Environmental Sustainability* and UNDP, 2008, *Capacity Development: Practice Note*. New York.

A second key lesson that can be drawn from TSCP is that inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral relationships are important in Cambodia where protected area laws and management duties are generally not harmonized with overlapping authority of other ministries responsible for economic development. The working arrangements between MoE rangers and FiA enforcement staff should have been more directly addressed at the outset. The functions of CNMC in facilitating protected areas implementation, enacting Core Area Management Plans and balancing fisheries-wildlife conservation objectives in conjunction with MoE implementation of the project were also never well defined or executed.

The TSCP *Lessons Learned Report* (December 2010) documented thirty lessons and key issues/suggestions related to Project Coordination and Management, Biodiversity Conservation and Monitoring, Environmental Education and Awareness and Sustainable Livelihoods and Community Development. This terminal evaluation mission confirmed many of the lessons identified by the TSCP team. With regard to the key project formulation lessons, the following issues were noted for future programmes:

- Overly ambitious objectives and unrecognized critical assumptions in the project design regarding the barriers to protected area management capacity development;
- The importance of high level commitment and effective incentives for government participation;
- Weaknesses in project organization, communications and the management capacity of government and partners;
- Absence of project strategies that addressed the complexities of institutional capacity development;
- The importance of inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms for effective protected areas management; and
- The need to link project assistance for sustainable livelihoods development with conservation objectives.