

Management response to the Terminal Evaluation of the Strengthening Capacity and Incentives for Wildlife Conservation in Wester Forest Complex (Tiger) Project

UNDP Project ID (PIMS) #: 5436

GEF Project ID (PMIS) #: 4677

Terminal Evaluation Completion Date: 10 July 2021

Date of Issue of Management Response: 18 July 2021

Prepared by: Mr. Saengroj Srisawaskraisorn, Programme Specialist/Team Lead, UNDP
Thailand Country Office

Contributors: Ms. Phansiri Winichagoon, Project Manager;
Dr. Rungnapar Pattanavibool, Deputy Director General, Department of National
Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation;
Mr. Sompong Thongseekem, Director, Wildlife Conservation Bureau;
and Members of the Tiger Project Board

Context, background and findings

The ‘Strengthening Capacity and Incentives for Wildlife Conservation in the Western Forest Complex’ (Tiger Project) (PIMS 5436) is a five-year project implemented by the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) and supported by UNDP. The project started on 15 July 2015 and is scheduled to finish on 14 July 2021 (revised from 14 July 2020).

The objective of the project is to “improve management effectiveness and sustainable financing for Huai Kha Khaeng - Thung Yai Naresuan World Heritage Site (HKK-TYN WHS) and incentivise local community stewardship”.

To achieve this objective, the project had three components, each with an associated Outcome.

The first component of the project is directed towards strengthening and scaling up existing best-practice management activities, and developing and testing innovative approaches to enforcement and compliance, in the HKK-TYN WHS. It aims to reduce the direct threats to tigers and prey, improve effectiveness of wildlife sanctuary management, and enhance the use of data and information to support key management decision-making.

The second component of the project is focused on linking sustainable livelihood development in the enclave and buffer zone villages with specific conservation outcomes and improving economic links between the buffer zone and enclave villages and the wildlife sanctuaries. It seeks to achieve these linkages by promoting incentives for community-based sustainable forest management, environmentally friendly agricultural practices, nature-based tourism and education and improved wildlife and habitat protection.

The third component of the project is directed towards raising the awareness in communities living in and around the WHS of the need to conserve, and the importance of protecting, the forest landscapes and associated wildlife. Work under this component assists in strengthening the representation of buffer and enclave communities on the wildlife sanctuaries’ Protected Area Committees (PACs). With improved community-based representation on the PAC, the project aimed to assist in building the capacity (information, knowledge, skills) of each of the community representatives to assure a constructive and meaningful contribution to the co-management of the WHS.

Based on the terminal evaluation, the project was given a ‘Moderately Satisfactory’ rating for the Overall Quality of M&E; ‘Moderately Unsatisfactory’ for the Overall Quality of Implementation/Execution; ‘Moderately Unsatisfactory’ for Overall Project Outcome Rating; and ‘Moderately Unlikely’ for ‘Sustainability’.

The TE team has made eleven (11) recommendations for sustaining the successes which the project helped created and also for future programming. Of these, seven are fully agreed, three are partially agreed and one is disagreed. Actions to implement recommendations are detailed in this management response.

Recommendations and management response

<p>Recommendation 1. Concerned parties should agree on the process, responsibilities and governance for establishing a business case for a sustainable financing mechanism for this project. The analysis and investigations undertaken as part of this project have provided the groundwork to develop a sustainable financing mechanism to fill the WHS budgeting gap. It is recommended that a process is put in place, with agreed responsibilities and governance, to develop a business case for realizing the potential to establish a sustainable financing mechanism for conservation in the WHS.</p>				
<p>Management response: Agreed. A study funded by the project has been conducted to explore innovative finance solutions for tiger conservation, of which few have been pursued but unsuccessful, several solutions need to be pursued proactively.</p>				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking ¹	
			Comments	Status
Continue following up with the Uthai Thani provincial administration on budget allocation for wildlife tourism development at Thap Saloa Non-Hunting Area	Aug 2021 – Dec 2022	DNP/UNDP		Not yet started
Continue pursuing innovative finance solutions for biodiversity conservation, such as the conservation license plate scheme, wildlife tourism, crowdfunding, result-based local budget realignment through ongoing and new projects/initiatives.	Aug 2021-Dec 2022	UNDP	BIOFIN has already started exploring several financing schemes but need closer coordination among relevant ministries and local governments to make them successful.	In progress
<p>Recommendation 2. Allocate funding to enable the continuation of the increased management capacity that was in place in the wildlife sanctuaries during this project. The increased temporary increased capacity in DNP (especially in the number of rangers) has been an important contributor to the results in Outcome 1. A funding allocation to enable this to continue would enable the project results to continue and expand.</p>				

¹ If the MTR is uploaded to the ERC, the status of implementation is tracked electronically in the Evaluation Resource Centre database (ERC).

Management response: Partially agreed. While this is a good and sensible recommendation, Covid-19 pandemic has taken a great toll on government budget since last year as all ministries' annual budget has been reduced significantly from pre-Covid years. This will force DNP to focus on core functions/mandates while significant number of staff is expected to be cut. Additional funding, if any, would need to come from outside development partners.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
Explore additional funding sources from sub-national governments (e.g., provincial administration/agencies, PAOs, TAOs) and development partners (e.g., WWF, USAID, WCS) to sustain increased management capacity of the WHS	Aug 2021 – Dec 2022	DNP		Not yet started

Recommendation 3. Prepare a report on the tiger conservation and monitoring activities from this project to inform the review of the Thailand - Tiger Action Plan 2010–2022. Thailand set the ambitious goal of doubling its tiger population by 50 percent by 2020 and has made significant progress in tiger conservation activities. The Thailand - Tiger Action Plan 2010–2022 (TTAP) will soon be reviewed. This project has been a significant investment in tiger conservation, and it is important that the findings and lessons be considered in the review of the TTAP. A report should be prepared as soon as possible, while the findings are still fresh, on the various tiger conservation and monitoring activities undertaken during the project. This should include recommendations and lessons learned to inform the review of the TTAP.

Management response: Agreed. There are many successes and lessons from this project that can be utilized as Thailand plans to review the current Tiger Action Plan 2010-2022. In addition to the report as suggested, the project is developing a digital repository of knowledge products which was produced during the course of implementation. Once finished, it will be a useful source of information on Thailand's achievement on tiger conservation which will be used to not only inform the next Tiger Action Plan but also a showcase for other tiger countries.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
The successes of this project will be used to inform a review of the new Tiger Action Plan after 2022.	Aug 2021 – Sep 2022	DNP		Not yet started
The project website and digital archive will be developed to collect all project's knowledge products for further public utilization or Thailand's policy and plan on tiger conservation	July – Sep 2021	UNDP		In progress

Recommendation 4. Continue to engage with Karen communities in TYW to enable this program to realize its potential in improving livelihoods, traditional knowledge and wildlife management. The Karen youth from TYW who participated in the Indigenous knowledge youth project showed a high level of pride in their knowledge, their role, and their communities' role in the WHS. In turn, this is leading to significant improvements in relations between the Karen villagers and DNP officers and, therefore, to the connection of traditional and scientific knowledge and the application of traditional knowledge to PA management. The youth involved are enthusiastic to build on this program and feel that, for

them and their communities, the program is still gaining strength and momentum. A small level of funding directed through the Rabbit in the Moon Foundation would enable this program to realize its full potential.

Management response: Agreed. Empowering these youth members further will carry the momentum of the work initiated by the project and will increase the sense of ownership by the youth members.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
Additional financial support has been given to Rabbit in the Moon to continue promoting local products and livelihoods of Karen group	Jun-Sep 2021	UNDP		Work in progress

Recommendation 5. Projects should strategically plan for project sustainability throughout a project’s life, from project development through inception, implementation and project close. Sustainability is the most significant weakness of this project. In particular, the return to pre-project levels (or lower) of DNP rangers in TYN-HKK WHS and the lack of an established financing mechanism are fundamental constraints to the continuation of results. These constraints were clear from the start of the project, yet at project conclusion there is no clear plan for sustainability. It should be noted that the MTR recommended that a Project Sustainability Taskforce be set up to develop an exit plan; however, this Taskforce was not set up. It is recommended that, in future projects, sustainability should be a strategic focus throughout project implementation, from inception to close, and that this should be led by the Implementing Partner (in this case DNP) and should involve project staff, stakeholders identified during project development, Board members, agency representatives, and other participating organizations and individuals. Board minutes show that some members raised sustainability in the early years, but there was no process established to follow up on this.

Management response: Partially agreed. Project sustainability is always in the core of any projects DNP/UNDP have engaged or implemented. Sustainability of conservation work lies in the fact that DNP remains the core agency which is mandated and given budget for that. The project came in to complement DNP’s mandate by bringing leverage resources to help accelerate the agency’s goal.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
Continue monitoring efforts (e.g., technical assistance, resources) by concerned parties (e.g., DNP, UNDP, WCS, provincial administration) to protect tiger population and WHS management	July 2021 – Dec 2022	DNP and partner agencies, provincial administration and/or agencies, UNDP		In progress
Enhance involvement/role of Protected Area Committee (PAC) and local authorities to support a larger picture of conservation work in WHS	Aug 2021-Dec 2022	DNP		Not yet started

Recommendation 6. Projects should establish working relationships between different partners and contributors, including project staff, to improve shared understanding of goals and to facilitate knowledge sharing and shared

learning. The TE team found that there was a low level of understanding among project parties of the overall project strategy and outcomes and of the roles and activities of different groups and individuals. In particular, NGOs and outreach officers involved in the project often had little involvement with each other. The MTR recommended that a Community Technical Reference Group be established to improve communications and knowledge sharing between organizations working on community aspects; however, this group was not established. This lack of understanding of project strategy and roles was also apparent among some Board members, who often had limited understanding of different aspects of the project because of the limited strategic engagement with them, as described previously (although some other Board members had a detailed understanding of the project and its components). A shared understanding of the project’s goals and activities and greater understanding of different roles would foster a sense of teamwork and provide opportunities for parties to share experiences and learn from each other.

Management response: Agreed. Although the project has already finished, this recommendation is still valid and applicable for future projects of DNP/UNDP.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
Coordination mechanism using existing structure(s) should be better than establishing a new body by a project, considering that the project has its own life time but the work of all parties will continue. Engage the Protected Areas Committee (PAC) as a body for improving communications and knowledge sharing between organizations working on community aspects.	July 2021 – Dec 2022	DNP		Not yet started
Take a proactive approach in engaging board members from different ministries in order to leverage their expertise and agency’s resources to help achieve the project’s goal. This can be done through the ongoing IWT (GEF6) project.	Aug 2021-Dec 2022	DNP/UNDP	N/A	Not yet started

Recommendation 7. Projects should work closely with Project Boards during implementation to value-add from Board members’ expertise and roles. The Project Board has a high level of experience and a wide range of expertise and could be a valuable resource for providing the project with strategic direction, identifying synergies and planning the sustainability of project results. Many Board members were enthusiastic about their role on the Board. However, engagement with the Board was largely process-related, focused on procedural matters such as work plans, budgets and approving results framework changes, and many members did not visit the project site during the project. Consequently, many members were passive participants with low engagement with the project.

An example of this was a visit by the Ambassador to the project site, which was strategically well conducted but was reported to the Board after the trip. Such events have significant potential for engagement and networking by Board members and for development of opportunities for synergies and collaboration. Another trip for Project Board was planned since the Ambassador’s visit but was not conducted. A shift to a more active, participatory role for the Board would value-add to projects by leveraging from the experience and expertise of the members.

Management response: Agreed. Good recommendation. This will be applied to ongoing and future UNDP/GEF projects.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
Ensure more engagement of project board members' technical expertise in project oversight and organize field visits for them to enhance their understanding of the project (applicable to IWT project and new GEF7 biodiversity-based tourism project)	Aug 2021 – July 2022	UNDP/DNP		Not yet started

Recommendation 8. Projects should put in place governance and control mechanisms to transparently track actual co-financing contributions during project implementation. The contribution of DNP to this project was very substantial, with several business areas of the agency contributing to a wide range of significant outcomes. The sum of co-financing committed at CEO endorsement was large: US\$22,864,427, which is three times the GEF allocation of US\$7,339,450. However, records of actual co-financing were not available for this evaluation, which means that the significant financial contribution of the Government of Thailand cannot be validated. This also means that the evaluation cannot fully assess the project's efficiency and value for money to inform future programming. Actual co-financing was also not provided for SNF. Mechanisms and guidelines would enhance transparency and improve understanding of expectations.

Management response: Agreed. Regular and consistent tracking of co-financing budget should be done annually to examine whether the project still brings relevance to the mandates of relevant project partners who share the common development goal.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
Update co-financing figures for DNP and Sueb Nakha Sathien Foundation and share with TE team	Jul 2021	DNP, SNF		In progress
Establish an annual tracking system on project co-financing as part of the annual project implementation report. Co-financing can count both in-kind and in-cash (e.g., investment, grant, equipment). This applies to the ongoing Illegal Wildlife Trade project (GEF6) currently implemented by DNP.	Jul – Sep 2021	UNDP, DNP	UNDP's annual Project Implementation Reporting system now requires tracking of co-financing figures as part of the Project Implementation Review (PIR) exercise	Started

Recommendation 9. Projects should use the Social and Environmental Screening Procedure as a dynamic tool during projects to proactively manage risk and maximize opportunities. The RTA recommended in the 2018, 2019 and 2020 PIRs that the SESP be reassessed to address potential project risks that may arise from a grievance that had arisen within the project area (this grievance was not directed at the project or its activities). However, this SESP re-assessment did not occur. Similarly, the RTA recommended several times in PIRs that a gender analysis be conducted to improve the gender marker rating and identify targeted interventions for gender mainstreaming that can be progressed by the project; again, this was not undertaken. In addition to managing risks, undertaking these assessments may have identified new opportunities for the project to achieve improved development outcomes. It is recommended that the SESP and approach to gender in projects is not 'locked in' at project commencement, rather that they are used as dynamic tools to manage risk and maximize opportunities.

Management response: Agreed. This recommendation applies to all UNDP/GEF projects and will be implemented through training for UNDP CO staff going forward. SESP risks will be monitored more closely every year during the Project Implementation Review. The response to the RTA's comment on the villagers' grievance has been documented in an internal memo for future reference.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
UNDP to prepare a memo to document the grievance case for future reference	July 2021	UNDP		Completed
UNDP to conduct training on project oversight and management for CO staff to increase awareness and capacity on risks monitoring during project implementation.	Q4/2021 – Q1/2022	UNDP		Not yet started

Recommendation 10. Thailand's World Heritage authorities should consider opportunities to make greater use of local knowledge and values in planning and management of natural World Heritage sites. During mission interviews, the Karen youth from TYW who participated in the traditional knowledge youth project demonstrated a high level of pride in their knowledge of wildlife and their role in the HKK-TYN WHS, and also an enthusiasm to learn from scientific knowledge. WHS planning and management would benefit from seeking opportunities to use local knowledge and values and to engage positively and proactively with local people.

Management response: Disagreed. DNP recognizes cultural value and traditional knowledge of enclave communities inside TYE/TYW and has worked with them continuously through the Tiger project and DNP's regular activities. It must also note the outstanding universal values (OUV) of the natural World Heritage and the cultural World Heritage should not be mixed as it can/has created confusion and misinterpretation to the public that was troublesome to DNP in the past.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
No action needed	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Recommendation 11. DNP should seek partnership to promote/support community outreach functions as part of respective agencies' regular mandates on protected area management, especially those adjacent to PAs. This project has shown that significant benefits can be gained through improving relations between DNP officers at project sites and

affected members of the community. In TYE and TYW, several outreach officers were employed by DNP after they had shown successful outreach outcomes results. However, there are limitations to how DNP can employ staff, so these people were employed in ranger roles rather than in outreach roles. This is a missed opportunity for DNP to make community liaison a part of 'business as usual' in protected area management.

Management response: Partially agreed. This recommendation should be taken up jointly not only by DNP but other agencies (e.g., local government, provincial agencies) which share the same goal. In practice, outreach functions have been integrated into the current job description of the management functions of the Regional Administrative Office. However, there are approx. 4,200 communities around the protected areas in Thailand. A better option may be to request community representatives from each community to work with park authorities and serve as the community outreach volunteers.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
Explore/establish a community outreach volunteer idea to fill the functions as suggested in the recommendation.	Aug 2021-Dec 2022	DNP		Not yet started
Raise awareness and seek cooperation of members at HKK, TYE, TYW PACs	Aug 2021-Dec 2022	DNP		Not yet started