Paper Parks and Paper Partnerships: Lessons for protected areas and biodiversity corridors in the Greater Mekong Sub-region

A paper synthesising lessons learnt about livelihoods, biodiversity, collaborative management initiatives and governance through the GMS/ BCI
Safeguarding Biodiversity for Poverty Reduction Project (SBPRP)

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Executive summary

The general trend revealed by this study is that several protected areas (PAs) within GMS Biodiversity Corridors in Lao PDR, Cambodia and Viet Nam, are experiencing a net loss both of biodiversity and of resources for local livelihoods, often at an alarming rate. The primary agents of ecological degradation are not local communities, but external commercial interests illegally extracting natural resources to maximise short-term profits often through distant markets. The poorer sections of local communities are becoming increasingly vulnerable as a result; to date there is no clear evidence that they will be able to find alternative livelihoods when PA natural resources become exhausted.

The study highlights the fundamental importance of strengthening State commitment to environmental governance. Without this, no amount of project support will prevent illegal use and unsustainable extraction by well organised commercial interests. Neither will local communities be motivated to participate meaningfully in any sort of sustainable NRM practices in collaboration with government agencies or projects. Ideas for promoting increased commitment by Government to PA protection and Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) are discussed.

The analysis confirms the need to combine state-enforced and community-led conservation approaches, and reveals a number of pre-requisites for success: finding the appropriate division of roles between co-managers; ensuring that the transfer of responsibilities is matched by a protection of rights; and promoting good governance at the community level (especially if the poor are to benefit). The need to strengthen communities' economic stake in PAs is highlighted. This requires that in addition to being given legally recognised access to certain PA resources, the profit from selling these products be sufficiently increased (through processing and marketing) that it allows sustainable and zoned harvesting to contribute to local communities escape from poverty (rather than just allowing subsistence level survival in a state of poverty). A number of recommendations are also made as to key information and management systems needed to allow informed and coordinated decision making by disparate co-managers.

The paper concludes with two wider institutional issues revealed by the study. The first explores the tendency for agencies to hide 'failure' and thereby impede lesson learning due to perceived pressure to report success. The second relates to the governance challenges facing BCI if it is to achieve its admirable but highly challenging goals of promoting pro-poor, pro-biodiversity economic growth.

Glossary

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BCI	Biodiversity Corridors initiative
CEP	Core Environment Programme (within ADB Environment Operations Centre)
CZM	Coastal Zone Management Project (DANIDA funded project in PKWS)
DFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
DHS	Dong Hua Sao National Protected Area, Lao PDR
FLEG	Forestry and/or Fishery[1] Law and Environmental Governance
GMS	Great Mekong Sub -Region
IDRC	International Development Research Centre, Canada
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
NRM	Natural resource management
NTFP	Non-timber forest products
PA	Protected Area
PKWS	Peam Krasop Wildlife Sanctuary, Cambodia
PMCR	Participatory management of Coastal Resources project, Cambodia
SBPRP	Safeguarding Biodiversity for Poverty Reduction project (GMS-BCI)
STNR	Song Thanh Nature Reserve, Viet Nam
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

[1] Conveniently the FLEG acronym applicable to either Forest-based natural resources or Fisheries.

1 INTRODUCTION

This briefing paper attempts to identify and share key lessons generated by an 18 month project implemented by IUCN, and funded by DFID through the Asian Development Bank (ADB), entitled "Safeguarding Biodiversity for Poverty Reduction Project" (SBPRP). Working in three national level Protected Areas (PAs) in Lao PDR, Cambodia and Viet Nam, this small regional project aimed to strengthen understanding of how best to promote biodiversity conservation, sustainable land-use and livelihood development in PAs of national and international biological importance.

While hoping to generate lessons relevant to a global audience, SBPRP's direct focus was to inform the on-going development of the ten year Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (BCI), a multi-agency regional initiative over-seen by the ADB using funds provided by the Governments of the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and UK. The BCI is itself a component[2] of the wider Core Environment Programme (CEP) for the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS) which aims to enhance environmental and economic development to achieve sustainable improvement in people's lives.

The three case-study PAs in which SBPRP is working all fall within the planned economic and biodiversity corridors which BCI intends to develop. The sites were: Song Thanh Nature Reserve (STNR) in Central Viet Nam, Dong Hua Sao National Protected Area (DHS) in Southern Laos and Peam Krasop Wildlife Sanctuary (PKWS) in South Western Cambodia. In all three sites significant investments have been, or continue to be, made by a number of agencies and donors (the major ones include: WWF, IUCN, IDRC, the World Bank, and the Dutch, Finish governments) promoting different forms of co-management, both to conserve key natural resources and strengthen local livelihoods. While significant differences (ecological, socio-economic, political) exist between the sites, a common feature is that all provide crucial livelihood services to large numbers of local people. Annex 1 gives more details of these 3 PAs.

This study combines new socio-economic analysis and action research with lessons from the practical experiences of on-going and previous initiatives (of other agencies) supporting co-management approaches in the three case-study PAs. Rapid rural research techniques were used to involve significant numbers of local communities (from 15-40% of target village populations) in the analysis. Interviews were also conducted with informants from operational NGOs, donors, government agencies at all levels, and relevant private sector interests. A series of workshops with key stake-holders were used to cross check initial conclusions. Building on these initial findings, SBPRP's team worked with local partners from April to December 2007 to pursue options for strengthening co-management partnerships, developing sources of livelihood and re-negotiating PA utilisation.

Significant convergence was revealed between the three sites regarding ecological and livelihood trends and the underlying forces driving them. The emerging lessons also resonate with findings from other studies within the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) and from other Regions, especially related to the over-riding importance of governance and economic forces on local decisions and outcomes. This strengthens one of the key conclusions of SBPRP – that without giving much greater attention to addressing the *institutional*

[2] BCI, which is planned to run till 2015, is considered by many to be the key environmental intervention in the GMS and is referred to by the Bank as the 'flagship' of the wider CEP.

environment, the current focus of projects on technical and organisational issues will have little long term impact or sustainability. The following lessons and recommendations indicate an urgent need for action by BCI partners who are the primary intended audience for this paper.

2 KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson 1: Without more effective strategies, market forces will exhaust PA resources

The general trend revealed by this study is one of net loss (often at alarming rates) of the natural resources upon which bio-diverse ecosystems and local livelihoods depend. Valuable timber, wildlife and other NTFP products are being severely over-harvested, while habitats and ecological services are being damaged or destroyed. The primary agents of PA degradation are not local communities, but external commercial interests illegally extracting natural resources to maximise short-term profits often through distant markets. The poorer sections of local communities currently depending on PA resources for their livelihoods are becoming increasingly vulnerable as a result; to date there is no clear evidence that they will be able to find alternative livelihoods when PA natural resources become exhausted.

From the perspectives of biodiversity conservation, ecological services, and local livelihoods in the three PAs, the general picture is undeniably gloomy. The overall conclusion is that to date most efforts to demonstrate sustainable PA management are failing. In this respect, there is no evidence to suggest that the case-studies examined by SBPRP are exceptional. Protected areas throughout the GMS are showing a net loss in biodiversity. Cornford and Matthews (2007) provide a useful overview[3] which concludes: "*Disturbingly, the ability of the natural resource base to continue to support the livelihoods of the poor in the Mekong is at a crisis point. Forests and rivers are in a state of rapid ecological decline caused by human over-exploitation*".

The rate and extent of exploitation appears very serious. In DHS local communities have experienced a 50-80% reduction of key forest resources (including timber, wildlife and fish and other NTFPs) on which their livelihoods depend in the last 15 years[4]. Based on current trends, villagers anticipate complete depletion of all key forest resources within the next 10 years. Significantly, local government officials do not dispute these estimations. A similar situation is revealed for valuable hardwoods, wildlife and fish species in high market demand and key NTFPs such as rattan in STNR. While the severely logged mangrove forest of PKWS are now slowly recovering (with support from donor-assisted projects[5]) from a state of severe degradation, local communities are anticipating that fishery based livelihoods may well become unviable within the next 10 years.

Field research under SBPRP clearly reveals the extent to which local communities depend upon the natural resources and ecological services still remaining in their respective PAs. In all three sites, the total livelihood value (for consumption, use and sale) of forest and fishery products significantly exceeds that of agriculture or wage labour, especially for poorer households. Since the majority of households in all three PAs assessed are already living close to or significantly below the poverty line (especially evident in the upland communities in Viet Nam), this depletion of natural capital poses a very serious livelihood threat for

[3] *Hidden Costs – The underside of economic transformation in the Greater Mekong Subregion*; Jonathan Cornford and Nate Matthews; Oxfam Australia 2007

[4] Report on the socio-economic status of households in Dong Hua Sao National Protected Area and the contribution of the impacts of co-management regimes on poverty alleviation and sustainable natural resource utilization; IUCN / SBPRP, April 2007.

[5] The Participatory Management of Coastal Resources Project (PMCR) and Coastal Zone Management (CZM) project which have been working in PKWS for almost ten years.

significant amounts of people. In all three sites, local communities saw little or no opportunity to diversify their source of livelihood. They recognised that the natural resource base on which they depend is diminishing but feel powerless to tackle that problem and have no clear strategy for the future. Agricultural development is limited due to biophysical constraints (e.g. topography, soil, salinity) and restrictions on land use. To seek employment opportunities it is usually necessary to migrate, but this also poses significant financial and social challenges (especially for the ethnic minority groups often most effected by PA destruction). Household interviews clearly revealed a sense of growing hopelessness as families described the economic and social consequences of current trends of natural resource destruction. Worrying signs of cultural erosion are also beginning to show in some cases, with alcoholism and breakdown of social values becoming evident.

The most destructive exploiters of natural resources in PAs are very clearly the powerful, external commercial interests and *not* driven by local communities. Illegal extraction is being directly organised by professional businesses on a scale far larger (and more destructive) than any off-take by local communities. Whether by large scale felling and extraction of hardwoods, unmanaged harvesting of important NTFPs such as rattan, organised hunting of important wildlife species (for traditional medicines, skins and bush-meat), illegal conversion of core forest into plantations, destructive mining of minerals or catching of immature fish by unlicensed commercial boats – the primary reason for PA destruction is not to support local livelihoods but to generate short-term profit for larger outsider businesses. The extent to which environmental corruption is implicated varies, but in all cases the opportunity for commercial interests to 'encourage' local officials to look the other way clearly exists.

And because this extraction is unregulated and under-cover, it is also unnecessarily destructive of local habitats and ecological services. Timber extraction and gold mining in STNR is threatening key wildlife species and polluting water ways; forest conversion in DHS clearly not only destroys habitats but there are worrying signs of reduced flow in perennial water ways; illegal fishing gear used in PKWS remove all species before they reach reproductive maturity.

There is no evidence to suggest that environmental degradation will not increase as new economic investments planned inside or near each PA will facilitate access to the areas. On-going and planned interventions include a large hydro-electric dam on the edge of STNR (bringing in over 2,000 construction labourers plus their families from the lowlands for at least two years); new roads and high voltage electricity pylons along the margins of DHS; and new roads linking the coastal areas around PKWS with markets in Phnom Penh and Thailand.

Lesson 2 Strengthen Government commitment first, other interventions can then follow

PA integrity depends primarily on a clear political and economic commitment by the State to prioritise environmental governance. Without this, no amount of project support (whether for co-management or other NRM systems) can prevent illegal use and unsustainable extraction by well organised commercial interests. Neither will local communities be motivated to participate meaningfully in any sort of sustainable NRM programme. Any intervention aimed at strengthening PA protection must therefore have an explicit and robust strategy to develop a verifiable commitment from the relevant levels and agencies of Government to PA protection and FLEG.

A complex range of forces and causal factors are implicated in the failure (and occasional success) of efforts to sustainably manage the natural resources within PAs. However, the clear lesson from SBPRP is that without an explicit buy-in from the relevant decision making bodies within Government, *outsiders will strip PAs of their valuable resources regardless of efforts to support locals to protect the resource.* In the absence of such environmental governance, no amount of project activity, innovative management or donor funds will be able to prevent PA destruction. Whether or not the additional problem of corrupt local officials exists, commercial extraction groups are too powerful to be stopped by local communities: their actions can only be stopped or regulated by the apparatus of the State. The State will be ineffective unless it makes its own genuine decision to prioritise (and budget) the enforcement of Forestry (or Fishery) Law and strong Environmental Governance (FLEG[6]). Evidence from all three sites also highlights the fact that without strong FLEG (and accompanying legal rights to share in benefits from PAs and exclude outsiders), communities themselves are unwilling to protect PAs or use natural resources sustainably.

Although FLEG by itself can not ensure sustainable use of PAs (nor local livelihood security), without FLEG, all other efforts to protect valuable biodiversity are proving inadequate**.**

The crucial community contribution to sustainable use and biodiversity protection can only be established once the State has begun to demonstrate in practice its commitment to enforce its own forest laws and fight environmental corruption. Where the relevant Government body has decided to prioritise protection of a given natural resource (e.g. in PKWS where the Regional Governor and Ministry of Environment decided to enforce laws to prohibit charcoal conversion of remaining mangrove stands) then there exists a real opportunity to develop pro-poor and participatory systems for sustainable management of the resource. Where that initial commitment is insufficient to enforce laws and regulate use by organised outsider businesses[7] then these PAs will continue to be exploited, regardless of the management systems introduced (be they participatory or not).

In such cases, the priority for any intervention seeking to promote biodiversity protection and sustainable NRM must be to promote government authorities to make the necessary commitment to FLEG aimed at pro-poor biodiversity management and the prevention of destructive PA utilisation, especially by commercial interests. This should include not only the designated resource management agency, but also involve police, customs, judiciary and sympathetic influential politicians.

A convincing *economic, social and political* rationale will be needed for each site to convince relevant government decision makers of the benefits of investing in FLEG aimed at sustaining PA integrity. States will understandably favour a model based on the sustainable use of *converted* wilderness (ie, multiple-use PAs), unless there is a strong socio-economic rational for protecting remaining ecosystems in their unconverted (original) state. Pro-poor biodiversity conservation efforts should therefore give much more priority for developing locally appropriate advocacy campaigns aimed at key Departments (and individuals) within the Government. This requires that donors and NGOs themselves start to deploy the necessary expertise and resources necessary for such institutional lobbying, which may involve the use of complex tools such as economic valuation and payment for environmental services. The targeting of relevant government departments that control markets and trading is also essential

[7] As in logging and NTFP extraction in STNR and DHS and, in terms of the fisheries, also for PKWS

– law enforcement in markets distant to target PAs will be as important as preventing extraction at source.

Projects continue to fail as a result of not institutionalising such commitment. Thus partnerships are drawn up, resources are mapped, technically viable NRM plans are developed, local capacities are built, and new livelihood options are piloted. But negating all these relevant (and costly) efforts is the inconvenient reality that the State has not reached its own decision to prioritise FLEG in practice. The consequences can be seen in DHS and STNR despite major investments by donors and projects over the years; as an independent review[8] of the PA system observes: "*there have been some successes in co-management, such as those in the Biodiversity Conservation Project in Dong Hua Sao…but the main innovations have not been sustained and have had no influence on the national system".* On a more positive note, the opportunities for success when a real buy-in has been inculcated can be observed in PKWS in Cambodia, where a strong commitment by the Provincial Governor to mangrove protection has been achieved and has created the space for co-management opportunities to be developed.

Lesson 3 The key to power sharing: transferring responsibilities *and* rights (avoid paper-partnerships)

PAs can neither be sufficiently protected by community action alone, nor by State enforcement alone: an integrated strategy is needed which combines both 'community-led' and 'state-enforced' conservation approaches. However, to be successful, such co-management still depends on finding the appropriate division of roles between the two co-managers (i.e. the State and the community). The transfer of management responsibilities to communities must be matched by a corresponding transfer of State-protected rights and benefits, tangible to local people. In this way, FLEG becomes a key *component* of successful co-management, with both parties agreeing on how best to divide the different governance and law enforcement tasks between them.

The importance of shared stewardship of PAs was raised clearly in all three sites. A real willingness was demonstrated by villagers to promote sustainable NRM at community level, but only *if* the Government was able to fulfil its responsibility of clarifying and protecting community rights and preventing illegal use by powerful outsiders. The study also revealed that in general the State has yet to demonstrate its commitment in practice to share any real power or ownership with local communities, especially ethnic minorities, or to protect their rights. Especially in DHS and STNR none of the local community thinks for a moment that they have any sort of genuine 'partnership' status with the local authorities in managing or benefiting from the PAs.

While recognising these problems, project staff tend to accept the rhetoric of participation and partnership so that they can get on with their contractual obligations to deliver outputs on time. *The trend therefore is a transfer of responsibilities to local communities without a corresponding transfer of rights or benefits.* The approved land use plans, agreements, procedural arrangement, bylaws etc are signed and approved, but all too rarely are they then followed through in practice. The depressing sense of '*paper-parks*' associated with so many

[8] *Lao PDR National Report on Protected Areas and Development.* Review of Protected Areas and Development in the Lower Mekong River Region; ICEM, 2003. Indooroopilly, Queensland, Australia. 101 pp.

national protected areas results largely from these *'paper-partnerships'* that are seen as worthy outputs of projects but are not being acted out in practice. Communities continue to feel marginalised and powerless either to demand grater rights or to protect those that exist on paper.

Explicit sharing of power and decision making is needed if communities are to feel the level of ownership and decision making opportunity needed to invest efforts in adopting sustainable use themselves. This requires a simple, workable and legally acceptable framework for co-management that clearly spells out how power, responsibilities, rights and benefits are shared equitably between the key co-managers and with wider stakeholders in the private sector. It is essential that the decision making and communication systems are clearly worked out so that all stake-holders know and understand the 'rules of the game'. This will sometimes require some form of legislative change that clearly spells out new community rights (tenure or usufruct) protected by law. This also needs to include practical mechanisms for coordinated decision making, planning and action between distinct management units – be they villages or clusters of villages (see lesson 6 below)

In all three sites we can see the State supporting the transfer of patrolling responsibilities to the community but neither the power needed to allow community patrolling to be effective, nor the benefits needed to offset the considerable time, effort and at times risks that patrolling entails. The establishment of village patrol teams, with only 'minor' project support is often proclaimed as an indicator of success for co-management projects – however, because they are not properly institutionalised or empowered, their impacts and their sustainability remain severely constrained. Their functioning with small project in-kind support (equipment, flashlights, motorbike fuel etc) is more an indicator of the poverty of the patrollers than of any inherent success of power sharing between State and Civil Society for PA protections.

The cost-benefits of co-management must therefore be objectively analysed if new responsibilities are to be matched by new rights. Clearly, benefits of policing the reserve must outweigh the costs incurred by community patrol teams if sustainable systems are to be developed. In some cases the economic benefits of exclusive rights to sustainably managed NTFPs will be sufficient. In others, where local benefits may be lacking (e.g. sometimes in the policing of zero-disturbance wildlife habitats), the State and donors will need to consider whether an appropriate fee will be paid in perpetuity if it wishes to 'sub-contract' to a local community. In any co-management project design, a phase in which zero project inputs are provided should be included to allow systems to be tested (and to reveal their weaknesses) before the completion of the project.

More robust strategies are clearly needed on how to promote a a serious and convincing transition towards genuine power sharing between the State and civil society; conservation programming has to become 'smarter' at how it seeks to tackle the inertia of government to promote community rights. Relative progress on this account in PKWS is linked to a number of factors that point to possible ways forward: working with and supporting carefully selected individuals from Government as 'change champions'; the proactive lobbying of key power holders (e.g. in the Cambodian context, the powerful Provincial Governor); supporting community groups to voice their opinions and requests publicly to the Government.

It is also clear that a longer term process of changing Forest (and Fishery) officer mentalities and expertise will be needed, including investment in curriculum development and delivery of training for professional government staff aimed at these longer term processes would seem

essential for any real institutional change to occur. Meanwhile, all projects need to invest much more in proactive trust building exercises between PA officers and local communities.

Lesson 4 Increase communities' economic stake in sustainable (and zoned) PA utilisation

Local communities will only invest time and effort in sustainable PA management if they perceive that their future livelihood security will be improved as a result. Potential earnings from selling natural resource products must therefore be sufficiently increased (through processing and marketing) such that *sustainable and zoned* harvesting can contribute to wealth creation (rather than just subsistence survival).

The majority of households in all three PAs assessed are living close to or significantly below the poverty line. However, this is not due to any inherent low profitability of the natural resources that they are harvesting. In all three sites, it was evident that with little or no processing, the same NTFPs are being sold in nearby urban markets for many times greater prices than those for which local communities collect them. In STNR, for example, sale of 4 key livelihood NTFPs of the local Ka'tu people (honey, rattan, broom-grass and *Scaphium macropodum* fruit) may generate, on average, about $190 per family per year. The same quantity of NTFPs will generate at least $650 (and possibly much more) in the Provincial urban markets with simple processing and marketing. The significant economic profit of the PAs continues to being captured by commercial interests that have no direct interest to harvest NTFPs in a sustainable way. For local people, returns are so low that they can only start to accumulate assets by over-harvesting degraded NTFP resources that are left by the commercial extractors.

In all three sites, efforts were being made to help local communities develop alternative sources of livelihood with the aim both of improving income and of taking pressure off harvesting of PA natural resources. As populations and pressures on remaining PA resources increase, such a strategy clearly makes sense. But it does little to strengthen local commitment to protecting remaining PA resources. To date, relatively little attention is being paid to help local communities increasing the incomes that they could get from NTFPs (and none at all to timber products) by strengthening processing and marketing. This remains a critical over-sight, since all communities considered that the low value of NTFPs reduces their interest in investing in their protection as a long term livelihood strategy.

Much can be done to increase the returns local communities can gain from selling forest products. In this way a livelihood based on sustainable forest use can start to become a means of escaping poverty and wealth creation (and not as present of a means of bare survival). Several different opportunities exist for adding value to forest-based livelihoods (e.g. delivery of processing skills training, training in enterprise development, establishment of market information systems to inform local processing and marketing strategies, support for cooperative-type organisations, eco-tourism) but all require business experience and skills to be effective. However, as discussed above, such initiatives will only prove effective if at the same time rights of access to key natural resources (and a corresponding exclusion of outsiders) are upheld by the State.

Given that they will perceive that they have most to lose from effective co-management, the private sector must also be actively engaged. Every opportunity must be explored to involve them as active supporters of sustainable NRM and pro-poor conservation to minimise risks

that they continue to rely on corruption to maintain unregulated access to natural resources. Where sustainable off-takes are an option they should be pursued and opportunities for supporting relevant public relations and product promotion supported. Involvement of institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce and business membership associations should also be explored.

Lesson 5 The importance of promoting good governance at community level for sustainable, pro-poor co-management

While governance issues at State level are key to PA protection, too often the importance of governance issues at community level are overlooked. Co-management requires that communities have structures and systems through which decisions are made and activities undertaken; without appropriate governance, decision making systems are unlikely to be sustained and they will not necessarily serve the interests of the most vulnerable members of the community.

The lack of attention to issues of governance also creates problem at the community level. In all three sites, community 'participation' has been promoted by involving a small and often elite group of local leaders (invariably men) without ensuring that the necessary systems for downward accountability are in place. The bulk of the local population often feel excluded, both from the decision making process and from any sort of benefit sharing. Technically focused projects, whether aimed at livelihoods or sustainable NRM or both, continue to under-estimate the investments needed in social organisation if co-management is to be genuinely inclusive, accountable and pro-poor.

Much greater attention is needed to understand how best to promote equitable and accountable decision making and sharing of responsibilities and benefits at community level. Before formation of new village-based decision-making committees, existing community mechanisms and organisations should be researched and considered. Often these may have traditional means of promoting peer-group accountability and wider legitimacy that are ideal for co-management of natural resources.

Whether traditional or new bodies are used, a significant investment under any co-management process is needed to strengthen village level organisational management capacity and systems to allow benefit sharing and accountable leadership. On a very practical note, community feedback during project assessments in all SBPRP sites considered that provision of specially designed community leadership training would enhance co-management efforts and should include mechanisms for appraisal and, if necessary, replacement. Information sharing within each village or management unit can not be assumed and work is needed to ensure that all members of communities know what is happening. Intensive public awareness-raising campaigns are especially important at the onset.

A related lesson emerging from the study was the reluctance of projects supporting village level co-management to 'let go' and observe in practice what happens when all project inputs are suspended. This was particularly evident in Cambodia. However, it is essential that project design explicitly develops (and prepares for) such exit strategies. Only in this way, can realities of sustainability be observed before the end of the funding cycle while still giving time for appropriate remedial action to be taken.

Lesson 6 Simple, but appropriate management structures, tools and systems must be established to fit the operating needs and realities of decentralised co-managers

Effective PA management invariably requires carefully designed information and management systems to allow informed and coordinated decision making by disparate co-managers. All too frequently a number of key organisational and institutional issues are over-looked. For instance: What is the lowest decision making unit (for communities and government) that can develop and oversee annual action plans? What tools do they have to make informed plans? How do they coordinate and negotiate with each other?

One of the greatest operational challenges facing co-management endeavours is in how to ensure that a decentralised and collective decision making process remains informed, coordinated and effective. In all three case studies, this key challenge remained largely unresolved. Holistic PA management plans were not being developed on the basis of collating and negotiating the component NRM plans of lower level management units (e.g. village plans or cluster-village plans). Four key information and management systems were seen to be lacking or under-developed:

i) appropriate tools for co-managers to undertake local level inventory and resource appraisal as a basis for planning (e.g. participatory forest resource appraisal);
ii) guidelines for calculating annual allowable off-takes for NTFPs, wildlife, fish etc on which sustainable harvesting plans could be developed, both for local communities and external private sector interests;
iii) mechanisms for producing local level sustainable NRM plans endorsed by whole communities (e.g. at village level);
iv) negotiation and compilation mechanisms needed to develop one overall PA management plan that can be endorsed by all co-management units (i.e. Government departments and all the participating village communities).

In all three sites, examples of traditional community mechanisms for regulating access to or harvesting of particular natural resources were found – either still in use or remembered from the past. Opportunities for incorporating these into official Government approved plans remain under-developed. Similarly, much more could be done to fill gaps in understanding of local communities by providing relevant biological information related to ecological processes, harvesting and assisted natural regeneration etc.

Lesson 7 Pro-poor co-management of protected areas is very difficult, but existing institutional forces do not encourage crucial lesson learning from failures

Projects promoting pro-poor co-management face enormous programming challenges. However, implementing staff at all levels are not supported in sharing experiences that reveal failure to meet project plans. Important chances are thus being lost for learning not only between organisations but also within the same organisation over time. This tendency obscures the extent to which we are all currently failing (to protect biodiversity and related livelihoods) and slows the evolution of good practice. Donors must take the lead in actively encouraging learning from failures and promoting a much more candid appraisal of what is and is not working.

There are no existing guaranteed solutions that projects can 'implement' to achieve pro-poor biodiversity conservation. Success will only come by building on previous experiences and

continuing to learn. However, stake-holders directly involved in projects focusing on such issues (i.e. the NGOs, government staff and donor staff directly implicated) are often under considerable institutional pressure to put a positive spin on all reports, regardless of the real outcomes. Where explicit reporting of failures is not clearly rewarded, a shared record and analysis of corresponding lessons remains a rare occurrence (rather than being a standard indicator of organisational good practice, as it should be).

SBPRP revealed a number of examples of the institutional factors influencing lesson learning. IUCN's Biodiversity Conservation Project (BCP) in DHS (which ran from 1996 to 2002) was never able to impact on illegal conversion of forest to coffee or illegal logging by outsiders. The project was consequently unable to fulfill its desired outcomes of biodiversity conservation, but no clear analysis of this reality was ever forth coming. BCP clearly generated many valuable lessons, but these were not systematically internalized nor shared with other stakeholders. New initiatives now starting in DHS are therefore unable to benefit from the BCP – lessons may have been generated at the time but little institutional learning occurred. A similar trend is now evident in the MOSAIC project in STNR, where public reporting highlights the many real achievements to date and thus presents a picture of an exciting success story reflecting best practice. The alarming rate of on-going illegal logging, hunting, NTFP extraction, gold-mining and habitat destruction is not reported and the opportunities for refinement of intervention strategies that reflect these realities are therefore unrealized.

This well known, but rarely discussed, characteristic of international aid projects to share only success stories while expeditiously overlooking severe constraints and resulting failures impedes learning and slows the evolution of best practice. The reason invariably given for such practices is that donors only want to fund success stories – too much harsh reality might adversely effect future funding. Donors therefore need to take the lead; by explicitly rewarding and funding greater commitment to institutional learning and candid reporting, they can do much to speed up the development of good practice. The PMCR project in Cambodia provides an example: an action-research approach was funded by IDRC that explicitly encouraged exposure and analysis of interventions with low or negative impact as key learning opportunities. Also, by linking the project to an independent academic institution charged with documenting and analysing the process, risks of hiding 'uncomfortable' lessons was reduced. This not only helped those involved to find locally appropriate solutions more readily, but also continues to provide practical lessons for interventions in other areas that promote pro-poor PA co-management.

Given the need for interventions to learn about the sustainability of processes that they are seeking to initiate, donors can take one more step towards promoting active generation of lessons. All projects should include structured plans to pilot the withdrawal of any outside support to learn to what extent the process can and can not be sustained locally while still allowing time, funds and human resources to take appropriate remedial action as necessary. Similarly, donors and facilitating agencies should not 'write-off' a programme until the results of an ex-post evaluation (at least 2 years after initial contractual funding cycles are completed) have indicated whether or not a local sustainable process has really been established.

Lesson 8 As a complex, multi-stake-holder process, BCI would benefit by clarifying its own institutional, structure, systems and governance

BCI works with multiple stake-holders to promote multiple objectives: explicitly economic and ecological, but also social and political. Strong shared vision must be built from the start if potential disagreement or conflicts of interest are to be avoided. Even then, there will inevitably be times when conflicting opinions arise over priorities and strategies. This study reveals a growing unease among many stakeholders that both the level of shared vision and the means for resolving disputes over economic and ecological priorities, may not be as well developed as required. Given the indisputable power of the economic-growth lobby, there is a concern that its interests are dominating and win-win solutions are not emerging. If true, BCI's admirable initiative to safe-guard biodiversity and pro-poor conservation may not be realised as planned.

As Lesson 1 highlights, current trends are worrying – wider economic forces continue to dominate at the cost of increasing PA degradation and vulnerability of local livelihoods. However, SBPRP also reveals a rich set of lessons (from existing and past initiatives) on how co-management, at an operational level, might be best applied to initiate more positive trends. In particular, the gradual recovery of mangrove forests in PKWS (and fishery habitats) shows what can be done. All the evidence collected by the study confirms that collaborative management between State and Civil Society will be essential if pro-poor biodiversity conservation is to work. Failures to date do not imply that co-management can not achieve significant impacts, but rather indicate what needs to be improved to increase impacts.

However, it is also important to step back and consider the wider institutional context – in this case, of BCI and Regional priorities in GMS. This is particularly important considering the pivotal issue of governance and institutional buy in by nation states if pro-poor biodiversity conservation is to be effective. Insights generated during SBPRP suggest that different opinions exist among stake-holders as to what are the actual priorities of the BCI when attempting to balance the demand for rapid national and regional economic growth with longer-term biodiversity conservation and local livelihood needs. It appears that thinking remains frustratingly polarised between the 'pro-economic growth' group and the 'pro-conservation group', with both sides committed to their own interpretation of reality.

The fact that conservation-focused interests retain a different perspective to those who see economic development as the priority is not surprising. What is worrying is that there appears to be no clear mechanism to promote open debate, build a real shared vision among stake-holders and generate win-win solutions. Given that the proponents of rapid economic growth are so much more powerful than those of biodiversity conservation, inevitably it is the former that wins out over the latter.

Optimum strategies cannot be developed or implemented without a much stronger sense of partnership and shared vision between those prioritising rapid economic growth and financial returns and those who favour pro-poor biodiversity conservation. The decision of the bilateral donors of BCI (currently Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and UK) to channel all funds through just one organisation, be it the ADB (as is currently the case) or another stake-holder, needs to be revisited. It is unrealistic to place the power of the purse strings so unilaterally, in either camp, and not anticipate conflict.

The following recommendations are made therefore with particular reference to donors of the BCI and the wider CEP and GMS development process:

i) Re-examine funding mechanisms and decision-making processes within BCI to allow greater room for informed, negotiated and balanced debate between different stakeholders.
ii) Significantly increase efforts by donors to link aid for economic development much more rigorously to minimum benchmarks for institutionalising pro-poor biodiversity conservation.
iii) Invest in the application of appropriate accounting methods to allow calculation of the discounted economic value to the Nation State of the environmental and social aspects of maintaining biodiversity and forest dependent societies.
iv) Establish an *independent* mechanism for mediating and resolving conflict between stake-holders, and charged with assisting all parties to arrive at collaborative solutions.
v) Establish an *independent* monitoring mechanism to track actual outcomes of BCI and wider CEP investments. Such a strategic watchdog should be carefully selected to ensure their legitimacy among all stake-holders as an impartial and qualified analyst of economic, biological and socio-cultural outcomes.

3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Perhaps the single most important conclusion of SBPRP is that without giving much greater attention to addressing the *institutional* environment, the current focus of projects on technical and organisational issues will have little long term impact. Projects are too often designed to address technical, managerial and capacity needs, but not to confront underlying institutional problems of weak political commitment to protection and environmental corruption. Such projects will have little chance of proving effective, however committed their staff. There are a number of key programming implications for interventions seeking to promote pro-poor biodiversity conservation.

Currently project design and staffing are geared more toward the technical and managerial side of interventions – as a result project teams are often less equipped to address the crucial issues of environmental governance, economic analysis and lobbying, socio-political processes at community level, involvement with the private sector and the institutional development needed to generate the shared vision and critical mass of support necessary for sustainable impact. Biodiversity protection and pro-poor economic development are essentially political processes and unless staffing strategies reflect this reality, we are undermining our project teams before they even start.

Furthermore, one-off, stand-alone projects implemented by a single agency will find it virtually impossible to achieve the holistic programme approach suggested - there is a need to develop approaches based on multi-agency collaboration in which different components of a coordinated programme are undertaken by different actors. It is no coincidence that in PKWS, where most progress has been made in integrating livelihoods and conservation, coordination between 3 agencies allowed key tasks to be divided up between them[9].

Finally, given the irreversible nature of biodiversity and cultural erosion, the need to introduce some sort of ombudsman function within the BCI would seem wise (as suggested under

[9] Thus PMCR focused on mangrove recovery and fisheries management, CZM focused on livelihoods and the PA authorities and local MOE focused on curtailing charcoal production.

Lesson 8 above). At the very least this would allow a more informed and less partisan debate on how to improve our efforts to uphold BCI's stated objective to "Restore and protect ecological integrity and reduce poverty within priority conservation landscapes". Current trends indicate that we are running out of time to get it right and running out of PAs to learn from.

Annex 1 – Descriptions of SBPRP field sites

A series of detailed reports for each site have already been produced by SBPRP which explored the relationships between the socio-economic situation and options of the local communities dwelling in an around the PAs, the current utilisation of PAs and their natural resources and issues of Governance and Law (including initiatives to introduce co-management as means of improving livelihoods, biodiversity conservation and sustainable use). For the reader wishing further details, these reports[10] can be requested from IUCN Lower Mekong Country Group located in Viet Nam, or the GMS Environment Operations Centre (EOC) based in Bangkok.

Song Thanh Nature Reserve (STNR) in Quang Nam Province of Central Viet Nam is an upland forest (core and buffer zone covering over 200,000 ha) of significant biodiversity and ecological importance within the Central Annamites Conservation Landscape of BCI[11]. It is home to the *Ka'tu* people, an ethnic minority group that has been marginalised for generations. The forest still has valuable resources of timber, wildlife, NTFPs and minerals and has received significant inputs from WWF's on-going MOSAIC project for the last five years, promoting co-management as the means to protect biodiversity and promote sustainable use. However, on-going illegal exploitation of PA resources remains a significant challenge. A large hydro-electro dam project (also ADB funded) is about to commence construction in the buffer zone of the reserve.

Dong Hua Sao National Protected Area (DHS) in Champasak Province of Southern Laos is a degraded forest PA of some 110,000 ha, heavily logged in the 1980s and 1990s but still an important part of the Tri-Border Forest biodiversity conservation landscape[12]. Its NTFPs provide the basis of local livelihoods for communities throughout the area, while on-going illegal clearing, logging and coffee production remain a serious threat to the NPA at this time. IUCN implemented their "Biodiversity Conservation project" here from 1996-2002 that aimed to introduce a form of co-management. A number of more recently initiated projects by a variety of agencies continue to promote sustainable use and NTFP-based livelihood development.

Peam Krasop Wildlife Sanctuary (PKWS) in Koh Kong Province of SW Cambodia is a coastal mangrove ecosystem covering an area of 23,750 hectares on the edge of the Cardamom and Elephant Mountains Biodiversity Landscape. It comprises a heavily degraded, tidal mangrove forest, which provides the crucial habitat and ecological conditions for marine and birdlife. Heavy logging of mangroves during the 1990s brought the ecosystem to the edge of collapse. Since then a partial recovery has been experienced through strong government interventions with the support of internationally funded projects[13]. The rich fishery represents the key NTFPs on which almost all local livelihoods depend. IDRC, CIDA and DANIDA have supported two on-going projects, both situated in the Ministry of Environment, for the last 10 years. Using different methodologies, both projects aim to promote community

[10] Report on the socio-economic status of households in Song Thanh Nature Reserve, Dong Hua Sao National Protected Area and Peam Krasop Wildlife Sanctuary and the contribution of the impacts of co-management regimes on poverty alleviation and sustainable natural resource utilization; IUCN, April 2007.
[11] A total of nine Biodiversity Conservation Landscapes have been identified to be the focus areas of the BCI
[12] This links contiguous areas of biodiversity in northern Cambodia, Southern Laos and Southern Viet Nam.
[13] The IRDC-funded Participatory Management of Coastal Resources Project (PMCR) and the DANIDA funded Coastal Zone Management (CZM) project that have been working in PKWS for almost ten years

participation and capacity building to establish sustainable natural resource management options and livelihood security.